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El Dorado supervisors face financial crisis

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El Dorado County's increasingly bleak fiscal forecast might have taken a bit of the glow off Tuesday's victory, but apparent Supervisors-elect John Knight and Ray Nutting said they are ready and eager to help guide the county through financial crisis.

The new board members take office in January.

Although 16,760 vote-by-mail, provisional and damaged ballots remain to be counted countywide, Knight led fellow El Dorado Hills resident Harry Norris 52 percent to 47 percent in District 1.

Knight said he expects the budget will be the overriding issue for some time.

"We need to understand what can be done in further cutting expenses and where we can start generating revenue," he said.

Knight applauded the Board of Supervisors' action Tuesday directing the county chief administrative officer to identify 100 positions that the board could consider for elimination Nov. 18. The cuts are proposed to reduce a projected \$20 million shortfall in 2009-10.

"They're facing the real tough, hard issues and the reality of what's happening," Knight said of the current board. "They're not being lame ducks, and I applaud them all for doing that."

But Somerset resident Nutting, who outpolled Barbara Smiley of Shingle Springs 68 percent to 32 percent in District 2, said such deep cuts would not be necessary had the board responded appropriately two years ago when the regional economic downturn began.

Nutting, who served on the board eight years in the 1990s, said the supervisors should immediately institute employee furloughs, a measure he prefers to layoffs.

"If you reduce bodies, you have to decide what services won't be delivered," he said.

Knight argued that the county can cut staff positions and maintain service by contracting for work as needed.

In addition, Knight said, he wants to work with the county's economic development coordinator to attract projects such as new hotels and other commercial development that would boost sales, hotel and property tax revenues.

Both men said they would consider asking voters to approve a temporary local sales tax measure to fund specific needs such as road maintenance, though they said it would be a tough sell.

Nutting said he will fight to preserve funding for road maintenance as well as fuel- reduction projects critical to preventing catastrophic wildland fires. Knight and Nutting also hailed Tuesday's passage of Measure Y by 71 percent of voters. The 2008 measure, endorsed by a cross-section of the community, modified a 1998 initiative intended to keep new developments from causing traffic congestion. The 2008 version clarified the original measure to eliminate unintended obstacles to affordable housing and commercial development.

Bill Schultz, county registrar of voters, said final election results may not be available until late this month due to the unusually large number of vote-by-mail ballots.

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