

What the county's talking about this week

## Creator of SLO County redistricting map questioned local election's 'validity,' sought ballot and voter records

The Arroyo Grande resident behind San Luis Obispo County's new redistricting map is alleging local election fraud following a months-long, unsuccessful probe to try to gain access to confidential county voting records in the 2021 recall election against Gov. Gavin Newsom.

Richard Patten—whose redistricting map earned the support of a majority of the SLO County Board of Supervisors last year—initiated a series of exhaustive records requests with the county registrar of voters in October 2021, around the same time that county supervisors started to show interest in his map, which was later adopted and now faces a gerrymandering lawsuit.

Patten's records requests with the county asked for a "voluminous" set of recall election materials, according to his correspondence with the county, ranging from "images of all ballots received throughout the course of the election," to "SLO County system internet access logs," to "Dominion system user access logs from start of tabulation to election certification," and more.

The SLO County Counsel's Office responded to each of his three sets of similar requests—made in October, and then February and March—by

denying the release of a majority of the records.

Most of the requests, the county said in its response letters, asked for confidential voter information—like ballot envelopes that contained voter signatures or voter rolls that require a formal application to gain access to—and raw data from internal computer systems that, if released, would "reveal vulnerability to, or otherwise increase the potential for an attack on the information technology system of the county."

Patten later penned an opinion piece in *CalCoastNews*, published on March 15, that lamented how his requests were met with "obfuscation or disregard" by the county. Patten alleged, without providing evidence, that "blatant examples of election infractions" were found in SLO County, which put the recall election's "validity in question." Patten's allegations included that dead residents received ballots, that incarcerated felons were allowed to vote, and that some individual voters received multiple ballots.

"The county needs to preserve the 2021 recall election data. SLO County residents need to be confident that their elections are fair and transparent," Patten wrote in the piece.

Patten claimed that the recall election results had been "contested" and records indicate that he personally requested a recount of the election.

County officials explained that any legal contest of the recall had to have been filed in Sacramento County court, and that any requests for a recount had to be submitted to the California Secretary of State within required time frames. The county then routinely destroys election records six months after the contest, barring a formal legal contest, as is required by state law.

After Patten's third round of requests for records in March, Deputy County Counsel Ann Duggan emphasized in her written response the legal ramifications of releasing confidential voter records, absent a formal application,

and added that the county would not respond to any further requests for the same records.

"We believe it prudent to emphasize the confidentiality that California law places on this voter information, since this is now the third time we have responded to numerous requests you have submitted," Duggan wrote.

Patten did not respond to *New Times*' requests for an interview before press time.

*New Times* reached out to the Board of Supervisors to ask if any members were aware of Patten's inquiries and views about the election before they adopted his redistricting map in December 2021. Two responded before press time.

Second District Supervisor Bruce Gibson, who opposed the Patten map, said he did not have knowledge of his requests and allegations, but noted that "it surprises me about as much as seeing the sun come up in the east."

"Patten seems to be pretty clearly pushing the Big Lie trying to undermine confidence in our election process. His assertions have been answered by the clerk-recorder and county counsel. There is no substance behind them," Gibson said.

Fourth District Supervisor Lynn Compton, who supported the Patten map, said that she received an email from him within the past few weeks asking her to help preserve the recall election records. Compton said she was told by county counsel that that was not possible. That email was the first she'd heard of Patten's election views, she said.

Compton told *New Times* that she believes mistakes get made in local elections, but not at the magnitude that would swing a race.

"Do I think there are issues out there? Yeah, I do," she said. "There are people that are concerned about it. We have to listen to all concerns."

Compton said that Patten's map "wasn't picked [by the board] due to any questions on that subject [the election] ... that I know of anyway."

Patten's map, which made significant changes to the county's five supervisorial district boundaries, is currently being challenged in SLO County Superior Court for allegedly favoring the Republican Party. Following recent preliminary court rulings, the map will be used for the upcoming June primary election. Δ

—Peter Johnson

SCREENSHOT COURTESY OF SLO COUNTY



**ELECTION INFRACTIONS?** Richard Patten, an Arroyo Grande resident who authored the recently adopted redistricting map for SLO County, has alleged that election fraud occurred locally during the 2021 gubernatorial recall election.

### Rural North County internet speeds don't meet state standards

Internet access doesn't just cost more in Northern San Luis Obispo County—it's also slower.

A San Luis Obispo Council of Governments (SLOCOG) report released at the beginning of April found that the urban areas of SLO County meet the minimum speeds for the federal definition of broadband internet, "while moving

away from the urban areas into the rural area shows diminishing speeds."

The northern regions of the county are also falling short of the California Speed Standard, which is higher than the federal broadband definition.

"The majority of blocks in the Central and South County meet the California Standard, while only the urban areas in the North Coast and North County meet the standard," the report stated.

Connecting to the internet is also more

expensive the farther north a resident lives in SLO County. According to the SLOCOG report, broadband internet plans in South County ZIP codes start at \$29.99, while plans in the North County start at \$55 to \$69.99, and parts of the North Coast are as high as \$165.

Connectivity challenges were on full display during an April 5 Paso Robles City Council meeting, when the meeting's livestream went dark—ironically, during a staff presentation about broadband.

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