

Council Accused of Sabotaging Charter Effort

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■ **City Hall:** Debate grows increasingly bitter as lawmakers charge that too much power would be shifted to the mayor.

By JIM NEWTON
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The men and women who spent two years rewriting Los Angeles' City Charter accused a majority of City Council members Tuesday of stabbing them in the back, and said the lawmakers are ignoring widespread support for the charter and are opposing the document solely to protect their turf.

Those accusations, leveled during a news conference Tuesday, marked an escalation in the increasingly bitter debate between charter reform's supporters and opponents, and demonstrated that reform advocates believe they can win votes by characterizing their proposal as a challenge to politics as usual at City Hall. The proposed new civic constitution will appear on a citywide ballot Tuesday.

"The council members oppose this for one reason and one reason alone," elected charter commissioner Rob Glushon said. "It's not good for them."

Among other things, supporters say that the document would improve representation by decentralizing the city Planning Commission and creating a network of neighborhood councils. They also argue that it would improve government efficiency by shifting some management authority away from the council and into the office of the mayor. And they contend that it would help civilians hold the Los Angeles Police Department more accountable by clarifying and strengthening the role of the city's inspector general.

Opponents counter that the charter package tips the balance of power at City Hall too far in the direction of the mayor's office.

They also say that it would cost too much money, and some argue that the proposals for improving representation are poor substitutes for more dramatic changes needed to empower residents.

Some of those disagreements have dogged the charter debate from the beginning, but the level of vitriol has risen in recent days, as council members who once participated in the process increasingly have voiced their opposition to the final product. Charter commissioners, Mayor Richard Riordan, City Atty. James K. Hahn and others have responded by reiterating their support for the proposal and by

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lashing back at their opponents.

"The arguments that the current City Council members are making to defend the status quo are pathetic and misleading," said Janice Hahn, a member of the elected commission. Hahn, who represents the San Pedro and harbor areas, added that if charter reform fails, it will fuel a number of secession movements across the city, including one in her district and a more widely publicized one in the San Fernando Valley.

Steven Afriat, who manages the campaign against the charter proposal, responded by charging that charter commissioners were hurling insults to obscure the poor job they did in rewriting the city constitution.

"They're whining and complaining because they did an incompetent job writing the charter," he said. Afriat also questioned the source of pro-charter campaign money, especially one large donation from DLO Corp., a Delaware-based corporation that contributed \$200,000 to the pro-charter campaign.

"Who are they?" Afriat asked. "Who are they fronting for?"

Bill Wardlaw, Riordan's closest advisor and a leader of the pro-charter campaign, said the answer is simple: DLO is Rupert Murdoch, another Riordan friend whose company owns the Dodgers and Fox studios and who has other personal and business interests in Los Angeles.

"For them to suggest that anything is sinister about this is ridiculous," he said. "It's about as sinister as Kevin Brown throwing a fastball."

Meanwhile, Glushon used the news conference to point out that the charter voters will consider was drafted in long, sometimes difficult negotiations with a commission whose members were largely appointed by the same council whose majority now opposes the final product.

"We really do feel stabbed in the back," Glushon said.

Leading council opponents of the charter reject that argument, saying that although they named commissioners to one of the reform panels and agreed to put the document on the ballot, they never

committed to the specific provisions of the proposed charter and always reserved the right to oppose it. After unanimously voting to put the proposal on the ballot, a majority of council members have lined up to try to defeat it.

