



Sign up for Express  
New from Palo Alto Online, Express is a daily e-edition, distributed by e-mail every weekday.  
Sign up to receive Express!

Palo Alto, CA

73 °F

Clear  
at 3:06 PM

Search

Login | Register  
Sign up for eBulletins

Click for Forecast

Palo Alto Online Town Square powered by Google

- Home
- News
  - Palo Alto Weekly
  - The Almanac
  - Mountain View
- Voice
- Fogster Classifieds
- Town Square Forums
- Sports
- Shopping
  - Pizzazz Coupons
  - 'Best of' Results
- Community Calendar
- Movies
- Restaurants
- Things to do
- Real Estate
- Photos
- Community Resources
- Visitor Info
- Lodging
- Special Features
- Palo Alto Wiki
- Contact us

Spectrum - Friday, September 18, 2009

## Guest Opinion: Endorsements — 'conflict of interest' or union bashing?

by LaDoris Cordell

As the Palo Alto City Council race gets into high gear, at least two candidates have placed the issue of conflict of interest front and center.

They have pointedly declined to seek the endorsement of Service Employees International Union, or SEIU, whose membership includes the great majority of Palo Alto city employees. The candidates maintain that because the city is in negotiations with the union, their seeking the union's endorsement represents a significant, although not illegal, conflict of interest.

A conflict of interest in government exists whenever an individual or organization is in a position to influence or benefit from an official decision. A conflict of interest can be actual or it can be a perception.

For example, the City Council, during my tenure, adopted a "no gifts" policy that prohibits council members from accepting gifts of any kind from anyone except family members. We adopted this rule to avoid even the perception of a conflict of interest in our decision-making, to remove any doubt that our decisions might be influenced by gift-givers.

When I ran for council I refused to accept monetary contributions from anyone, preferring to avoid the perception that I might be beholden to interest groups or individuals. I therefore applaud elected officials and those running for public office who strive to avoid the pitfalls posed by conflicts of interest.

If the candidates who now refuse to seek the union's endorsement had adopted an across-the-board no-endorsements policy, then their refusal to seek union support would be laudable.

But they have not. To the contrary, these candidates are actively seeking the endorsements of other special-interest groups, including realtors, developers, environmentalists and neighborhood associations.

The great majority of council decisions concern land use, zoning and housing issues. As a consequence, developers and realtors frequently appear before the council to advocate for their various projects.

Arguing on the other side, oftentimes, are environmentalists and representatives of neighborhood associations, of all whom are well known to council members. These interest groups are in no different a position than are the members of SEIU with respect to what they seek from our council -- to be fairly heard and fairly treated.

Therefore for these candidates to single out only SEIU's endorsement is naive at best and hypocritical at worst.

Tensions are high as the city management and union leaders negotiate SEIU's new contract. Talk of a pending strike has escalated. This is not the time for council candidates to engage in union bashing, which, sadly, is exactly what those who have singled out the union in this fashion are encouraging.

We need council members who represent all of our community, which includes our hardworking city employees. An endorsement from the union is no less an honor than an endorsement from any other group, nor is it more of a conflict of interest.

*LaDoris Cordell is a former judge, Palo Alto City Council member and special counsel to the Stanford University president. She can be e-mailed at [ladoris@judgocordell.com](mailto:ladoris@judgocordell.com).*

### Comments

Posted by names?, a resident of the Adobe-Meadows neighborhood, on Sep 18, 2009 at 9:13 am

So, who are these two candidates?

[Report Objectionable Content](#)

Posted by Marvin, a resident of the Charleston Gardens neighborhood, on Sep 18, 2009 at 9:19 am

"We need council members who represent all of our community,"

well, I have been in PA for 15+ years and have yet to see a council member that meets that criteria--the council members have their own little agendas (traffic, green etc) and/or they are using the position as a stepping stone for their political ambitions. When they are done with their term they point to their achievements (i.e. the Homer Avenue tunnel for one ex-council member) and pat themselves on the back for a job well done

[Report Objectionable Content](#)

Posted by Sharon, a resident of the Midtown neighborhood, on Sep 18, 2009 at 9:28 am

Send this story  
Print this story  
Adjust text size

SHARE

WATCH VIDEO  
Visit the ReElect Larry Klein Web site

Fresh News Delivered Daily

introducing **express**

Today's news, sports & hot picks

Get daily local news via e-mail each weekday morning

from Palo Alto Online

**SIGN UP HERE**

When you think Palo Alto Real Estate, think Carol, Rosemary & Nicole

Steve Miles will show you how