



Tuesday 3/4/08 Meeting Minutes : State Senate District 3 Debate Transcript

1. Joni Eisen called the meeting to order a little after 7pm.
2. The whole meeting was devoted to a debate between the candidates for the 3rd State Senate District. All four candidates were present to participate in a debate on issues of interest to Potrero Hill Residents.

The candidates were:

Joe Alioto Veronese
Mark Leno
Carole Migden
Joe Nation

3. The moderator of the event was **Philip DeAndrade**. Philip is the owner of Goat Hill Pizza in Potrero Hill, and also the president of the Potrero Merchants Association. Each candidate made opening and closing statements; the order picked by random drawing. The opening statements random order was Leno, Migden, Nation, and Alioto Veronese. By the luck of a second draw, the closing statement order was also Leno, Migden, Nation, and Alioto Veronese. Opening statements were limited to 2 minutes for each candidate.

The turnout for Tuesday night's debate was excellent. One observer counted 89 in attendance at one point. The audio of the debate was recorded in MP3 – links to the MP3's with playback instructions are included at the end of the meeting minutes.

4. **Opening Statements**
 - a. **Mark Leno:** Mark opened with how he believes there is a more respectful, inclusive, collaborative, and accessible and ethical way of representing this wonderful progressive district of San Francisco. He spoke of his past accomplishments as a legislator with regards to Fair Employment and Housing; Marriage Rights for all Californians; amending the Ellis Act to exempt residents of SRO's. Then he made reference to a lawsuit recently filed by Senator

Migden to overturn a ruling that restricts her campaign spending to within legal limits. Mark said we need higher ethical standards representing this Senate district.

- b. **Carole Migden:** Senator Migden opened defending her right to spend money on her campaign. She said that she and her lawyers believe she is within the bounds of the law and that it's an issue of free speech. She believes that when she gets her day in court they will rule in her favor. She said she is the best candidate because "I get things done". 14 out of 20 of Migden's bills got signed – more than any other legislator. She supports green power, affordable housing, and community aggregation. She gets things done and brings back results for you.
 - c. **Joe Nation:** Joe is a teacher at Stanford, he teaches climate change policy, health care policy. Joe is a Climate Change Advisor for the environmental consulting firm, ENVIRON International, to reduce the world's greenhouse gas output. Joe said "I think Sacramento is a mess." With a 16 billion budget shortfall the governor wants to cut key programs including education. When Joe gets to Sacramento he wants to work on climate change, universal health care, and bring budget sensibility to Sacramento. On good years California should save money for harder economic times like we are in today.
 - d. **Joe Alioto Veronese:** Joe admires all three other candidates, and says you need to decide what change means to you. Does change mean electing the same people and expecting different results? Or does change mean electing someone brand new that is not a part of the problem in Sacramento. Joe is a civil rights attorney in San Francisco, and also has been police commissioner for the last 4 years. As police commissioner he's taken bad cops off the street. He's created a diversion program to keep people out of jails.
5. **Question #1:** Our state budget does not reflect the values we support. Given the lack of state revenue, a republican governor, a 2/3 majority requirement to pass a budget, what strategies would you employ to bring about a change in how Sacramento does business?
- a. **Joe Alioto Veronese:** We should be getting our priorities straight in Sacramento. We shouldn't be cutting back education. Our priorities should reflect our values. We need to streamline our spending. Our priorities should be in health care, in transportation corridors, and in emergency personnel. On the police commission since I've been there we've gone from a \$290 million budget to a \$430 million budget. We are the only agency in San Francisco that is currently hiring. We intend on hiring 750 in the next year

including the last two years. We've prioritized public safety. We don't need to tax more, we need to prioritize better.

