

# Palo Alto Rotary Pinion

Date: May 23, 2016

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Visiting Rotarians were Area 9 Assistant Governor Steve Ross of the Palo Alto University Rotary Club, and Vijay Subramanian who is from Toronto, Canada, and Barry Chang of Cupertino Rotary.



Guests of Rotarians were Majda Jones of Portola Valley, guest of Dan Quinn; Jack Adler, guest of Le Levy.

Opening remarks were given by Dennis McGinn, whose topic was empathy and compassion. When he sees homeless people he wonders why they are there. Empathy is a gateway to compassion. Empathy is a mode of relating to people.

Compassion is about taking action, it is empathy in action. It comes about from realizing that we all want the same things. The practice of mindfulness has been shown to improve health - empathy and compassion are in our self-interest. The Dalai Lama, who has been homeless for 50 years, nonetheless writes about "Why I Laugh." Smiling is the best medicine.

**PLEASE NOTE:** Updated PA Rotary Endowment Fund by-laws are now available on the club website in the Members Only section. Look for them in the Overview and Policy area. They will also be mailed to the membership next week. On June 6, the Endowment Board meeting will occur before the regular club meeting. At the club meeting, there will be a vote to approve the by-laws.



Diana Diamond introduced the eight candidates in the June 7 primary election for the 24th Assembly District. There is a vacancy because the current member, Rich Gordon, has been termed out. California has the smallest legislature compared to the size of its population of any state. It has the

largest assembly districts by population in the country with over 400,000 in each district. The 24th District covers from Cupertino to Sunnyvale, Palo Alto, Mountain View, Menlo Park, Portola Valley, Woodside, and out to the coast. The candidates include one Republican, one Libertarian, and six Democrats.

Seated left to right, in alphabetical order, the candidates were:



Mark Berman, Jay Cabrera, Barry Chang, John Inks,



Mike Kasperzak, Peter Ohtaki, Seelam Reddy, and Vicki Veenker.

Diana Diamond asked a question to the four candidates on the left side of the podium, "What is your motivation for running?" Mark Berman responded that he wanted to continue the work that he had done with the Palo Alto City Council - he mentioned working on the minimum wage, solutions to housing and transportation, infrastructure, STEM education, and resources for under-served students. Jay Cabrera said he wanted us to re-think culture and society. He said the system is rigged for the 0.001% that all people are equal and should receive basic life necessities. He is aligned with Bernie Sanders. Barry Chang said that he wanted to solve problems. There is a housing crisis as police, teachers, and fire fighters cannot afford to live in our area. There is also traffic, congestion, and education funding is too low. John Inks said that he favored balanced budgets, holding back on regulation, and that we needed to address budget deficits and retirement costs.

Moderator Diamond's second question, to the candidates on the right side of podium was, What are your top two priorities?

Mike Kasperzak said his priorities were housing and housing affordability and transportation. He suggested affordable housing tax credits, low-income units, overturning the Palmer decision, and that we have to take care of our roads. Peter Ohtaki mentioned he had been on the Menlo Park City Council, had served as Mayor and he wanted to solve key problems and maintain our quality of life. He is against spending on high-speed rail and favors spending on local transportation needs such as Caltrain, grade separations, and BART. He favors local control. Seelam Reddy said he wants to end corruption and influence of special interests. He would like to address airport noise and provide pet owner medical deductions. Vicki Veenker said her top priorities were the environment. She has a degree in Biochemistry and has served as a patent lawyer. Her other priority is education and she mentioned her endorsements from education leaders.

The third question related to tax increases and was directed to four of the candidates.

Vicki Veenker said we needed to be smarter about taxes. On Proposition 30 she said that we could let the sales increase tax go but we should keep the income tax increase. She thought we should increase the gas tax on a per gallon basis and there should be a user tax on the electric cars to pay for roads. She supports the Silicon Valley half cent sales tax.



Peter Ohtaki said that many people are close to moving and that we have to be careful about adding new taxes. He stated that the gas tax needs to go to transportation.



