

EDITORIAL: Pacheco and Mendes have chance to right a wrong



County Board of Supervisors District 4 candidate Buddy Mendes on election night on Nov. 4, 2014.

MARK CROSSE — THE FRESNO BEE [Buy Photo](#)

One of the first orders of business when Brian Pacheco and Buddy Mendes join the Fresno County Board of Supervisors in January should be mustering the four votes needed to accept a \$2.06 million state grant to make the assessor's office more efficient.

In light of the staffing and technology challenges facing the assessor's office, acceptance of the grant should have been a slam dunk at Tuesday's board meeting. Indeed, three supervisors affirmed the grant, but a supermajority vote was necessary to appropriate the money to Assessor Paul Dictos.

This result is a classic example of political brawling and a slap in the face to common sense. Debbie Poochigian, who voted no, said that the grant was about "taking money out of taxpayer's pockets." Phil Larson also voted in opposition, saying that Dictos had already raised taxes on Williamson Act properties and had supported "an unfair assessment levied against certain taxed groups in the county."

The facts are quite clear in this matter and they don't support Poochigian and Larson.

Dictos' office began reviewing property assessments in 2011 — several years after the previous assessor, Bob

Werner, alerted the board that Williamson Act property owners were getting tax breaks for which they were not entitled.

An independent report in 2012 estimated that 20% of the tax breaks in Fresno County were wrongly calculated. The same report estimated that 5% of the tax breaks were going to properties not being farmed — a violation of the Williamson Act, which attempts to save farm land from development.

Claims such as Larson's were investigated by the Fresno County civil grand jury, which issued a report in 2013 calling the revised tax rolls "accurate and timely."

Poochigian's tea party reasoning for opposing the grant flies in the face of state law, which calls for a property owner to pay taxes based on an accurate valuation of the property.

A better-staffed assessor's office with new computers and software will be better positioned to make accurate and timely assessments that may — or may not — result in higher taxes. As Poochigian well knows, or should know in light of Fresno County's plight during the Great Recession, property taxes go up or down depending on market conditions.

We don't expect Poochigian to change her mind, but Pacheco has the opportunity to right Larson's wrong when he replaces him. We hope that Mendes echoes Tuesday's affirmative vote from Judy Case McNairy when he takes her seat. Combined with support from Andreas Borgeas and Henry R. Perea, the new board would be able to give Dictos and his team the help they need.

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