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San Bernardino County supervisors appoint new assessor

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The Press-Enterprise

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San Bernardino County Assistant Assessor Dennis Draeger was appointed assessor Tuesday by supervisors who praised his steady leadership in the five months since former Assessor Bill Postmus quit.

Draeger, a 34-year county employee, was sworn in minutes after the unanimous vote.

"I will not let you down," Draeger said. "I will not let the taxpayers of San Bernardino County down. Nor will I let down the employees of the assessor's office."

Draeger, who previously has served on the Calimesa City Council, will fill out the remainder of Postmus' term, which expires in January 2011. He said he plans to seek a full term in the June 2010 election.

Postmus resigned after a January arrest on suspicion of drug violations and in the wake of an ongoing district attorney's investigation of allegations of misuse of public resources for political activity. He has not been charged.

Three other top managers have been arrested on charges related to their activities at the assessor's office.

Draeger was appointed assistant assessor in November after 10 years at the treasurer-tax collector's office as chief of tax collections. He previously had worked in various appraisal and management positions at the assessor's office for 23 years from 1975 to 1998.

In overseeing the day-to-day operations after Postmus resigned, Draeger has had to deal not only with negative publicity for the office but an increased workload because of property reappraisals and the layoffs of 62 employees.

"With all of the crises we've gone through in that office in the past two years, we really need to look at some stability, and I believe Mr. Draeger brings that to the office and the county," said Supervisor Neil Derry, who made the motion to appoint Draeger.

Supervisors Paul Biane and Brad Mitzelfelt praised Draeger's performance but said the board should explore all options and open the process to other interested applicants.

"I do feel it's incumbent on us to fill this vacancy with the best person possible," Mitzelfelt said. "Mr. Draeger may be that person. I don't think we'll know that unless we consider other possibilities."

Both ended up voting for Draeger after his appointment seemed certain, even as they reiterated that they preferred an open recruitment process.

Board Chairman Gary Ovitt said he usually would favor an application and interview process before appointing someone.

"I think the least political thing we can do is appoint Mr. Draeger based on the fact that he's proved himself working at the assessor's office," he said.

Draeger also won support from employees. About 100 signed a petition favoring his appointment, said Dan Harp, chief appraiser, who spoke in favor of Draeger.

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