

Consensus-Building, Love of Outdoors Inspire ACWA VP John Coleman



ACWA Vice President John Coleman traces his love of the outdoors and his philosophy on leadership — in some degree — to his days as a Boy Scout.

Coleman, who is nominated to be ACWA president for the 2014-'16 term, rose through the scouting ranks to Eagle Scout, then spent many years as a scout master and Eagle Advisor. The scouting experience filled him not only with a sense of stewardship for the outdoors, but it also molded his beliefs on strong leadership and community.

"A leader does not count wins and losses; a leader builds consensus among those who disagree to find solutions and solve problems," Coleman says.

Coleman has relied heavily on consensus-building and problem-solving skills during his decades of community service. He expects to continue using those skills moving forward if he is elected ACWA president in December.

Among the things he says he likes best about ACWA is the diversity of its members and its focus on an issue so vital to the well-being of the state — water.

"You're working around bright people who have differences of opinion," Coleman says of ACWA.

"People are really committed finding a long-term solution to our water crisis... so our grandchildren have less of an issue and we can grow our economy," he adds.

Coleman says he will bring a unique perspective as ACWA president.

"I bring a unique perspective of understanding urban as well as rural issues," says Coleman. "We need to send

a message to the urban environments that what happens in the Delta and the mountains happens to them."

Coleman has served on the board of directors of East Bay Municipal Utility District (EBMUD) since 1990. He has been re-elected five times to represent Ward 2 in Contra Costa County and has served at times as president and other times as vice president of the EBMUD Board. At ACWA, Coleman serves as vice president of the Board of Directors and chair of the California Water Finance Task Force. He is immediate past chair of ACWA's Federal Affairs Committee.

Coleman's civic duties in the water world reach beyond ACWA and EBMUD. He is chair of the Upper Mokelumne River Watershed Authority (UMRWA); board member of the Contra Costa Council; chair of the Freeport Regional Water Authority (FRWA); board member of DEWRA, the joint powers authority for recycled water service provided by Dublin-San Ramon Services district and EBMUD; and a member of the San Francisco Bay Restoration Authority Advisory Committee.

Coleman's day job is executive director of the Bay Planning Coalition, which represents maritime and shoreline interests in Northern California. Recently, he moderated a daylong forum on the water-energy nexus that was sponsored by the Bay Planning Coalition.

At ACWA, Coleman sees stabilizing the budget as the association's biggest internal issue. Long-term stability "will help both staff and members," he says.

As for other critical statewide issues in 2014, Coleman views passage of a water bond as top priority.

"We need to deliver a water bond that will pass," says Coleman, who says bolstering the state's water infrastructure is vital to California's economy.

"It's all about the economy; you

can't take water and energy out of the equation," he says.

Coleman cites the Freeport Regional Water Authority as an example during his tenure at EBMUD of his ability to work with others to forge mutually-beneficial compromises.

"For years and years we had rights to the American River," says Coleman. "I ran on those rights...but when we realized we weren't going to have success...I negotiated a deal with the city and county of Sacramento. Today we have the Freeport project.

"I was so headstrong on the American River, but realized we weren't going to get there and made a 180-degree turn," he adds.

For ACWA to reach its goals this year on a water bond and other water issues, Coleman says the association must bring in "pragmatic environmental support." He defines pragmatic environmentalists as "those who are willing to listen, think and talk about the situation."

"People realize the economy is fragile and we can't take things for granted," Coleman adds.

Coleman graduated in 1981 from UC Berkeley with a Bachelor of Science in natural resources. He holds a certificate in management from the University of the Pacific School of Business and Public Administration.

For fun, he enjoys camping, backpacking, skiing, reading and the arts. He recently returned from a three-week trip to Europe where he visited France, Italy, Spain and Monaco. He toured two wastewater treatment facilities in Cannes.

He and his wife, Lonna, a vice president at Bank of the West, have two adult children. The couple lives in Walnut Creek where they grow grapes on their property.

"How I relax is by getting my hands dirty," Coleman says. ■■■