

**Almaden Valley Community Association**  
**Meeting Location**  
**Almaden Community Center, 6445 Camden Avenue**  
**Monday, Sept 13, 2010**

## **Ira Ruskin**

AVCA President Jerry Mungai opened the meeting at 7:00 pm and introduced IRA Ruskin, the incumbent representative for California Assembly District 21 (which includes part of the Almaden Valley). Ira's political career includes being a member of the City Council of Redwood City and being a three term member of the California Assembly, representing a long narrow district that stretches from Redwood City to the Almaden Valley. Jerry and Ira discussed Ira's private sector background in consulting in the area of video and web-based marketing and sales. Ira is prevented by term limits from running for a fourth term in the Assembly. Jerry also introduced three candidates for office in the audience: Edward Gonzales, (Libertarian) candidate to represent the 16<sup>th</sup> Congressional District; and candidates to represent the 21<sup>st</sup> Assembly District, Greg Conlon (Republican) and Rich Gordon (Democrat).

Ira began his remarks by thanking the candidates for running. He also introduced Karen Zamell from his office. He structured his talk as a series of "top ten" recommendations for those seeking public office, sprinkled with relevant anecdotes and observations from his public service career.

10. Make sure you love public service!

9. Believe that constituents are number one!

8. Pick two or three areas and specialize!

Ira picked the environment, higher education, and small business as his areas of specialization. He told about one contentious problem involving planning for the collection and disposal of mercury thermometers. There was a disagreement between manufacturers and environmentalists over how to estimate the numbers of mercury thermometers in the population. Ira's suggestion of taking a random sample resolved the disagreement. Ira explained that his specialization led to credibility that helped convince. In the higher education area, Ira described an issue arising from the lack of captioning for hearing impaired students. The advocates for the hearing impaired wanted a bill to "require text book publishers to pay for captioning." Because of his credibility, Ira was able to obtain bipartisan support for the bill. In the area of small business, the law requires small business participation in State contracts. The issue arose because small businesses complained that the small business participants were "shills" for large corporations. An investigation of these charges uncovered significant overcharges to the State by Office Depot. \$2.5 million was recovered.

7. Build consensus whenever possible!

Ira amplified that this implies disagreeing civilly. AB96 (enhanced vapor recovery) prevents ten tons of pollution per day. The problem was that small gas stations couldn't obtain credit to purchase the required \$50,000 equipment. The solution was to provide credit from unused State funds.

6. Get a thick skin!

Ira wanted to protect wildlife corridors and supported a bill to establish a State mapping system. The bill passed but was vetoed by the Governor, in what was said to be a mistake. Ira made superfluous changes and resubmitted the bill, which then passed and was signed by the Governor.

5. Don't lose sight of the objective!

In one case the administration said there was no need for a bill. In fact the problem was solved without the bill.

4. Sustain momentum through ups and downs!

3. Expect frustration!

Having stated this rule, Ira said, "... which brings me to the budget." According to Ira, the most frustrating part of the system today is the 2/3 rule for passing a budget. Only three states require 2/3. In the assembly the 2/3 rule means 54 votes are needed for passage as opposed to a majority of 41 votes. The solutions demanded by the last few voters are "not mainstream." Ira believes consensus is a recipe for gridlock. He quoted Alexander Hamilton from Federalist Papers number 22, saying essentially that under a 2/3 rule a minority has a negative effect on the majority, reversing what is expected, and forcing public business (which "must go forward") to conform to the views of the minority.

2. Have an open door policy in office!

Ira explained that this means being available to talk to anyone. He said, "you never know when you might be wrong." He also said, "Listen to your staff."

1. Believe that an individual can make a difference.

A question and answer period followed.

Q. Doesn't the 2/3 majority requirement suggest a need for a complete revision of the Constitution?

A. "The movement to redo the Constitution is defunct." This movement was led by the "Bay Area Council," which proposed a Constitutional Convention. In terms of signature gathering, publicity, and television in prime markets, it costs roughly \$10 million to win a controversial proposition. In this case insufficient funds were raised.

Q. Please comment on governing by proposition.

A. It is a "basic right" but "can be overused." It creates problems like the unfunded mandate and diminishes the flexibility of government. It increases the public's disrespect

for government. (Ira reiterated points he had made earlier about the 2/3 rule.) Voters don't have time to analyze the in propositions. There needs to be a better way to show the consequences of propositions.

Q. Please comment on the set of proposals from the Governor.

A. There is a difference of opinion about where to cut. There are ongoing negotiations with the Governor. Some agreements have been reached with unions. Negotiations continue with 5 or 6 other unions. All are frustrated by the budget process.

Q. The Legislature knows about propositions while they are circulating (acquiring signatures). Why not focus on such issues early?

A. This is a good point. It sometimes takes longer to pass legislation than to pass an initiative.

Q. California's huge deficits would be even larger without the 2/3 rule. Why does California ignore the cost of illegals?

