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Coming Soon:

Local Hiring Preference Ordinances
Institute for Ecology and the Economy: Training
Future Leaders
The Sonoma County General Plan
Ludwigia in the Laguna

What We Do:

The mission of the Coalition for a Better Sonoma County is to elect candidates who agree with, and will abide by, our Statement of Principles. For a full copy of our Statement of Principles, see www.bettersonoma.com.

Who We Are:

COPE of the North Bay, AFL-CIO
Sonoma County Conservation Action
Petaluma Tomorrow
IBEW, Local 551
Operating Engineers, Local 3
Sonoma County Latino Democratic Club
SEIU Local 707
Housing Advocacy Group
Concerned Citizens for Santa Rosa
United Healthcare Workers West
World Stewardship Institute
Progressive Student Movement
Sheetmetal Workers, Local 104
Let the Voters Decide Coalition
UA Local 38, Plumbers and Pipefitters
UFCW, Local 101
Direct Action Network
Plus many individual s and elected
representatives

ELECTION NEWS

Most Coalition Endorsed Candidates Victorious!

For the elections in November 2004, an endorsement by The Coalition for a Better Sonoma County became sought after. Numerous candidates, and several causes, requested Coalition endorsement. The Coalition decided to endorse 19 candidates and one ballot measure. Of those endorsed

candidates, 13 were elected, and in 8 races, the Coalition endorsed candidates who received the most votes.

Also, the Coalition endorsed Measure R, Petaluma's Campaign Finance Reform ordinance, which passed overwhelmingly.

For a complete list of the candidates the Coalition endorsed, please see www.bettersonoma.com/election_2004.html

PERSPECTIVE...

Larry Robinson, Mayor of Sebastopol

This morning, as I was walking to the store, I saw something green in the middle of the road. As I got closer I realized that it was a few blades of grass pushing up through a crack in the pavement. The recent rains are already turning our hills green. Like many of us, the grass is an immigrant which has found a home here. Its growing edge is tender, but its roots are patient, persistent and powered by the force of life itself.

After a week of grieving the November election, I began to regain my perspective. Yes, I was disappointed that the pendulum's swing has not yet hit its nadir. No, I don't regret my perpetual hope that each moment will mark that turning point. Because everything I know about history and about natural processes assures me that that point will arrive.

But didn't we always know, in our hearts, that the work before us would never be as easy or as simple as replacing a president? Didn't we always know that the hard work of restoring the soul of democracy would go on regardless of who occupies the White House?

There is no question but that we are going through some very dark times and will be for some time. But did we really believe that America would somehow be immune to the kind of suffering which brings wisdom in its wake, the kind of suffering endured by almost every other nation? To believe that would be to indulge in the kind of exceptionalist thinking which clouds the reasoning faculties of the neoconservative ideologues leading us deeper into the Big Muddy.

It appears highly likely that the legacy of the current administration will include even greater giveaways to their corporate sponsors, significant reductions in the standard of living for millions of working Americans, further erosion of worker and environmental protections, a Supreme Court which will reverse *Roe v. Wade*, the beginning of a theocratic state, dismantling of Social Security and Medicare as well as the public school system, further erosion of civil liberties and the continuation of a disastrous war which will cost

countless lives and hundreds of billions of dollars. I could go on and so could you.

But that is no reason to give up hope. We have endured worse. Reactionary Republicans may have won (or stolen) the election; the Democrats may (or may not) have run an effective campaign. But our vision of a just society, of a peaceful world, of humans living in partnership with the natural world was not defeated and cannot be defeated. That vision will endure.

The greater work with which we are engaged is nothing less than a radical shift in human consciousness. Throughout our history we have undergone several such shifts. They are never easy, never without great disruption and suffering. I believe that what we are witnessing is the last gasp of a dying paradigm which, of course, refuses to go gently. It may be that we are called to serve simultaneously as hospice workers helping it to die while minimizing the damage and as midwives assisting in the birth of anew humanstory.

Our challenge will be to find the courage to do this work with as much love and compassion as we can muster, to maintain our faith in our vision and to continue to organize for even more effectiveness. We need to build coalitions with those who share our vision in the broad strokes while accepting differences in our ideas of the specifics.

It is important to acknowledge our feelings of loss and disappointment, but we can no longer afford to indulge in pessimism. We must cultivate hope as a deliberate strategy to keep ourselves energized. We need to reach out to each other for strength when we get discouraged and offer hope to those we see despairing. whatever we do, we can do with joy and gratitude.

More than ever before we need to show up, to pay attention, to speak the truth and to practice letting go of the outcome of our efforts. This means doing what we can with as much intelligence as we have and trust in the power of life itself. After all, in the end grass will always prevail over asphalt and rivers will always defeat dams.

