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Business Journal Endorses Bob Foster For Mayor

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Although Long Beach's reputation has improved and its economy has rebounded considerably in several sectors under Mayor Beverly O'Neill's 12-year watch, most engaged voters realize that the International City's next mayor faces considerable challenges.

According to a recent U.S. Census report, Long Beach has the sixth-highest concentration of poverty in the country, a dubious and daunting statistic to say the least. Long Beach also ranks as the most ethnically diverse large municipality in the U.S., a demographic reality that presents its own set of challenges (with issues of representation looming especially large). Beyond that, the next mayor must address a host of massive environmental and infrastructure challenges related to the Long Beach-Los Angeles port complex, Long Beach Airport and area freeways. As if that were not enough, Long Beach's next top elected official must also implement rigorous fiscal discipline and find new revenue opportunities to ensure that funding is available for city services, public safety and capital improvements.

And then there's what many view as the most pressing challenge of all: seizing control of an increasingly fractious city council, divided along partisan and district lines to the detriment of the city as a whole.

After a lengthy review process and consideration of the abovementioned issues, the Business Journal editorial team has concluded that Bob Foster is best suited to take the reins from O'Neill to chart a new course for Long Beach. We believe Foster has the necessary force of personality, skills and experience to strike a more functional tone at City Hall, while leading all of Long Beach, not just downtown, in a more positive direction.

The fact that Foster has garnered broad, bipartisan support from a range of business, community and labor groups, makes him uniquely qualified to bridge the gap between those interests that are so often at odds with one another. We see this as a big plus.

Although Foster is most widely known as the former Southern California Edison president who was instrumental in turning that company around, it's important to note that he started his career working in the California legislature on the senate's energy and public utilities committee - becoming the committee's chief of staff in less

than two years. During that period, Foster worked on several pieces of energy conservation legislation in a time when environmentally sustainable was a foreign term to most people and before the Arab Oil Embargo hit. Foster later worked for the California Energy Commission, where he implemented the same conservation legislation he helped draft (an experience he characterized as “humbling” because he saw firsthand how legislation can impact business).

After three years with the energy commission, Foster established an independent public policy research and consulting firm, which he operated for six years until he took his first of many positions with Southern California Edison in 1984. He signed on as an operations executive and steadily climbed the company ranks until, by 1996, he was named the senior vice president of external affairs for Edison International and Southern California Edison. Six years later he took the helm as Southern California Edison president.

Foster now seeks to return to public service, and we support his efforts to do so. We feel his business and financial acumen combined with valuable experiences in both public and private sector capacities and insights into the interworkings of Sacramento and Washington, D.C., politics make him Long Beach’s best bet. We believe Long Beach needs a new direction, and we feel that Foster is far more likely to be a proactive ‘uniter’ than his opponent, outgoing 3rd District Councilmember Frank Colonna.

Although Colonna has, for the most part, done a good job, there have been several hiccups along the way, including: his failure in 1999 to support a compromise proposal for cutting the utility users tax (he wanted to do his own thing); his steadfast support for the former city manager despite sufficient evidence that a change was necessary for the good of the city; his very high office budgets, usually ranking the highest of the nine districts; his placement of taxpayer-paid, bullet-proof glass at his business office in Belmont Shore; his approach to the Rancho Los Alamitos request to expand its facilities (most Bixby Hill residents are still fuming about how the issue was handled). A bigger issue, though, are his misleading claims in campaign mailers that Foster “opposed a city plan to control its own power utility” and opened the door for Enron to do business in California. The truth is, if Foster had not voiced strong opposition to the city initiative supported by Colonna and former city manager Henry Toboada, the city would have cut a contract with Enron. As everyone knows, that would have been a disaster.

Ultimately, our decision boiled down to one simple question: Which candidate can best bring the various constituencies of this diverse city together to achieve common goals for the good of the entire community?

We feel Bob Foster possesses the skills, and the experience, necessary to meet this charge.