

# Fresno County assessor's race: Candidates have different styles

BY PABLO LOPEZ

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Fresno County Assessor-Recorder Paul Dictos and his challenger, Mike Goossen, tout similar credentials: Fresno State graduates with CPA licenses, family men with a strong belief in God, and a commitment to keep the county financially solvent.

But that's where the similarity ends.

Dictos, 70, is an immigrant from Greece who says he's living the American dream. He has operated an accounting business in Fresno since the 1970s and has held the assessor-recorder job for four years after a few unsuccessful bids for other elected positions.

Goossen, 52, was born and raised in Fresno and has lived in Sanger for the past 10 years. He is a political novice who first explored taking on incumbent Rep. Jim Costa for his congressional seat before deciding to challenge Dictos.

Goossen has held a number of jobs, including as former CEO of the Central California Blood Bank and former financial officer for the Fresno Rescue Mission. He is now a self-employed management consultant for small businesses and nonprofits.

As the June 3 primary election nears, both candidates said they plan to keep going door to door, putting up campaign signs and talking to voters, hoping to convince them who's more qualified for a job with a key responsibility: determining the value of each taxable property in the county. Money raised from these taxes helps pay for police, schools, roads, parks and other government services.

The job pays \$143,613 a year, according to 2012 county pay records.

Dictos has raised the profile of the office by aggressively reassessing farmland. He also enacted an 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday work schedule for staff to combat what he called a Friday ghost town in the office under the old flexible schedule.

"The public has given us great trust of their money, so we should earn it," he said.

Goossen said if he's elected, he might return to the flexible schedule, saying the assessor staff is professional and knows what needs to be done. "People like to feel appreciated. I don't think that is happening in the assessor's office," he said.

County leaders are picking sides in the assessor-recorder battle. Goosen has endorsements from Supervisors Debbie Poochigian and Phil Larson and Vicki Crow, the county's auditor-controller/treasurer-tax collector.

Dictos has the backing of Supervisor Henry Perea, Assembly Member Henry T. Perea, Fresno Police Chief Jerry Dyer and former Fresno County schools superintendent Larry Powell.

Dictos is ahead in fundraising. He has collected about \$10,500 from supporters and loaned his campaign \$39,000, the latest campaign records show. He said he made the loan because he doesn't like asking people for money: "If you don't believe in using your own money, then you don't believe in what you are doing."

Goossen has collected about \$14,100 from supporters, including \$2,500 from Deran Koligian Farms. Koligian, a longtime Fresno County supervisor who died in December 2001, was Poochigian's father. Goossen has donated \$1,000 to his campaign, but has not taken out any loans. "I'm running because the community asked me," he said of his no-loan approach. "If the community comes together, we will win."

But if more contributions don't come in soon, Goossen said, he might not have enough money for radio advertisements and mailers -- two political strategies that Dictos will likely employ to get the word out.

Dictos said he will win on his record.

One of his first acts was to stand firm against The Gap, the clothing retailer that built a distribution center in Fresno after City Hall sold it 200 acres of prime land for \$2 in the late 1990s. The Gap wanted a tax break on its equipment. Dictos said no.

He then caused an uproar when his office raised property taxes for thousands of agricultural landowners whose parcels were under the Williamson Act, a conservation program that generally assigns lower tax values to farmland. The county grand jury investigated the much-criticized tax hikes and ruled in Dictos' favor last year, finding the Assessor-Recorder's Office acted appropriately.

In recent interviews, both Supervisor Perea and Dyer said Dictos has shown fairness and integrity. Dictos "is motivated to do the right thing for the right reason," Dyer said.

Goossen doesn't disagree with the farmland reassessments; but, he said, the farmers he talked to didn't like the way Dictos rammed them through. "There was no opportunity for input," Goossen said. "If I win, I will rebuild the relationship with taxpayers."

Poochigian said Dictos rubs people the wrong way.

He lost a battle with the Board of Supervisors over a \$35 fee he wanted to charge people who want to appeal their assessment, which tax bills are based on. The fee was initially approved by a 3-2 board vote. But in June 2012, Supervisor Judy Case McNairy switched sides and declined to support the proposal after its second reading. Larson and Poochigian also did not support the proposal.

"People already pay enough taxes," Poochigian said in a recent interview. The fee "was a slap in the face to taxpayers."

Dictos said the board majority was short-sighted: The proposed fee would offset the county's cost of processing appeals as well as deter unwarranted challenges. Besides, he said, more than 30 counties statewide have a similar or higher fee.

Poochigian has other complaints about Dictos. She said his employees are not allowed to talk to supervisors or department heads without his permission. "He has them under a gag order," she said.

Because Dictos owns an accounting firm, he might have a conflict, Poochigian said.

"I think we need a full-time assessor," Poochigian said.

Crow, who beat Dictos in the 2002 election for auditor-controller/treasurer-tax collector, also wants Dictos out. Her office and Dictos' office intertwine, but Crow said Dictos is reluctant to work together on a new computer system.

Crow said she has known Goossen for many years and believes he will be a team player who will bring "good energy and fresh ideas" to the assessor-controller's office.

Dictos bristled at the complaints, saying many elected officials, including Poochigian and Larson, who have farming interests, have outside jobs. He said the "gag order" is "a chain of command" policy to ensure he knows what his staff is saying to others.

"They want to boss me around, but the voters elected me and want me to be independent and do what's right," Dictos said.

## **Paul Dictos**

Age: 70

Occupation: Fresno County Assessor-Recorder

Education: Bachelor of science degree in accounting from California State University, Fresno, and a Certified Public Accountant (CPA)

Family: Married, three children, eight grandchildren

Residence: Fresno

Endorsements: Supervisor Henry R. Perea, Greater Fresno Area Chamber of Commerce, Fresno Police Chief Jerry Dyer, and Fresno Police Officers Association and Fresno Deputy Sheriff's Association.

Website: [www.votepauldictos.com](http://www.votepauldictos.com)

### **Mike Goossen**

Age: 52

Occupation: Financial management consultant for small businesses and nonprofits and adjunct accounting professor at Fresno Pacific University

Education: Bachelor's of science degree in business, with a minor in accounting, from California State University, Fresno, and a Certified Public Accountant (CPA)

Family: Married, three children, three grandchildren

Residence: Sanger

Endorsements: Fresno County Supervisors Debbie Poochigian and Phil Larson, retired Fresno County Assessor-Recorder Bob Werner and Fresno County Auditor-Controller/Treasurer-Tax Collector Vicki Crow

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