Big Retail Marches on Petaluma (and everywhere else)

Larry Modell, Petaluma Tomorrow

Have the retail big boxes suddenly disappeared from all other towns? To some of us in Petaluma, it seems they must have, because they are all coming here!

The past year saw the opening of a Kohl's department store at the north end of town, to be joined later by other retailers at the site, as well as a Staples near Washington and McDowell.

In addition, the following big retail developments are in various stages of planning:

- Chelsea Properties still wants to add a new retail center or two next to their existing outlet mall along the Petaluma River's "Corona Reach." Chelsea was acquired last year by the nationwide retail behemoth Simon Property Group (which also owns the Santa Rosa Plaza locally). This proposal has met very strong citizen opposition, and was withdrawn by Simon in December pending further consultation with city staff.
- Downey Savings and Loan (DSL), owner of a big undeveloped parcel across McDowell from the Petaluma Valley Hospital, has proposed a large retail center called "Deer Creek" (ever notice how developers name their atrocities after the natural feature they obliterate?). The proposed anchor for this center would be a 160,000 square foot Lowe's. That's right, the same Lowe's that is building another very contentious supercenter a few miles up the road in Cotati. This proposal has also been met by strong concerns voiced by local residents and businesses.
- Looking further ahead, after Kenilworth Junior High School relocates further east in a few months, its current site is

expected to become another retail or mixed use center, anchored, according to rumor, by a large Target store.

Cash-strapped city governments often welcome new retailers for their promise of sales tax revenue. Residents of towns like Petaluma often welcome new shopping opportunities, especially where merchandise is offered that has not previously been available in town.

On the other side, labor, community, and environmental groups sometimes join forces with competing local businesses to oppose specific big box retailers seen as bad for the community. Factors leading such groups to oppose a retailer typically include:

- **Location:** Would the development harm a scenic area or important habitat? Does it draw economic vitality away from the important central/downtown area? How will it affect traffic in the vicinity? Is the proposed location in a floodplain? (The Chelsea/Simon property, for example, earns high negatives for all these considerations);
- Is the retailer a local business or a national chain? Both generate retail jobs, but local businesses also tend to keep profits, higher-paid "headquarters" jobs, and business services in the local economy;
- Better vs. worse wages, benefits and labor practices. WalMart (which feinted into Petaluma in the early 1990s and hasn't been heard from since) is usually considered the worst of the big box bad boys in this regard. But even among other chains, some are clearly better than others.

How do we sort this out? How can residents determine how much retail is appropriate, which stores are

needed, and where they belong?

For Petaluma, one useful starting point is the Retail Leakage Study completed last year by consultants hired by the city and the Chamber of Commerce. While the intent of the funders was pretty clearly to justify retail expansion across the board, the study provides useful data suggesting what categories of retail might be needed, as well as what parts of town make the most sense for new retail.

Having seen how real data can inform the retail debate, the community group Petaluma Tomorrow believes the next step should be for Petaluma to require all major retail projects (or "big boxes," however defined) to produce a Community Impact Report (CIR), before getting the go-ahead to develop. CIRs, which are being implemented in various forms in many cities, including San Jose and Los Angeles, usually the developer to study and document the economic and community effects of the development on existing businesses, the workforce, government services, and the local economy as a whole. A CIR can be seen as a complement to the Environmental Impact Report, which typically does not look at a project's economic and social impacts.

Larry Modell is chair of Petaluma Tomorrow, www.petalumatomorrow.org

[Editorial note: Petaluma is not alone in this struggle... Cotati will be getting a new Lowes, and Kohl's, Home Depot and WalMart are attempting to enter Santa Rosa in the coming year. We need to be aware what this influx of "big boxes" will cost all of us. Sonia Taylor]

Join the Coalition for a Better Sonoma County – make a difference!

YES, I want to become a member of the Coalition for a Better Sonoma County.

Enclosed are my annual individual dues: \$25 (Annual Individual Dues)

Enclosed are our annual organizational dues: \$100 (Annual Organizational Dues)

I want to really help the Coalition. Enclosed is: Other Amount _____

YES, I want to be notified of the Coalition's Meetings and Action Alerts.

For more information, call the Coalition offices at 576-9675, or email to mail@betersonoma.com

Print Name(s) 1) _____ 2) _____

Address _____ City/State/ZIP Code _____

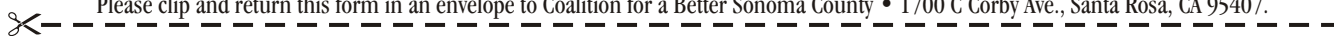
Phone: _____ FAX #: _____ Email: _____

Occupation: _____ Employer: _____

Signature(s) 1) _____ 2) _____

Please make checks payable to: the Coalition for a Better Sonoma County

Please clip and return this form in an envelope to Coalition for a Better Sonoma County • 1700 C Corby Ave., Santa Rosa, CA 95407.