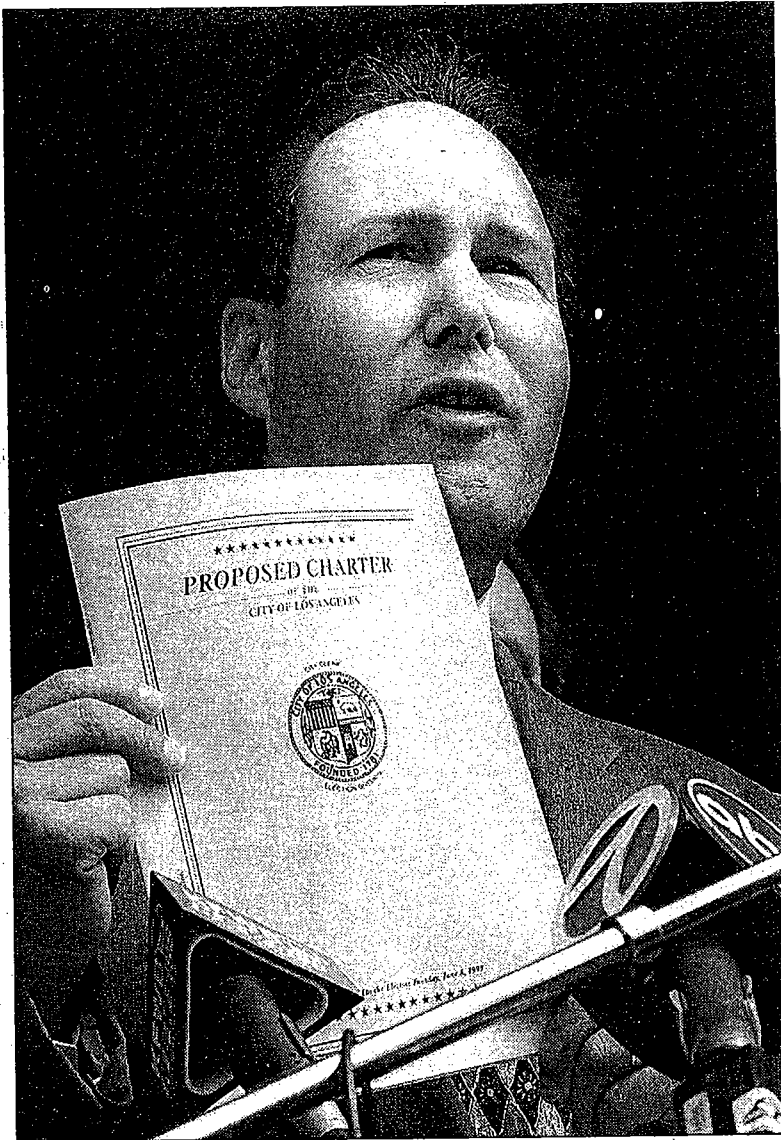
George Kieffer, who headed the appointed commission, did not attend Tuesday's news conference, but said later that he did not want to join in questioning the motives of the proposal's opponents. He did, however, say he was disappointed that council members with whom he and other commissioners consulted later decided to oppose the charter.

"We consulted with the [city administrative officer], the city attorney and council staff on every part of our draft," he said. "We incorporated many, many suggested changes. It's a shame now that a majority of the council has chosen to make themselves the status quo, particularly when its own appointed commission has so strongly endorsed the new charter."

Council members also dispute the contention that they are chiefly concerned with protecting their domain. With the exception of Councilwoman Cindy Miscikowski, who supports the proposed charter, every member of the council either is serving the second term of a two-term limit or already has indicated that they intend to seek another office. According to charter opponents such as Ruth Galanter and Jackie Goldberg, that demonstrates that the council majority's opposition to the document is based on a difference of opinion, not a desire to protect power.

"The fact that we disagree is not a sign that something is wrong," Galanter said last week, "but a sign

CHARTER: Accusation of Sabotage



RICK MEYER / Los Angeles Times

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that something is right."

Charter commissioners and some others see it differently.

Councilman Joel Wachs, who supports the charter, agreed with commissioners who said the council majority opposes the document out of self-interest. Although Wachs said many of the proposal's provisions would make important changes in city government, he said its most important contribution to Los Angeles would be its ability to puncture "the arrogance of power which literally permeates City Hall."

"If this fails," Wachs said, "you probably will not see meaningful charter reform in our lifetime."

Both sides in the charter debate are gearing up for a final push. Backed by Riordan and his allies, supporters have far more resources to marshal. Already, advertisements supporting the charter are beginning to air on television and some residents are beginning to receive mailers making the case for the charter.

The other side is waging a more modest effort. Two types of fliers were sent in recent days, and two more are expected by the end of the week, Afriat said.