

Swetnam: Criticisms on ethics issues unfounded

Contributed by Cliff Swetnam
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It amazes me that when someone does not agree with another person, that it then becomes all right to call people names and make false charges against them.

In 2006 I recused myself on the Van Eck subdivision because I made a mistake in a conversation with Mr. Van Eck and stated my opinion on curbs, gutters and sidewalks for his project. I should not have done that and I later decided to recuse myself to be fair to both sides of that issue. I did not have to do that, no one else heard the conversation, only Mr. Van Eck and I knew what was said. But I knew what I did, and I feel I took the correct action. I did not have any conversations with the Van Ecks about the project currently before the Board of Supervisors and I learned about that project through the normal course of duties as a commissioner. My wife and I get invited to many of the same events as the Van Ecks so we see them from time to time. But, because of the perceived conflicts, the Van Ecks and my wife and I have spent very little time together in the last year. This was a mutual decision to avoid any further conflicts. I'm sure Mr. Murphy is quite proud of himself for becoming a wedge in that friendship. Neither my wife nor myself have any financial interest or connection with the Van Ecks or any of their projects. Mr. Murphy seems to think that I am getting rich as a member of the Planning Commission. Planning commissioners make \$150 to \$300 a month. The truth is that I have to take off work to be on the commission and it costs me with lost wages and other expenses about \$4,000 a year to sit on the commission. We can spend as much as 20 to 30 hours a month or more reading staff reports, doing site visits and attending public hearings. Mr. Murphy states I have elastic ethics. I am the vice president of the California County Planning Commissioners Association. I was elected to this position by the planning commissioners from throughout the state's 58 counties. One does not get elected to such a position with elastic ethics. This organization's mission is to train and educate the county planning commissioners throughout California. If Mr. Murphy spent any time getting his facts right his comments might have some meaning. There was no wine cave approved by the Planning Commission, so once again Mr. Murphy is not correct in his facts! As for Mrs. Van Eck sitting on the Lake Family Resource Center Board of Directors, that is correct. If LFRC had a project coming before the planning commission I would recuse myself. The fact that Mrs. Van Eck sits on the board does not require me to take that action. What is going on with the Van Eck ranch issue is the same thing that is going on throughout the county when residential meets ag land. There is almost always a conflict. This is a right-to-farm county and the ag land owner has some protections which allow them to conduct their ag business. It is my hope that with good planning, installing ag buffers, we can reduce the number of conflicts between home owners and ag operations in the future. Cliff Swetnam represents District 4 on the Lake County Planning Commission. He lives in Lakeport.

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