- b. **Mark Leno:** We need to be honest with the voters. Governor Schwarzenegger five months ago said the budget deficit was zero and that he fixed it as he promised. He wasn't being honest then, he's not being honest now. Suddenly a \$16 billion deficit; \$12 billion of which is specifically the result of his rescinding of the restoration of the vehicle license fee on his first day in office. We do not have the budget crisis independent of that unilateral act he did on his first day in office. People need to understand that the \$200 reduction in the license fee was paid for "on a credit card", and with interest you or your kids college education just went up by a \$1000. We're going deeper into debt – this needs to be resolved at the ballot box so I'm making sure people understand. We need to reform the parole system. It requires 3 years of parole no matter what the severity of the crime. My reform bill could have saved \$50 to \$70 million in the parole system with in custody rehabilitation programs.
 - c. **Carole Migden:** Only RI and TN that have 2/3rd budget requirement – little tiny states, not like California. First thing we need to do is have majority vote for a budget. With a 2/3rd vote requirement it's the minority that gets to control the majority. No Republican will vote for any tax increase at all. Prop 13 means our taxes are too low. We can't get the 2/3rd vote in the legislature – we're at the behest of the Republicans. We should repeal Prop 13. We would like early release – because of the 3 strikes law there are a lot of people in jail for minor crimes.
 - d. **Joe Nation:** If you're in the hole – first, you stop digging. The first solution this governor had to this crisis was to borrow more money. Another \$3.3 billion. Remember when he said he was going to cut up the State's credit card? Well now he says he's going to max it out, and then he's going to cut it up. This state is on a path to fiscal disaster. Look at the \$8 billion prison budget – the largest in the country. Look at the revenue side, long term. We'll probably get a short term tax that will last a few years. I want a long term solution – lower the sales tax but broaden it so it covers more things. That stabilizes revenues. Also provide flexibility on how we spent money in schools.
6. **Question #2:** Given the recent setback in passing comprehensive health care legislation at the state level, do you think there are any interim steps that we can take to address parts of the problem? For instance expanding coverage for people with pre-existing conditions; limiting profit margins for health insurance companies; health care for low income populations. Anything short of single payer we can do now?

- a. **Carole Migden:** Single payer is our goal. But it won't be easy to get rid of the insurance companies. We need to show with community aggregation that we are about to have a government run it like Canada. The health care bill that didn't pass had problems – it was too expensive for what we got. There will be more done this year to expand coverage for children, to use healthy families better, to make sure we create a plan that does allow for people with pre-existing conditions and doesn't just cover indigents but working people. I support a bill for people to get healthy family forms at the job site where they pick up their checks.
- b. **Joe Nation:** SB2 by Senator Burton which mandated that employers of certain sizes would have to pay for part of health care for folks. As a small business owner I pay for my employees' health care. I would support an employer mandate as an interim solution. Our current system lets big employers like WalMart get a free ride. As a long term solution, employers have to provide health care and individuals have to buy health care. You have to get everyone in the pool to spread the costs and the risks. I think single payer has two big hurdles: 1) \$100 billion tax increase is very tough 2) there is lots of policy covered – but no funding. You need to find the funding.
- c. **Joe Alioto Veronese:** First we need to mandate catastrophic illness insurance. 50% of bankruptcies are from catastrophic illnesses. Second we need to make sure free clinics are available to absolutely everybody to free up the ERs. Third, this is a federal issue. This is an issue where the federal government needs to step up. Ted Kennedy has a plan called the "Medicare for All" plan. We should take a look at this and get it passed. Medicare works. Start with 0 to 18 and move on the other ages later.
- d. **Mark Leno:** As a principal co-author of the single payer health care bill, we need to continue to promote it. But we need to keep in mind the insurance industry would fund a referendum to take it to the ballot and spend whatever it would take to overturn it. So we took a compromise step forward which would have regulated insurance industries; prohibited an exemption for pre-existing conditions; would have required 85% of premiums to be spent on health care provision rather than the current 36% spent on administration (which is the profit margin of course). So what can we do now? Preventive care; we each need to take responsibility for our own health. One in eight Californians currently have type 2 diabetes; it's projected to be 1 on 2 by the year 2050. Currently at 1 in 8 we spend 50% of our health care dollar on diabetes related treatment. We need to teach people how to eat better and take care of themselves.

7. **Question #3:** Heliports in 94107: This community has an opportunity to weigh in on two heliports: SF General Hospital and another for the pediatric unit of the UCSF hospital which is planned for the foot of Potrero Hill. How do we work out the issues? There are “goods” on both side of the issue. UCSF is exempt from local land use rules and from paying property taxes. How would you help to insure that community voices have a role in shaping UCSF’s development plans specifically in cases such as the proposal for a helipad on the new hospital?
- a. **Joe Nation:** I’ll give a short answer because I haven’t yet been there to see it and need to get a better sense of the proposal. I don’t think a State hospital should be exempt from any appropriate process. You ought to have the same voice as you would if this were a private institution coming in to locate something here.
 - b. **Joe Alioto Veronese:** There are ways we can talk about mitigating the noise at the bottom of the hill by flying over the water. But at the other location that’s not an option. The only opinion that matters is that of the people in the neighborhood. The neighborhood has to decide because they have to live with it.
 - c. **Mark Leno:** The temperature has been taken in the community and there is serious concern with regard to SF General. With regard to UCSF there is a potential solution of putting the helipad at the end of 16th Street maybe even into the bay. We may be able to get federal funds from homeland security. Let’s make sure no corners are cut and no process is disrespected. And we also need to make sure these helipads are needed in addition of the eight already existing in the Bay Area.
 - d. **Carole Migden:** I have a strong working relationship with the UCSF Medical Services. We can address the hospital directly and hold hearings to take a look at location or site concerns. Trauma center needs to expand to save your life. One the other hand we need to make darn sure that it is really needed. All of us would not want to say no before fully studying the merits.
8. **Question #4:** Our state prison system is in crisis. We currently spent \$10 billion a year on a state prison system that is broken. The prisons operate at 200% capacity. Rehabilitation, drug counseling, and vocational training have all but disappeared. Virtually the same statement can be made about public education. Overcrowding, programs cut, an educational system now ranked 47th in the country. Yet prison spending is increasing while education budgets are slashed. What would you do as one single voice to change this situation?