Workers' Compensation Changes

Rick Meechan, Meechan Wootton Weinberger

Working families will find 2005 to be a far harsher world if a breadwinner should have the misfortune of being injured on the job.

If an industrial injury prevents you from returning to your job because you are no longer physically able to do it, you will need to find a job on your own. Vocational rehabilitation has been cut and it no longer exists.

If you don't like the doctor or medical group that your employer has sent you to, that's too bad because your employer is now in charge of your medical care. You no longer have the right to pick your own doctor if you've been hurt on the job and your employer has set up a medical group.

If you suffer a catastrophic injury requiring surgery, you should get it done quickly. Once you've been temporarily disabled for two years, there is no further obligation for the

insurance carrier to pay temporary disability benefits.

The new proposed rating of permanent disability has been published and the Governor is proposing cuts of approximately 70%. California was ranked 47 out of the 50 states, before this cut was proposed.

Penalties for unreasonable delay have been drastically cut. If an insurance company delays payment to a worker without a reasonable factual or legal excuse, there should be a penalty. The old penalty had small teeth – the new penalty has tiny teeth.

Apportionment of disability has also changed. In the past, an employer took their employees as they found them. At the current time, employers are asking for apportionment to underlying pathology, pre-existing nondisabling conditions, age, gender, and whatever else they can blame

disability on. This change will take significant money away from injured workers.

Existing awards for medical care have also been sharply cut back. Now, most workers with current medical awards are being denied care and many doctors are refusing to take Workers compensation cases.

These changes have been brought to you, compliments of Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger. He promised that his changes would not hurt legitimately injured workers. He promised that he would not be captive to special interests. These changes will devastate families that fall into the workers compensation system starting January 1st. So the real question is "Are working families a special interest or is it the governor's friends at the Chamber of Commerce and the Insurance Company that feed his campaign coffers?" Yeah, that's special.

Volunteer!

FIRST: We have need for volunteers to do office work at our new offices, donated to the Coalition by the Sonoma County Building Trades. Contact Guy Conner at guyc@sonic.net to volunteer. Thanks!

SECOND: We can save money by not mailing our Newsletters to you. If you are willing to download a pdf version of this Newsletter from our website, instead of getting a paper copy, please let us know at mail@betersonoma.com. Thanks!

Coalition for a
Better Sonoma County

1700 C Corby Ave. • Santa Rosa, CA 95407
707-576-9675

SAVE THE DATES!

April 5th, 6 p.m. – Board of Supervisors. Support the County Planning Commission's approval of housing programs, including inclusionary zoning and a County jobs-housing linkage fee. We need you there!

May 12th, 6 - 9 p.m. – PARTY! The Coalition for a Better Sonoma County will be holding its annual "get to see all your friends and allies" party.

MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN SONOMA COUNTY!

Join your friends and colleagues at our regular monthly meetings on the Second Monday of every month. Check www.bettersonoma.com for the date.

HAVE SOME FUN...

Take part in surveys on issues of importance to us all – go to our website (www.bettersonoma.com) after 2/15 and let us know what you think!

Successful Labor Effort!

After two year struggle...Sonoma Health Care Center Workers Join California's Largest Health Care Union.

On Tuesday, August 31st, the National Labor Relations Board upheld a May 2002 vote by Sonoma Health Care Center workers to join SEIU 250, California's largest health care workers' union. The results of the election had been delayed for more than two years by the Ensign Group, the for-profit corporation that operates Sonoma Health Care Center. The Ensign Group is the fifth largest and fastest-growing nursing home chain in California.

Over the past two years, the Ensign Group wasted hundreds of thousands in resident care dollars on an expensive campaign to intimidate and silence employees rather than work together with caregivers to

bring about positive change in the facility.

In 2002, after the regional labor board dismissed all of the Ensign Group's objections and recommended the union be certified, the company hired a team of lawyers to file frivolous objections to further delay bargaining and intimidate workers.

In one of its more baseless allegations, the Ensign Group claimed that respected community leaders who showed support for workers' efforts to improve care were actually "creating an atmosphere of confusion and coercion."

Nearly 70 full-time and regular part-time employees working at Sonoma Health Care Center, including certified nursing assistants, restorative nursing assistants, activities, dietary, laundry and

maintenance staff, are now members of SEIU 250.

"This has been a long struggle for all of us working at Sonoma Health Care Center," said Rosa Aparicio, a certified nursing assistant. "We are very excited about joining SEIU 250. We hope that now our employers will finally work with us to improve our facility for our residents."

Last week's decision means that the employer is now legally required to recognize the union and begin negotiations over a new contract soon.

With over 95,000 members, United Healthcare Workers (SEIU 250) is the largest and fastest-growing healthcare union in the Western U.S. We represent every type of healthcare worker, including nursing, professional, technical, paramedic and service classifications. Our mission is to achieve high-quality healthcare for all.