

# Elected Reform Commission Offers True Reform, Riordan Says

By a **NEWSource** Staff Writer

An elected reform panel's proposed new charter would markedly improve the accountability of Los Angeles officials, while an appointed commission's document would mostly preserve the status quo and in some cases worsen a dysfunctional system, Mayor Richard Riordan said last week.

Just days before the Elected Charter Reform Commission's citywide Constitutional Convention on charter issues, Riordan said the elected panel has made "excellent final judgments after a lot of fighting."

Riordan lauded the commission for a series of proposals that would for the first time give the mayor more direct power over department managers, city finance, and litigation. He urged Los Angeles residents to attend the commission's Saturday forum at the Convention Center and said he planned to be there for the morning session.

His comments, drawing sharp distinctions between the work of the commission he helped to establish and the parallel panel set up by his nemesis, the City Council, follow a recent controversial elected commission decision to propose advisory community councils in the main charter ballot measure next spring. Advocates of directly elected community councils with real decision-making authority over expenditures and land use charged that the elected commission had sold out to business leaders and other opponents of neighborhood government.

The Elected Charter Reform Commission voted on Oct. 26 to allow voters in alternative to their main charter, substituting in elected community councils.

But that is not enough for many vocal activists, including some who see secession movements in the San Fernando Valley and other areas as now the only real chance for community empowerment. Without fully empowered local councils as part of the main charter proposal, critics have said, the work of the elected commission is virtually identical to that of the appointed commission. Some had vowed to boycott Saturday's convention.

Meanwhile, the two panels have decided to restart efforts to conform their two charter drafts, following several months of going their own ways. Numerous compromise proposals have been floated to assure a single charter measure next spring, and appointed commission Chairman George David Kieffer said a Conference Committee session was planned for Nov. 19 with members of both panels. The two commissions also have raced to finish in order to be ready

for the April 1999 ballot, but both now appear to be aiming in stead for June.

But Riordan's message, delivered to reporters at a City Hall breakfast briefing last Monday, was that the difference between the two proposals is profound.

In a document that set forth 12 major issues in city governance and described the approaches of the two charter panels, the mayor cited what he said was the elected commission's meaningful departure from the status quo, including a clear separation of powers between an executive branch, led by the mayor, and a legislative branch, led by the council.

The mayor would for the first time be included as part of the city's "governing body" and would have sole power to fire city commissioners and department general managers. He would gain some power to represent the city as the "client" in legal matters and would have new authority to settle lawsuits.

The appointed commission, he said, took a step backward by removing the mayor's power to appoint, remove, and evaluate the general managers for the Airports, Harbor, and Water and Power departments.

In addition, Riordan's chief charter reform deputy Theresa Patzakakis said, the appointed commission would make it easier for the City Council to remove the mayor's power over departments by transferring department functions to the city administrative officer—who reports to both the council and mayor.

The appointed panel thus theoretically "opened the door to a city manager system," Patzakakis said.

Riordan's biggest disappointment in charter reform, he said, was the decision by both panels to retain a single, elected city attorney. Still, he said, the elected panel took a "step in the right direction"

by allowing the mayor a certain degree of control over the litigation process.

The mayor said he planned to back the new charter proposal when it appears on the ballot next spring, although he has not yet decided whether to put up his own money as he did for the measure that established the elected commission a year and a half ago.

"Obviously I'm going to play a very active role," Riordan said.

The mayor has been critical of both the council and the elected school board. The charter reform process, with the parallel commissions operating concurrently, has provided "a lesson for me in participatory democracy," he said.

The appointed commission has acted "with an eye to coming up with something that the City Council won't have to amend" before approving a new charter for the ballot sometime next spring, he said.

The elected commission's work does not go to the council but will be placed directly on the ballot, a procedure that Riordan said has allowed the panel the freedom to propose a more sweeping revamp of city government.

Kieffer, the appointed commission chairman, characterized Riordan's comparison sheets as "more of a campaign document than anything else." Some of the descriptions on the grid mischaracterized the appointed panel's actions, Kieffer said, such as the mayor's loss of direct power over proprietary department general managers. The grid failed to note that the mayor would continue to directly appoint each commissioner, who would in turn exercise control over the department chiefs, Kieffer said.

"It's not an accurate portrayal," Kieffer said of the grid. "I think that's disappointing."