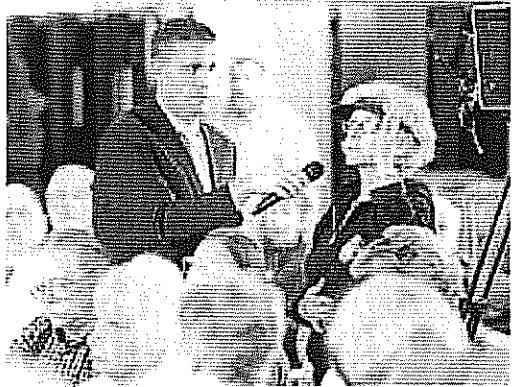


McGuire talks local issues at Eureka town hall

Affordable housing, health care, road funds in legislator's future plans

By Will Houston, Eureka Times-Standard

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Whether the topic of discussion was homelessness, affordable housing, lack of doctors, crumbling roads, rogue marijuana grows or vaccine laws, North Coast Sen. Mike McGuire got an earful from his constituents at Thursday's town hall meeting in Eureka.

The diversity of topics discussed was represented by those who attended who included local teachers, doctors and past, present and prospective government officials to name a few.

For many who packed into the Eureka High School cafeteria Thursday evening, health care and homelessness were the focal issues. Several residents voiced concerns about parents in nursing homes who are facing relocation out of the county or about having to wait up to 10

months to find a doctor.

"There is not going to be an easy answer to this," McGuire said. "We're going to need to look at some type of additional reimbursement rate when it comes to getting medical professionals into Humboldt County."

McGuire (D-Healdsburg) also addressed other areas where he felt Humboldt County and the rest of the 2nd District has been under served and the work that has been done to address them, including funding for affordable housing.

This year's state budget includes \$2 billion in competitive funds that local agencies can use for affordable housing projects with a minimum of \$250 million going to rural California, McGuire said.

A panel of government and agency representatives from the county, cities and state were also present to lend their input, including 2nd Ward Eureka City Councilwoman Linda Atkins who touched upon the city's work to find housing for the homeless.

As part of the county and Eureka's program to house 30 chronically homeless individuals in 60 days, Atkins said that 24 have been housed since the program began a month ago.

"It will take many years to get everyone housed in Humboldt County, but we're going to do it," she said.

Humboldt County 4th District Supervisor Virginia Bass said continued collaboration will be key in securing the competitive state funds now available. She said collaboration extends out to property owners who can provide housing for the homeless and to the businesses that can offer them jobs.

"If you have a business, people need jobs," Bass said. "People who move into these units need job to be successful."

For Eureka Police Chief Andrew Mills, many of the calls they receive involve the transient and homeless community, with 1,800 contacts having been made with homeless individuals this year. Mills said that they have had 400 unique contacts with homeless people this year, but he also said that his department's Mobile Intervention and Services Team in cooperation with the county Department of Health have helped 100 of these individuals find some form of housing.

"It is not just the police, it is all of us working together," he said.

Touching upon broadband services, McGuire said that AT&T has completed the first phase of making the local broadband fiber optic network more resilient, which would limit outages caused by fiber cuts to much smaller areas rather than wiping out service to the whole North Coast as occurred many times last year. However, he said resiliency upgrades in the region between Arcata and the Del Norte County line will not be completed until 18 months from now at the earliest.

And with election season nearing closer to its Nov. 8 climax, the meeting was an opportunity for both government officials and residents to talk about some of the many local ballot measures. Measure V, which seeks to implement a half-cent sales tax throughout the county over the next 20 years to fund road repairs and transportation services, was one of the more topical issues for McGuire.

McGuire said the state faces a \$59 million backlog for road repairs on state highways over the next 10 years, with counties and cities throughout the state having a current repair backlog of nearly \$78 billion. McGuire said that he is attempting to pass legislation next year that would prevent state transportation funds from being siphoned off for other budgeting purposes, but said it has been difficult and he voiced his frustrations on Thursday.

"The bigger the issue, the quicker the heads turn," McGuire said. "... I hate excuses. Just do your damn job and get it done."

The result: local communities are now having to find their own way to fix their roads, McGuire said.

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