

Council pressure succeeds in setting labor vs. reform

By Rick Orlov

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Calling in their political chits, Los Angeles City Council members convinced the county's largest labor political group on Monday to oppose the proposed new City Charter but failed to win a commitment to campaign against it.

Ignoring both Mayor Richard Riordan and City Attorney James Hahn, the Committee on Political Education of the Los Angeles County Federation of Labor, AFL-CIO, voted 41-14 to oppose Proposition 1 after hearing from council members Richard Alatorre, Ruth Galanter and Jackie Goldberg.

"They basically told us that they had been with us for a long time and for us to trust them on this, that the charter reform was bad," said Miguel Contreras, executive secretary-treasurer of the union.

"I'm not sure if we can devote any resources to the campaign, but they felt it was important we make a statement."

Riordan and Hahn had urged the organization to support the measure or, at the least, to remain neutral.

Elected Commissioner Janice Hahn said she expected the action.

"It's clearly boiled down to politics, and you have an elected City Council leaning on lots of these organizations that do business with the current City Council to go along with them," Hahn said. "I think that most people will see through these political shenanigans."

Steve Afriat, the city lobbyist and political consultant putting together the campaign against the measure, said the value of the COPE action is showing a unified labor front.

"Now you have the largest union

along with the Police Protective League, SEIU (Service Employees International Union) and the firefighters opposing this," Afriat said. "It's a strong message from labor. And they did this even with the living wage provision included in the charter."

The COPE backing comes at a time when the campaigns for both sides are beginning to escalate in the final weeks leading up to the election.

Riordan has raised \$1 million and has begun broadcasting a commercial that is an indirect attack on the City Council.

"Basically, we're saying it will save taxpayers money by scaling down the bureaucracy, bring in management audits and fiscal controls and take power from the downtown special interests and give it back to the neighborhoods," said Bill Carrick, who is heading up the campaign for Riordan.

"We haven't said it directly, but it is a big temptation to say the most unpopular institution in the city, the City Council, is opposing this. We may get there."

"Many of these people were the same ones who said we needed a unified charter and couldn't have two charters on the ballot and now they're the same ones trying to kill this."

Carrick would not identify individual donors other than to say, "they're the usual circle of Riordan donors."

Councilman Mike Feuer, who supports the new charter, said Riordan did not ask him to help raise money.

"He's doing that part on his own," Feuer said. "I'm making campaign appearances for it."

Afriat also would not identify any of the donors to the anti-charter campaign.

"They're the people who give to City Council members," he said.

Campaign finance reports are due to be filed on Thursday with the city Ethics Commission.

Afriat said the anti-charter forces have only raised about \$150,000, but that he expected to raise substantially more to allow him to have at least two citywide mailings and one to a targeted group of voters.

A fund-raiser had been scheduled for about 40 people, at \$500 each, for this morning at the private City Club in downtown Los Angeles. It had to be canceled due to illness of Councilman Hal Bernson.

"A lot of them told us to keep the money anyway," Afriat said.

One registered lobbyist, who asked not to be identified, said there has been intense pressure to contribute.

"I'm getting calls all the time," the lobbyist said. "The council feels pretty strongly about this."

Afriat said the tone of his initial mailing will be on the expected cost to implement the new charter, with up to \$7 million in start-up costs and ongoing costs of \$10 million to \$12 million depending on whether voters approve expanding the council.

Also, Afriat said the campaign will make use of Riordan's success during his six years in office.

"Crime is down, the economy is improving," Afriat said. "There are more cops on the street, more firefighters. We think Mayor Riordan has done pretty good under this charter, and there doesn't need to be any change."