

At VVC Forum, Challengers Urge Against Recycled Leadership, Incumbents Defend Progress

By Charity Lindsey

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VICTORVILLE — An earnest request to voters to not recycle old leadership was contrasted with an if-it-ain't-broke-don't-fix-it mentality during the Victor Valley College Board of Trustees candidate forum Thursday.

While the two incumbents and four challengers all shared similar ideas for increasing student achievement, some contention arrived at the topic of old vs. new management.

“Don’t recycle ‘We can’t’ leadership,” candidate and local lawyer Bob Conaway urged voters during the forum, held in collaboration between the Daily Press and VVC’s Associated Student Body at the college's Student Activity Center.

He cited “financial management issues” and a lack of “open communication” as things the current VVC Board of Trustees need to improve.

Directing the criticism at Conaway, incumbent Joseph W. Brady said he wished the candidates running would have attended board meetings in the past year to see the strides trustees have taken in those areas.

John Pinkerton, a VVC incumbent who earlier this year ran in the primary for the 8th Congressional District, mentioned that the board has come a long way in talking about the college’s investment account.

“The GIC (Guaranteed Investment Contract) was like the virgin daughter,” Pinkerton said.

Since the beginning of Brady and Pinkerton’s term in 2011, VVC has received full accreditation without sanction, adopted a “balanced budget” and, most recently, refinanced its general obligation bond debt for a taxpayer savings of \$6.6 million.

Conaway, however, said those bonds “should not have had to be refinanced.”

“Should have used the money to build,” Conaway said during discussion of establishing a VVC campus on the west side of Interstate 15.

Candidates David “Wes” Gregg, Margaret Kagy and Thomas Kerman, each having extensive backgrounds in education, all expressed their interest in developing a west-side campus, but Pinkerton said the college is “not quite ready.”

Calling it “the giant hole in the ground,” Pinkerton said that even if the college’s 55 acres of land on the Oro Grande Wash, purchased for \$10.9 million in 2008, could be leveled and built on, “we couldn’t afford to staff it.”

Gregg rebutted that “to say we can’t have education where it’s needed because we can’t afford it is not right for the community.”

Gregg, an information systems technician at Victor Valley Union High School District, noted that another thing he’d like to see developed at the college is increased use of electronic textbooks, which has proven very successful in K-12 education.

Similarly, Kerman, a teacher in HUSD, noted in his opening statement that the ideals of local K-12 school districts need to be connected with VVC to “build a much stronger education system.”

Kagy’s forum statements were mainly concerned with creating quicker and easier processes for students in terms of enrollment and financial aid.

“I want to make sure there’s always somebody there to answer the phone when students call,” Kagy, a longtime VVC employee, said. She also noted her full support of establishing a “one stop” student center on campus.

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