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Three challengers elected to health-care board

Adams, Steady, Ostroff win; incumbents come up short

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In a vote that could have far-reaching implications for local health care, three challengers ousted two incumbents as they won seats on the Petaluma Health Care District board of directors in the Tuesday, Nov. 4 election.

Fran Adams, a registered nurse, received the most votes (13,876), and was followed by Stephen Steady (12,205), a physician, and Robert Ostroff (10,605), a retired physician and the president of the South Sonoma County Medical Group.

They beat incumbents Liz Close (9,712) and Robert Hill (8,267) and challenger Gerald Besses (8,006), a semi-retired physician.

"I hadn't run in an election before, and had no idea how the results would turn out," Adams said. "I'm very pleased that the three of us won, and I'm very excited about being able to serve.

"I think that the vote confirms that the community recognizes the need for more involvement by the board in hospital operations."

Adams identified two main issues of concern.

"Physician recruitment is at the top of the list, and we also need to deal with providing affordable health care," she said.

Ostroff also emphasized the importance of physician recruitment in a letter he wrote to the PHCD board on Oct. 25.

"If the challengers get three votes on the board, physician recruitment will become the single job of the PHCD, and everything else will become peripheral (but not ignored)," Ostroff wrote. "PVH is dead without doctors, and we've lost half of them already, and we'll lose another half in the next four years."

Ostroff also issued a statement after election results were released.

“I would like to thank the people of the health care district for their votes,” he wrote. “I look forward to working with this board and accomplishing those things that we said needed doing: preserve and expand high-quality and affordable health care access for the people of the health care district, and preserve Petaluma Valley Hospital as a top-quality institution that everyone in the district can use.”

Steady, like Adams, views the election of the three challengers as a public desire for change.

“As we have seen with votes around the country, people are not satisfied with the status quo, and want change,” said Steady, who was raised in Petaluma. “I would like to see the health care district have more of a business plan as it moves forward, and see it focus on the recruitment and retention of physicians, who are the life blood of hospitals.”

During the contentious election campaign, the challengers often were highly critical of the board, so functioning together could pose problems.

Steady is optimistic that the new board members will be able to work constructively with standing members Dr. David Anderson and Josephine Thornton, although he thinks that there might be “bumps in the road” as they begin functioning as a team.

“I have thought about this, and certainly hope that there won’t be problems,” Adams added. “The board will need to move forward, and may change its focus, but the only way this situation will work is if we all work together.”

Daymon Doss, CEO of the health care district, stresses that all the board members will be united by their desire to serve the community.

“They all care about Petaluma, and I am looking forward to working with them,” he said. “I’ve known all three of the new board members for some time, and they’re all very concerned and very much interested in working in a positive way for Petaluma Valley Hospital.

“They have sent a clear message to focus on physician recruitment. I feel that this has been a focus of the board, but there will be a renewed focus on it.”

Doss said that the new board will review the current strategic plan next month.

“I believe that the new members will find that it isn’t very different than what they have been saying they want,” he said.

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