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2007 LARGE BUSINESS OF THE YEAR

Former judge talks of removal

Velásquez fields questions from college students

By **SUNITA VIJAYAN**
The Salinas Californian

Nearly a year after his removal from the bench, it looked Tuesday as if former Monterey County Superior Court Judge Jose Angel Velásquez was back in the hot seat.

This time, instead of answering to the California Commission on Judicial Performance, Velásquez was peppered with questions by administration of justice students at Hartnell College in Salinas.

"Yes, I did certain things — I didn't follow procedure," he told the class of more than 60 students Tuesday morning. "It was wrong in the sense that I violated (people's) due process rights and constitutional rights, but I never denied what I did. ... I did make a mistake and I have to own up to that. I will take responsibility. I'm not here to blame others. I did them."

In the second of two presentations he made this week since he was officially removed from the bench in October, Velásquez spoke to the students about the circumstances surrounding the commission's decision to strip him of his robe and gavel, and the consequences he has faced since.

In the past five years, only four judges statewide have been removed from their jobs by the commission.

In July, following his appointment by Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, Tom Willis was officially sworn in to replace Velásquez.

The state commission had ruled in April 2007 that Velásquez acted inappropriately toward more than two dozen defendants and

See **JUDGE**, Page 3A

AT A GLANCE

Former Monterey County Superior Court Judge Jose Angel Velásquez was officially removed from the bench in October 2007, following the denial of his appeal to the California Commission on Judicial Performance.



Ex-Judge Angel Velásquez speaks at Hartnell College on Tuesday to an administration of justice class.

Measure W defeated



BRITTANY DURGIN/THE SALINAS CALIFORNIAN

From left, Sam Downing, Shirley Lavorato and Julia Hicks look at the first round of results for Measure W Tuesday night at the Monterey County Elections Department in Salinas.

District voters reject SVMH's \$392M bond

By **DAWN WITHERS**
The Salinas Californian

It all ended in 30 minutes. Eight weeks of campaigning, polling and calling voters to support Salinas Valley Memorial Hospital's \$392 million bond — Measure W — failed to convince enough people to pass the measure.

Two-thirds of the 64,000 voters in the district stretching from Moss Landing to Gonzales were needed to pass the measure but returns reported

30 minutes after polls closed at 8 p.m. Tuesday showed 48 percent voted against the measure with 52 percent saying yes.

"The one thing people can control is keeping their taxes low," said SVMH Chief Executive Officer Sam Downing, who gathered with other hospital executives and Measure W supporters at

the Monterey County Elections Department in Salinas on Tuesday night. The mood turned somber as supporters' and hospital executives' hopes of a bond were dashed after the results were announced.

Downing said with so many people losing their homes and facing dismal

See **MEASURE W**, Page 3A

Election2008

WHAT'S NEXT

The Monterey County Elections Department will release the final ballot count for Measure W on Friday.

Authorities destroy pot plants

By **MARIA INES ZAMUDIO**
The Salinas Californian

Authorities on Monday destroyed a marijuana crop containing about 6,500 plants on U.S. Forest Service land in Carmel Valley.

The marijuana, found off Robinson Canyon Road, had an estimated street value of \$26 million, the Monterey County Sheriff's Office said.

No suspects were found. The team from the U.S. National Guard spotted the plants during a routine flight during a three-day working visit to the Monterey County Sheriff's Office, said Sgt. Daniel Karamitis.

The Sheriff's Office also destroyed about 7,000 marijuana plants Aug. 13 after finding them in the

Salinas River area just north of San Ardo. That crop had an estimated street value of more than \$28 million, the Sheriff's Office said.

In addition to law enforcement eradication, the wildfires in south county likely destroyed as many as 20,000 marijuana plants in June and July, he said.

Marijuana crops are usually planted in late April

and ready to harvest in September or October, Karamitis said.

Contact Maria Inés Zamudio at mzamudio@thecalifornian.com.

TO HELP

Anyone with information about the marijuana garden found in Carmel Valley or other marijuana cases may call (831) 755-3722.

and ready to harvest in September or October, Karamitis said.

Contact Maria Inés Zamudio at mzamudio@thecalifornian.com.

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Laird drops in on convention

He'll be back for Assembly work

By **JAKE HENSHAW**
The Salinas Californian Capitol Bureau

SACRAMENTO — Assemblyman John Laird, D-Santa Cruz, was heading back to Sacramento on Tuesday, after attending the Democratic convention in Denver.

Laird, who chairs the Assembly Budget Committee, was one of the few Democratic legislators to attend the convention — even though the state is about two months late in passing a budget.

"I decided to go because I think it is a historic con-

vention," Laird said in an interview from Denver, "and I was working remotely on the budget over the weekend."

Laird said he flew to Denver on Saturday and had written a column on the budget Sunday. He also talked with the Assembly speaker and staff about the budget each day he was gone, he said.

"My take was if there was going to be any movement (on the budget) I was going to be on the first flight back," said Laird, who estimated the trip takes about two hours.

The Assembly met

Monday while Laird, who wasn't receiving legislative living expenses during the trip, was gone, but there was no budget vote.

There was no Assembly session Tuesday, and Laird expects to be back for today's meeting.

In Denver, Laird said the speeches of Sen. Edward Kennedy, D-Massachusetts, and Michelle Obama were highlights, and he predicted Sen. Joe Biden, D-Delaware, would help Democrats regain the White House.

"I think we'll come out of Denver united and fired up" for the fall campaign, Laird said.

Contact Jake Henshaw at jhenshaw@gannett.com

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