A. California is seriously affected by immigration but this is a Federal issue.

Q. We have serious problems on our border.

A. It is a Federal issue. We need immigrants for businesses to hire.

A sample from a series of rapid questions and comments follows:

Q. Isn't there a bracero program?

C. Cheap labor is subsidized by taxpayers in the form of public services.

C. California should do what Arizona is doing.

Q. Should we have more illegals just because it is good for business?

Q. Why do you keep saying "immigrant" when the issue is about "illegals."

C. The United States Constitution makes special provision for State action in case of invasion. This is not exclusively a Federal issue.

Ira's responses were either very brief or non-existent.

Q. Please comment on the Mercury News article about the sponsoring of bills.

A. Legislators accept contributions from people who sponsor bills. The Legislative Council office reviews all legislative ideas. "One man's lobbyist is another man's advocate." My rule is that I must approve every amendment (to my bill) that a staff person makes, and I must know everything in the bill. I don't use any speech written outside my office.

Q. Please comment on gifts from lobbyists?

A. There is a legal limit of \$10 per month in gifts a legislator may accept from lobbyists. There is also a \$400 per year limit on gifts a legislator may accept from constituents. I once took a foreign trip that was paid for by a non-profit organization to discuss the Kyoto Protocol (related to California AB32 The Global Warming Act). Everything had to be accounted for precisely. Someone questioned a \$40 bottle of cologne that somehow showed up in my travel accounts. It turned out there was no bottle. The \$40 expense was for a tour in the City of Cologne.

Mike Wasserman, candidate for County Supervisor, arrived during the general meeting and was introduced by Jerry Mungai. There was a brief recess at 8:05 pm.

## **Business Meeting**

After the brief recess President Jerry Mungai opened the business meeting at 8:08 pm. Board Members present included:

- **President: Jerry Mungai,**
- **Vice President: Pat McMahon,**
- **Secretary: Ray Strong,**
- **Treasurer: Bob Boydston; and**
- **Directors: Susan Bailey, Steve Levin, and Joe Boudreau.**

### **Secretary Report: (Ray Strong)**

**The August minutes were approved without opposition.**

### **Treasurer Report: (Bob Boydston)**

**The Treasurer's report, showing a balance of \$9,683, was approved without opposition.**

### **Membership Report: (Lee Dimmit)**

The e-loop (email list to which the AVCA sends communications) has 475 members. The AVCA has 123 dues paid members.

### **Transportation Committee Report: (Steve Levin)**

Steve introduced the following proposed resolution:

#### *Proposed AVCA Resolution Regarding High-Speed Rail*

*If high speed rail is built along the San Francisco Peninsula, the Almaden Valley Community Association (AVCA) supports the most cost-effective alignment and construction. At-grade and aerial construction costs much less than trenching or tunneling, so this should be used everywhere practical. The only exception is in the immediate vicinity of stations, where trenching or tunneling may be best.*

*If any city or community on the Peninsula wants trenching or tunneling, that city or community should provide all funds necessary for any trenching or tunneling beyond the minimal most cost-effective alignment and construction. This is the model used for construction of BART in the 1960s. When the City of Berkeley wanted BART underground, Berkeley had to provide funds to pay for this.*

*An acceptable alternative would be to have the northern terminus of high-speed rail in San Jose, so that high-speed rail need not continue up the Peninsula beyond San Jose to San Francisco.*

*In addition, high-speed rail in San Jose and Santa Clara County should be constructed in a manner such that no expressways, freeways, roads, or streets are diminished in capacity, lanes, or traffic flow.*

*The AVCA Board gives approval to have this resolution distributed as widely as possible to elected officials, the High-Speed Rail Authority, media, etc., edited as necessary for space considerations.*

Consideration of the proposal was briefly discussed and postponed for the next business meeting.

**Website Committee Report: (Bob Boydston)**

Bob Boydston reported that Linda Spencer will take over managing the website next month.

**Neighborhood Commission Report:**

Bob Boydston reported that the caucus to fill vacancies on the Neighborhood Commission had insufficient participation and failed in its goal.

**District 10 Liaison Report: (Kathy Sullivan)**

- Whole Foods may be open as early as November 11.
- The PW Supermarket is permanently closed. Nancy Pyle's office will work to make sure it is replaced.
- There are issues with the license for the Almaden Mining Company (restaurant and bar intended to replace a closed movie rental store in the Safeway shopping center; but it is expected to open soon.
- The Guadalupe Mines project to build 87 homes on a plot with a 3 acre riparian set-back has been approved by the Council. The development will be called Brookside Estates.

**President's Report: (Jerry Mungai)**

The Thursday (September 23) forum will be held in the Water District Board Room. The Water District candidates will appear first, followed by the candidates for Assembly District 21.

**A motion to provide approximately \$190 for three microphones (as part of a sound system for the AVCA sponsored candidate forum) passed without objection.**

The meeting adjourned at 8:52 pm.

**Draft Minutes submitted September 28, 2010**

**Minutes approved October 12, 2010**

**Ray Strong, Secretary**