

Herhold: Candidates: Best bets and political baggage

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You can't live on the edges of Santa Clara County politics as long as I have without getting to know most of the players. It's like working in a restaurant - a good surprise here, a bad surprise there and, occasionally, a resolution never to eat the food.

What strikes me about the local races on the June 3 ballot is that they include as many folks with baggage as they do candidates with promise.

But because the races are down the ballot - and because we're busy - voters often decide based on the ballot statement, the familiarity of the name or eeny-meeny-miny-moe.

So today, I'm doing my part to bring a little light to the situation by looking at five races. For each, I'll list who I think is the best bet to perform well in office and who has the most baggage. The idea isn't to tell you how to vote - or predict who will win - but to give you an insider's view of how candidates come across.

A word on my criteria: I'm not very ideological. I'm looking mostly for competence, smarts and aptitude. And by baggage, I don't mean wrongdoing; I mean an accumulated body of criticism to give a voter pause.

Santa Clara County Supervisor, District 2

Candidates : East Side Union board member George Shirakawa Jr.; county human relations executive

Richard Hobbs; Alum Rock school board president Frank Chavez; kindergarten teacher and former school trustee Patricia Martinez-Roach; and Richard Lopez, director of marketing for a marble company. Perennial Andy Diaz is also on the ballot.

Best bet : Hobbs. Though his inexperience in campaigning has shown, he's a decent man who tried to broker compromise on the Little Saigon fight.

Most baggage : Shirakawa. His history of getting big campaign contributions from contractors and vendors in the East Side district is bothersome. After leaving the San Jose City Council, he turned to lobbying to make a living. And on April 25, the city of San Jose filed a lien on his property because he didn't pay his garbage bill.

San Jose Council, District 8

Candidates : Businessman Minh Duong; Evergreen activist Rose Herrera; retired teacher Galvin Jackson; retired tech executive Pat Waite; insurance agent Van Le; Santa Clara County Board of Education member Craig Mann; Eastside Union High School District president Lan Nguyen.

Best bets : Herrera, Nguyen. A U.S. Air Force veteran, Herrera is well-versed in neighborhood issues, while Nguyen has a good command of traffic problems and land use. Another smart - but markedly more conservative - candidate is Waite.

Most baggage : Mann has enough to fill up the old terminal at San Jose's airport. As a trustee for the East Side Union High School District, he charged nearly \$30,000 on a district credit card to attend conferences and buy equipment that he also used for personal use. In 2003, he repaid the district \$1,100 and now acknowledges that he "made mistakes."

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Superior Court judge

Candidates : Deputy District Attorneys Jay Boyarsky, Lane Liroff, and Tim Pitsker; civil attorney Diane Ritchie; and court commissioner Jesus Valencia.

Best bets : Boyarsky, Valencia. Boyarsky is a smart, thoughtful prosecutor with law enforcement support. Valencia is a respected court commissioner praised for a sense of fairness.

Most baggage : Liroff. The veteran homicide prosecutor might know the most about the criminal code. He's demonstrated courage in trying difficult cases. But he sometimes comes across as arrogant - the smartest guy in the room - erupting at people who disagree with him. That's a problem for a judge.

Santa Clara Valley Water District, District 2

Candidates : Incumbent Joe Judge, challenger Diana Foss.

Best bet : Foss. With a background in science and a commitment to curbing excessive spending, the Willow Glen resident offers the best chance for badly needed change at the Golden Spigot.

Most baggage : Judge. He's simply been there too long - 22 years. And while he was critical of ex-CEO Stan Williams, he's helped preside over one of the county's most bloated bureaucracies.

Assembly District 22

Candidates : Democrats Foothill-De Anza Community College trustee Paul Fong; Santa Clara Councilman Dominic Caserta; Santa Clara County Board of Education member Anna Song; and Cupertino Councilwoman Kris Wang. Bank manager Brent Oya is unopposed in the Republican primary.

Best bet : Fong. While he's not an intellectual giant, he's a dedicated man who has labored long in the cause of education and equal opportunity.

Most baggage : Caserta. He has a history of free spending on mileage and cell phone use on the Santa Clara council.

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