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Front Page	<p>Posted on Sun, Mar. 03, 2002</p> <p>Mark your ballots On candidates, school bonds and propositions, think big picture</p> <p>The recession that rumbled through California like an earthquake in 2001 will continue to shake things up in this election year. It magnifies the importance of candidates' priorities, since budgets will need to be cut; it gives pause to voters who want better schools and parks and police protection but are worried about their own paychecks.</p> <p>Slow times have some redeeming qualities, however. They allow us to stand back, unpressured by frenzied growth, and think about</p>
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what's important for the long haul. Keeping the big picture in mind will lead to the best choices Tuesday.

For governor, Democratic incumbent Gray Davis has nominal opposition in the primary, but the GOP race is hotly contested. Conservative William Simon lately has surged past Los Angeles Mayor Richard Riordan in the polls, but come November, Riordan's more moderate positions and his broader vision of what California can be will make him a more viable candidate.

A thoughtful man who defies stereotype and seems un beholden to special interests, Riordan could well shake up Sacramento in a positive way. He would attack head-on some challenges that others tiptoe around, like the cumbersome education code that stifles imaginative approaches to schools. We recommend him.

In other key statewide races, John Garamendi is the Democratic candidate for insurance commissioner best able to represent consumer interests; and for the non-partisan post of superintendent of public instruction, Jack O'Connell is the most capable candidate.

BALLOT PROPOSITIONS

Among Tuesday's ballot propositions, none is more important than Proposition 42, which for the first time in decades would ensure adequate investment in our highways, local streets, and mass transit systems. Best of all, it would do this with no new taxes.

Under Proposition 42, the sales tax currently paid on gasoline would be dedicated to transportation. It shouldn't be necessary to mandate this, but until recently, governors and lawmakers have shirked their responsibility to provide for the transportation needs of a growing population and economy. Without better transportation systems, Silicon Valley in particular will decline as a center of prosperity.

Proposition 40 will authorize \$2.6 billion in bonds to expand and improve state and local parks and protect threatened natural areas, particularly along the coast, around the bay and at Lake Tahoe. This is the time to make the investment. Costs will only go up.

Likewise, approve Proposition 41 to pay for voting equipment, replacing punch cards and other outdated methods across California. Remember Florida in 2000? Remember "chad"? Enough said.

LOCAL MEASURES

Measures on local ballots overwhelmingly are for school funding, as districts take advantage of the newly-enacted 55 percent threshold



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for voter approval of school bond measures, instead of two-thirds. In the South Bay, each district on the March ballot can document its need, or show you the dilapidated schools if you care to investigate yourself.

It's hard to convince students or teachers that they're important when they spend their days in slum-like environments that most of us wouldn't tolerate in our workplaces. Voters should approve the bonds and parcel taxes on the ballot.

In San Jose, Measure O is the big decision. A \$159 million bond issue, it would pay for additional fire stations, a police substation in South San Jose, a much needed 911 facility to better handle emergency calls, and training facilities.

San Jose is the safest large city in America. To stay that way, it has to keep up response time to calls -- perhaps the most important factor in residents' sense of safety. Investing in new facilities will avoid problems in the future. Voters should approve Measure O.

LOCAL OFFICES

Many local offices have minimal competition Tuesday. For San Jose Mayor Ron Gonzales, as an example, the only question is whether he will win outright or face a run-off in November with one of five weak challengers. He is by far the best candidate.

City council incumbents LindaLeZotte in District 1 and Nora Campos in District 5 face nominal challenges and have earned re-election. (Cindy Chavez is so strong in District 3 that she scared off all the competition.) But two seats whose incumbents are term-limited out have serious races.

In Central San Jose's District 7, the standout in a crowded field is Terry Gregory, a school board member and community volunteer with a background in high tech. His articulate advocacy for housing and other city needs will bring real value to the council.

In District 9, the Cambrian area, JudyChirco should get the nod. A school board member, businesswoman and longtime neighborhood activist, she is admired and respected by those who've worked with her on a broad range of issues. She would bring fresh viewpoints to city hall.

The only contested supervisor race in Santa Clara County is a slugfest, with incumbent Don Gage challenged by Morgan Hill Mayor Dennis Kennedy. Gage is doing too good a job to consider replacing him. A fiscally-conservative Republican, he has pushed the county to build its reserves and take more care in spending -- ye

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he has won the support of many Democratic leaders and even county unions. He is fair, they say, and always willing to listen.

Judicial contests can be puzzling for voters, since the candidates usually are little known outside the courthouse. The best choices on this ballot are Arthur Bocanegra in Office 9 and Aaron Persky in Office 16.

For state Assembly, the only serious contest is the Democratic primary for the 22nd Assembly District. There Rosemary Stasek is easily the best candidate. She is independent and creative, and has a broad background in public service and technology..

	
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