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# Legislators We Like

(and why we like them):

# Past, Present, and (hopefully) Future

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By John Fox, Ph.D., Foothill College

## Among FACCC's values is "the expertise, experience, and professionalism of all faculty, full- and part-time, as the primary force for advancing the mission of California Community Colleges."

While we hope that everyone embraces this value, it is not the case when fights over the faculty's role in shared governance, system funding, equity, and curriculum occur in the California State Legislature. Despite this, many legislators have been champions of California Community College faculty. The ones featured here have words and deeds that demonstrate a belief in FACCC's core values. They are to be lauded but, more importantly, serve as models for other legislators to emulate.



Perhaps the best friend of California community college faculty was Assemblymember **John Vasconcellos** (1932–2014), author of the landmark bill AB 1725, which was signed into law in 1988. This law transformed community colleges in a myriad of ways, one being the establishment of faculty playing a role in the governance of colleges. Although the term "shared governance" is not in AB 1725, it explicitly states that there should be administrators "who value institutional governance based upon a genuine sharing of responsibility with faculty colleagues."

Driven by an interest in humanistic psychology, Assemblymember Vasconcellos' authorship of AB 1725 reflected his wider personal and political philosophy: "My major goal over all these years has been unity, unity between who I am as a person, and who I am politically, my commitment to a multi-cultural, nonsexist, cooperative and caring political system." [i]

AB 1725 passed almost unanimously and was signed by Republican Gov. George Deukmejian. As Brian Murphy, chief policy consultant and negotiator for the bill said:

*"The crafting of the legislation itself was an exercise in shared governance, as John secured state funding for two commissions that brought administrators and faculty and trustees together to negotiate the language that would legislate new roles and responsibilities for faculty, alongside everything else. John believed that the new structures would only work if they were crafted through participation."*

California Community Colleges are better because of AB 1725, but it should serve as a baseline for improvement rather than the end goal.



Another champion, who is retiring this year, is Assemblymember **Jose Medina** (D-Riverside). In addition to his many bills that support community college students, he gains special recognition for his advocacy on behalf of part-time faculty.

"Being a part-time faculty member in the California community college, it is a rough road with no or very little office hours, no opportunity to meet with students...and... sometimes not even having the respect of other faculty members at their own institutions." [ii]

He has supported pay equity and health insurance for part-time faculty, sponsored legislation supporting the negotiation of re-employment preference for part-time faculty and, most recently, authored AB 1856, which calls for an increase in the part-time load from 60–67% to 80–85% of the full-time load.

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**These legislators and candidates demonstrate an understanding of community college faculty as professionals who advance the mission of California community colleges, and as educators who do their best work for students when economically and professionally supported.**

John Martin, chair of the California Part-Time Faculty Association, says “Medina is by far, at this time, the top legislator in Sacramento in the last several legislative sessions, because he understood our part-time issues within the California Community College system... CPFA will miss him.”



Perhaps the lawmaker who picks up where Assemblymember Jose Medina leaves off is Assemblymember **Evan Low**, another friend of part-time faculty who sponsored AB 706, which allowed part-time faculty to transfer their sick leave benefits from one district to another. Low’s partnership with Assemblymember Medina includes the co-sponsorship (with several others) of the ethnic studies requirement, Cal Grant reform, and the defunding of Calbright College, an online-only public institution. A graduate of De Anza College and a strong advocate of the LGBTQ+ community, Low co-authored (with Assemblymember Joaquin Arambula) AB 2315, which allows students, staff, and faculty to declare a name or gender identification of their choosing and (with few exceptions) not require them to use their “legal” name or gender.

Patrick Ahrens, president of the Foothill-De Anza District Board of Trustees, said “Assemblymember Evan Low has a deep passion for public service, and a vision for our community grounded in his own lived experience and belief in the transformative potential of our students, faculty, and staff. At this pivotal moment in our state’s history, we need bold leadership and policy proposals.”

Representing the California Senate, we have Senator **Nancy Skinner**, chair of the Senate Committee on Budget and Fiscal Review, as well as the Joint Legislative Budget Committee. Winner of the 2022 Legislator of the Year award from California Community College Independents (CCCI), Senator Skinner also has been a strong advocate for part-time faculty. This is fitting for a legislator who, as a graduate student at UC Berkeley, cofounded the union now representing graduate student instructors.