John Inks said that we are past the breaking point on taxes and that we cannot count on the increased taxes from Proposition 30 during years in which the incomes are lower. He believes we need to throttle back on taxes



Jay Cabrera said the tax system favors the wealthy and that there is plenty of money to go around in Silicon Valley to pay for human needs.



The moderator then asked Mike Kasperzak, "Why did it take you so long to run?" He said that he is a moderate Democrat, that his experience matters and is in his favor as a candidate.



Peter Ohtaki was asked why as a Republican in a Democratic district he was bothering to run. He said that the district is more moderate than people think and that pension reform has been passed in local jurisdictions.

Barry Chang was asked about the FPPC fining him and the recall campaign against him. He stated that the recall supporters are a small group who want no growth and were upset that he pointed out that their proposal to limit buildings to 45 feet could result in tall structures. He said the FPPC fined him because he had a voluntary treasurer and became overwhelmed with work so the reports were not timely filed.



Mark Berman was asked about the numerous pro Berman mailings that have come from Ed Voice and the Dental Society. He responded that his campaign had only sent three to five mailers per household. He said Ed Voice was started by Ted Lempert and favors education reform. He did not know why the Dental Society was sending out mailers as these are independent expenditures not under his control. He said he had called the FPPC to see if he could ask the groups not to send these things out.



Vicki Veenker was asked about the hit piece mailer sent out against her that said that she had no experience. She noted that four Palo Alto City Council members and two Menlo Park City Council members endorsed her so obviously they didn't think city council experience was necessary. She said she had been active in public policy through the Law Foundation of Silicon Valley. The mailer was sponsored by the Californians Aligned for Patient Protection which is opposed to increasing the cap on malpractice suits.

Seelam Reddy was asked why he did not show up for the Palo Alto Weekly editorial board. He said he is the chief of staff of his campaign and it slipped his mind. He doesn't have advertising with the Palo Alto Weekly but works with the other newspapers. Jay Cabrera was asked why he is bringing Bernie Sanders into the campaign. He responded that there is mass mobilization movement and that he is the only candidate for State Assembly in line with Bernie platform.



All candidates were then asked about our drought problem. Mark Berman said he is disappointed the state government has relaxed the water rules and that we should assume the last few years are the new normal. Vicki Veenker said we need a smarter water system, and should use water recycling. She is opposed to the Delta tunnels. Seelam Reddy said we need to be better with gray water and ocean water. Jay Cabrera said we need to cut down on our use of many things and he belongs to the Half It Movement. He also suggested greenhouses could be used to conserve water. Barry Chang said that he had served on the Santa Clara Valley Water District Board, he favored recycling and conservation, and that we still waste quite a bit of water. John Inks said that he also served on the Santa Clara Valley Water District and that he favors recycling, advanced water treatment and conservation. Mike Kasperzak said we need to look into ground water recharge, rainwater capture systems, and change in the building code so that we can reuse water for toilets instead of using potable water. Peter Ohtaki said that he favored water recycling and purple pipes.

Next were questions from the audience. Mike Kasperzak was asked about litigation costs. He said he doesn't support a loser pay system. He thinks we should hold the line on shifting burdens of cost in litigation. In response to the next question, none of the candidates said that they were in favor of allowing fundraising by Assembly members or Senate members in the final 30 days of budget consideration. Vicki Veenker was asked about unfunded pension liability and she said she did not have a full solution but that the current reforms were probably not enough. In response to a question about providing free tuition to the University of California, Cabrera and Chang said they supported it. Reddy said he favored charter schools and the other candidates mostly said they were in favor of reducing fees but do not think it was feasible to eliminate them entirely at this time. Peter Ohtaki mentioned that he opposes bringing in out-of-state students. John Inks said it would be more expensive to provide education if it is made free. The meeting adjourned at 1:33 p.m. and the candidates stuck around to talk to the gathered multitude.

**PROGRAMS & EVENTS**  
May 30 -DARK – no meeting  
June 6,Linda Adler, MPH, MA: "Beyond Advocacy: What You Really Need to Know to Successfully Manage Your Healthcare"