- a. **Mark Leno:** I will stand up to the voices that demand that we pass stupid laws like Jessica's Law. Residency restrictions don't work. Jessica's Law will add \$1 billion to our prison budget. We have gone from spending 5.4% to 10% of our budget on prisons in 5 years. Next year we will spend more on corrections than higher education. I am an advocate for reforming parole. I support intermediate sanctions like drug rehab for parolees that fail a drug test instead of going back to prison. Let's put money into rehabilitation programs.
 - b. **Joe Alioto Veronese:** Our schools in San Francisco need help. Just over the hill the life expectancy is 21 years for some of our children. I have a lot of experience in law enforcement. We need to be working on diversion programs to keep people from entering the prison system. Thirty years ago we went from a prison system of rehabilitation to a prison system of punishing people. We need to go back to rehabilitation. I have proposed that we turn San Quentin into a center for rehabilitation. We need to put people back into society.
 - c. **Carole Migden:** Leno voted for prison expansion – AB900. I did not. I did not vote to expand prisons. He did. We don't properly prepare either prisoners or students for entering society. If you have a mental problem as a kid you should go to services, you should not go to jail. I think you have to keep chipping away at those kind of conditions. I did a terrific program with women in Chowchilla prison to keep them living with their children in prison. I see schools failing and kids leaving school not able to read or write and not prepared. We're just making people villainous and angry and not prepared for a new world post prison.
 - d. **Joe Nation:** Stop building prisons. I have fought for six straight years against the expansion of San Quentin. We need to have an honest debate about the death penalty. I oppose it. It costs \$13 million per execution – it costs about \$1.5 million to put someone away for life which is a far better option. Number one – almost half the people behind bars are there for drug offenses or other non-violent offenses. We need to give judges more discretion in sentencing. Finally we need to fund schools up front to keep people out of prisons.
9. **Question #5:** Doyle Drive: Hurricane Katrina and the Minneapolis I-35 bridge collapse have drawn our attention to the immediate need to strengthen the nation's infrastructure. Locally, according to the San Francisco Chronicle, CalTrans has given Doyle Drive leading up to the GG Bridge a safety rating of 2 on a 100 point scale. The Minneapolis bridge was rated 50. Using Doyle Drive as an example, what can we do at the

state level to insure that the Bay Area infrastructure can meet both daily and emergency needs? You might specially address the notion that in order to get the \$58 million from the Feds we need to be able to take a toll on Doyle Drive that requires some State legislation.

- a. **Carole Migden:** Doyle Drive is not safe and it needs to be repaired. It's a state road that non residents use to come to work here during the day. I achieved \$400 million for Doyle Drive repair from State transportation money. What happens in the north/south equation with LA is we issue bonds and LA wants to steal everything – it's much bigger than we are. I was able to get \$500 million back for Novato Narrows and \$400 for Doyle Drive. We don't think Marin commuters should pay it – it should be regionally paid.
 - b. **Joe Nation:** Current proposal puts an unfair burden on those who come from the North Bay. There may be a fix – maybe require people to have a transponder; going one direction you pay a fee and going the other direction you pay a different fee. Use technology to create a smart way to fix the problem. I agree with Senator Migden, it has to be fixed. In the short term we have got to find a way to keep those federal dollars. Will probably need a congestion pricing scheme. Finally, the solution here is to think about the bigger picture: more ferries, busses, and trains. Those are the solutions we need to address climate change here in California and around the world.
 - c. **Joe Alioto Veronese:** It's just not fair to put the tax on Marin residents. We're \$400 million dollars short on a billion dollar project; we don't need the \$58 million from the Feds. We don't need to keep taxing the people, we need to be better spending the money we currently have. We have to get out of the tax and spend cycle.
 - d. **Mark Leno:** First I need to address something; I voted for AB900. But not a single new prison in it. I voted for it because it relieves overcrowding by creating more beds and adding rehabilitation areas in common areas. On Doyle Drive – the Joe's are right. We have to work in a regional collaborative fashion. Have the GG Bridge highway and transportation authority implement congestion pricing to qualify for the Federal money. It should be regionally funded.
10. **Question #6:** The southeast portion of the city has historically served as the dumping ground of San Francisco's most toxic industries. Asthma rates among our kids exceed the rest of the city. And yet when we try to close down our polluting power plant, the state requires us to replace it with other fossil fuel plant for reliability forcing us to choose between the

health of our kids and keeping the lights on. What will you do to help us out of this dilemma?

