

MSWD Questionnaire, answers submitted by Richard Cromwell III

1. What kind of expertise and experience can you bring to the Board that you believe would qualify you to fill the vacancy?

I have 20+ years of management experience in the private sector, 19 years of experience as general manager and CEO in the public sector, and have served as an elected official several times in the City of Desert Hot Springs and on the Palm Springs Unified School District. I've served on the DHS City Council and as a Board member and president of the Palm Springs Unified School District. Most recently I ran (and lost) for a seat on the Board of MSWD. Through my first career in the retail industry, my second career at SunLine Transit Agency, as a council member and school Board member, and now as a consultant in the environmental arena, I've developed specific expertise in dealing with multiple stakeholder groups and helping to create and implement win-win scenarios. I learned long ago that serving customers should be the primary focus of any business/organization. I believe the best solutions consider multiple points of view – including both the realities of an organization's resource constraints and the needs of the people the organization serves.

2. If you are appointed to the Board, what will be your priority?

Working with District staff and fellow Board members, I feel resolutions to the following are critical:

- a) Fiscal – as was highlighted in the most recent presentation from Mr. Hayden, I'm very concerned about the drop in capital reserves.
- b) Completing the sewer project – we must pull out all the stops! I set up the W.O.W. Ad Hoc Committee (**W**rite for our **W**ater) to help address what citizens can do to help. We've sent out 266 e-mails to all segments of the community encouraging a letter writing campaign to Congress to support this essential project.
- c) Septic maintenance program – It will take time to complete the sewers under the best circumstances. So I feel very strongly that to protect our hot and our cold water, we must work collaboratively with local, regional and state partners to establish a robust maintenance program.
- d) Strategic plan – we must continue planning for future growth including infrastructure upgrades and expansions, the Horton Water Treatment Plant upgrades, etc.
- e) IRWMP – we must also continue to take a regional view and work with other local agencies on the creation and adoption of this important plan.

3. Please provide 3-6 business accomplishments (non-water related) that you have had in the past four years.

As a consultant in alternative fuels and government relations, I've assisted public and private sector clients on property development, infrastructure development, and inter-governmental relations. Accomplishments within the past four years include:

- a) Working with the City of Palm Desert to successfully bring on-line the nation's first CNG ambulance, now in operation in Palm Desert;
- b) Working with a northern California city on a major project to implement a council resolution to convert the city's fleet, which may include conversion of a ferry boat to LNG (currently under study);
- c) Serving as the ombudsman for the City of Desert Hot Springs to the Palm Springs Unified School District and representing the community's interests to the school district;
- d) Working as a liaison to the former city manager of Desert Hot Springs on many community matters, ranging from redevelopment issues to the ultimate passage by Desert Hot Springs of the MSHCP.

4. *Tell us of a business situation where a compromise on your part resulted in the greater good.*

During my tenure with SunLine Transit Agency, I successfully participated in the negotiations of four union contracts. As GM/CEO, I never lost an arbitration, was never threatened with a strike, and developed a wonderfully supportive relationship with ATU 1277. The relationship was immensely helpful in our very successful public/private partnership programs. Another example is that I have been a guiding force in the alternative fuels movement in the U.S., and much of it began here in the Coachella Valley, while I was GM/CEO of SunLine. There were many compromises made along the way in order to advance technology development and implementation. The greater good was always our focus.

5. *What is your understanding of the 1996 Proposition 218 ("The Right to Vote on Tax Initiatives" guidelines for setting rates?*

Proposition 218 precludes a local governmental agency (cities, counties and special Districts such as MSWD) from proposing new or increased assessments without a prior vote of the affected property owners. Prior to its passage, local governmental agencies were able to pass assessments that could have significant financial impacts on affected property owners even if the property owners were against the action. Water Districts are required to give 45-days notice to ratepayers and hold a protest hearing before taking action on raising rates. If a majority of property owners oppose the increase, the agency can't pass it. What this means to MSWD is that *public outreach and education are extremely important*. It's not just a financial issue for the District, it's a PR issue.

At SunLine, our success was due in large part to what we referred to as "bringing the public along." We always educated them about the benefits of alternate fuels and made sure they understood how what we were doing helped them – even if they weren't bus riders. I see Prop 218 in the same light. The public MUST understand the need for and reasons behind any rate hike – otherwise we will not be able to meet District goals.

6. *What is your opinion about increases in water/sewer rates?*

Particularly in this economy, no one likes to talk about increases in water/sewer rates. As a result, the public has not been given the opportunity to understand how public services are paid for. I feel it's the District's responsibility to foster open and frank discussion with total transparency. I've lived in Desert Hot Springs for 20 years and another five years in Mission Lakes Country Club. It's been my experience that when the local community understands the issues surrounding delivery of services -- whether police, fire, water or sewer -- they have and will continue to support the cost. But they must be part of the process. The Board is responsible for the fiscal well-being of the District. In my view, the Board must accept the responsibility to actively communicating with ratepayers and assure that staff does the same. We have a wonderful and very special product. It must be protected. Dealing with fiscal issues upfront will help us insure the continued delivery of our invaluable water.