

# Oakland Tribune



Thursday, May 4, 2006

## Sandre Swanson seeks to move to center stage

**G**IVEN that the Oakland mayoral race is consuming most of the area's political oxygen, it might be easy to overlook other key races. The 16th District Assembly race, which covers Oakland and Alameda, definitely falls into this category.

Sandre Swanson, who served for more than 30 years as a policy aide to former U.S. Rep. Ron Dellums and chief of staff to Rep. Barbara Lee, is now vying to replace Assemblywoman Wilma Chan, who is leaving office because of term limits.

Swanson's political career began as student body president at Laney College in 1970. He also cites working on Shirley Chisholm's "Unbought Unbossed" 1972 presidential campaign and attending the Democratic National Convention that year as laying the foundation for his commitment to public service.

After 30 years behind the scenes as a key staff member, Swanson believes serving in the state Legislature is the best avenue to accomplish the goal of "assisting children."

"I want to mentor young people and show them the value of public service.



**Byron WILLIAMS**

Hurricane Katrina shows what can happen when you don't have the right kind of leadership in place; it can cost people their lives," Swanson said.

Central to Swanson's platform is the education, health and overall well-being of young people. And for him, every other policy flows from that overarching commitment.

Swanson believes strongly in government helping those who are most vulnerable, be it through health care, affordable housing, a healthy environment, job opportunities that pay a livable wage or providing businesses a way to grow and thrive.

According to Swanson, "The responsibility of government is not to simply quote statistics about Oakland's homicide (rate) as better than it

used to be, but to see it as the crisis that it actually represents and to accept that challenge."

Swanson is an advocate of schools having local control.

"Schools are our greatest example of democracy that must involve parents, teachers and students if we are to reach educational excellence," he said.

He finds California being 44th in per-pupil spending unacceptable.

"Schools must be more than a line-item in the budget," he said. "It is not only important that we keep the governor to his promise about Proposition 98 moneys but that we look at schools as an investment. When we look at schools as an investment, there is a multiplier that pays for itself."

He adds, "If you make real investments in schools to reduce truancy and drop-out rates, there is a correlating reduction in crime."

Swanson contends that by failing to invest in schools, we only demand that money be invested in the juvenile justice system or a facility such as San Quentin, where the cost per inmate is roughly \$31,000 annually.

Swanson's progressive bona fides are without question.

Dellums, who was chairman of the

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## **SWANSON**

House Armed Services Committee, appointed Swanson to manage congressional oversight of more than \$50 million in federal conversion and cleanup money for Oakland and Alameda.

Swanson's leadership helped pave the way for 485 homes under construction in Alameda. Oakland uses its share of the land to create two marine terminals and the formation of Middle Harbor Shoreline Park.

But how does such experience translate into being an effective

member of the Legislature who has at best six years to accomplish anything?

Swanson freely admits that term limits have curtailed the effectiveness of legislators. He recognizes that the initiative process has allowed elected officials to pass off tough decisions to voters, essentially making the electorate part-time legislators.

If elected, Swanson says he believes his 30 years of congressional service will minimize the requisite learning curve for freshman legislators. Moreover, he has pledged to focus solely on the duties in the Assembly.

Numerous elected officials, unions and members of the business community have endorsed Swanson. He recently received the endorsement of the California Democratic Party.

But after 30 years in politics, Swanson understands the only endorsement that matters is from voters of the 16th District.

"I must work hard to tell my story and allow democracy to work," he says.

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Byron Williams is an Oakland pastor and syndicated columnist. E-mail him at [byron@byronspeaks.com](mailto:byron@byronspeaks.com) or leave a message at (510) 208-6417. Send a letter to the editor to [soundoff@angnewspapers.com](mailto:soundoff@angnewspapers.com).