- a. **Joe Alioto Veronese:** I ran for the municipal utility district to shut down that power plant. As a civil rights attorney here in San Francisco I have gone after Lennar when their employees recorded asbestos in the air. You're absolutely right about the southeast portion of the city. I walk the beat with police officers where sewage coming down from ceilings into kitchen sinks. It's absolutely terrible how we treat people – if I had the authority I'd drive a bulldozer down there and I'd imprison the head of HUD. My next project is to go after HUD.
- b. **Mark Leno:** Maybe we should revisit the governance of the ISO entirely. It's rigged – it's all industry controlled. How do we wean ourselves off of fossil fuels? As a supervisor I authored a \$100 million solar energy bill, the largest in the nation. Installing solar panels on city building rooftops and wind turbines on land the city owns outside the city. As other cities follow our lead we will see an increased demand for the technology which will lower its cost.
- c. **Joe Nation:** AB32 requires we have a carbon market – which means if you put out greenhouse gasses you have to pay. And you have to pay more and more each year unless you reduce. Move the carbon market start date from 2012 to 2010. Al Gore says the same thing. Need to create tax incentives for solar – you shouldn't have to pay taxes on solar installations. It takes about 8 years to recoup the cost of a solar system – that is way too long. Increase PG&E rates a little bit to fund the programs to encourage you to build solar and wind.
- d. **Carole Migden:** Natural gas plants still produce greenhouse gasses, so that's not a great solution. I founded the community choice aggregation. Solar is vogue, but it is very expensive. We talk about wind – but the rich don't want the windmills near their house. It's interesting to see the commitment level into green and how far it goes. Community aggregation – it's colder here – why should we pay for L.A.'s air conditioning? I did an illegal dumping bill for the Bayview so there are mandatory \$1000 fines which gave greater compliance in neighborhoods.

11. Closing Statements

- a. **Mark Leno:** It has been said by the incumbent that you should support them because they are the incumbent. I hold a different philosophical belief – that democracy is best served when voters have a choice. So we can have an election not a coronation. I am

proud of my record. This year we're authoring an airline passengers' bill of rights. I've done a successful bill for medical cannabis ID cards. And I'm working on another bill banning gun shows at the Cow Palace.

- b. **Carole Migden:** I never expected a coronation; frankly it doesn't feel like royalty when you do this job. I merely said I've done a terrific job and I think you should re-hire me. I certainly recognize the democratic process. I get things done – I don't quit. Saving the forests, clean water, safe cosmetics, safe needles, sending disabled people back to work, age discrimination – I fight for you and I produce results. You have to decide who fights for you.
- c. **Joe Nation:** I think the candidates have a difference on what we want to work on and what we want to emphasize. I'm pretty independent – I voted against the budget two years ago, my last term, because I didn't want to suspend Prop 98 – I said I will not cut school funding. When I was in the assembly my tag line was "This Nation Works". I'm accessible – I had pancake breakfasts where we'd have 150 to 200 people and I'd answer questions. I had sidewalk office hours when I'd set up a card table on a corner and talk to people as they came by. I want to focus on climate change – need to have the carbon market now not in 2010. On education I was chosen as legislator of the year by the counties school board association in my last term. On health care we need an individual mandate + an employer mandate. On transportation we have to do things so people don't have to hop in their cars.
- d. **Joe Alioto Veronese:** We have an opportunity for a real fundamental change. Change needs to be defined by you all. I'm a civil rights attorney, I battle for people in the courts and I give them justice the way I know. I fought Lenard, I fight HUD for the people that are being stomped on in the southeastern part of this city. This club chose Edwards because it chose somebody that fought the way I do. Sacrifice means putting your life on the line as I have as a police commissioner, as a police officer, and as a DA investigator here in San Francisco. Sacrifice means sitting the table from an African American gentleman who is 50 years old and crying and asking you how he confronts how he should confront his child after being called the n word on a daily basis. And telling him you're going to receive justice for him. That's what I do on a daily basis. That's what I'll do for you in the state senate if you put there.

12. Meeting Ended at 8:30pm

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Potrero Hill Democratic Club meets the first Tuesday of the month at the Potrero Hill Neighborhood House, 953 De Haro Street, San Francisco. Our mailing address is 1459 – 18th Street, #152, SF 94107. Our web site is www.phdemclub.org. For more information, please contact club president Joni Eisen at 648-6740 or contactus@phdemclub.org.

For full audio recordings of the debate click [HERE](#).