Jeffrey Michels, president of CCCI, said, “Nancy Skinner has been a huge supporter of our community college system, students, staff, and faculty. Under Nancy’s leadership, we have won more funding for full-time hires and part-time pay and benefits. She has been a true leader on these issues, wading through propaganda to get at the facts when it comes to college spending.” Her support for students extends to college athletes through her sponsorship of SB 26, which expedited the Fair Pay to Play Act so athletes could earn money from their name, image, and likeness. Whether it’s for community college faculty, student-athletes, or graduate student employees, Nancy Skinner works to ensure that those who make the system work are fairly compensated.



Senator **John Laird** of Santa Cruz, FACCC’s Legislator of the Year in 2022, has strongly supported community colleges on the budget side. In response to cuts in the education budget, Laird ran for Senate in 2010 in support of the issue of funding public education in California. He is a critic of the so-called Student Centered Funding Formula (SCFF) and the flaws in the hold-harmless provisions. As he stated in a subcommittee hearing in February, “We’ve got this situation where the [funding formula] is cutting substantially college districts in high-income areas, and so they get a double whammy. They can’t hire people... and they are going to be cut substantially, so someone has to address this issue.”[iii]

Former FACCC President Debbie Klein relayed this story about Senator Laird:

*“I met John Laird when he was a trustee at Cabrillo College back in 2001. That was my first year teaching at a community college, and I was a part-time anthropology instructor and my department’s representative for our faculty union. My colleagues and I asked John to participate in a collegewide panel about part-time faculty working conditions. Not only did John listen, understand, and care about the systemic inequities inherent in part-time faculty working conditions, but he championed our message that faculty working conditions are students’ learning conditions. Fast forward twenty years, and John continues to fight to keep our community colleges alive, thriving, and appropriately funded. Like no other legislator I have worked with, John Laird gets it: our students succeed when, and only when, our faculty are fully supported.”*



This coming election provides an opportunity to elect legislators who will fully support faculty:

- FACCC’s endorsements include **Esmeralda Soria** (AD 27), a part-time faculty member in political science at Fresno City College, and a member of the Fresno City Council. On Soria’s political candidate page on Ballotpedia, she says, “I have a long track record of advocating for good education for all. As a Fresno City Council member, I helped expand Fresno City College cam-

pus into the city’s two most low-income neighborhoods. And, I also helped create a scholarship fund for DREAMers at Fresno City College.”[iv]

- **Eric Guerra** (AD 10) is a former Capitol staffer who earned a Staff Achievement Award from FACCC. Guerra helped to establish the Legislative Community College Caucus and advocated for undocumented students in the Los Rios Community College District.
- Labor leader **Liz Ortega** (AD 20) is a former political director of AFSCME 3299, representing the largest University of California workers, and served as former executive secretary-treasurer of the Alameda Labor Council. Her endorsements include many labor unions, especially in education and health care.
- **Lola Smallwood-Cuevas** (SD 28) is an educator, labor organizer, and the project director at UCLA Labor Center. She is a co-founder of the Los Angeles Black Worker Center and, like Liz Ortega, has strong support from labor unions.

These legislators and candidates demonstrate an understanding of community college faculty as professionals who advance the mission of California community colleges, and as educators who do their best work for students when economically and professionally supported. We hope you appreciate them as much as we do, and consider supporting them in their campaign efforts this fall. ■

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***The author would like to thank everyone who contributed to this article, and especially FACCC Executive Director Evan Hawkins for his guidance.***

[i] P. 664 in Fishel, Jeff. 1992. “Leadership for Social Change: John Vasconcellos (D-CA) and the Promise of Humanistic Psychology in Public Life.” 13, 4, Dec., Pp. 663-692.

[ii] “Assemblymember Jose Medina comments on EdSource investigation into adjunct working conditions.” EdSource Feb. 2, 2022. Retrieved August 16, 2022, from <https://edsource.org/2022/assemblymember-jose-medina-comments-on-edsource-investigation-into-adjunct-working-conditions/669962>

[iii] California Senate Budget Subcommittee #1 hearing, February 16, 2022. <https://www.senate.ca.gov/media-archive/default?title=sub&startdate=&enddate=>

[iv] [https://ballotpedia.org/Esmeralda\\_Soria](https://ballotpedia.org/Esmeralda_Soria)