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EDITOR'S NOTE

2020 ELECTION COVERAGE

VOICES



Political bedfellows

Sacramento council members split on endorsements

BY FOON RHEE / foonr@newsreview.com



Divided support could make for some awkward debates at Sacramento City Hall.

PHOTO BY FOON RHEE

million budget deficit by 2021-22, mostly due to rising labor contract costs.

While opponents warn it would set a “terrible precedent” for special interest groups to grab city tax money through a ballot measure, there are special interests on both sides. Nonprofits that could benefit from Measure G are helping fund the vote “yes” campaign, which has spent more than \$220,000 since Jan. 1, 2019. The firefighters union (an initial \$40,000

contribution in January) and police union (\$25,000) are bankrolling the opposition effort.

Also against Measure G are Hansen and Mayor Darrell Steinberg, who is pitching his own plan for the November ballot. It would set aside 20% of revenue growth for youth programs, an estimated \$2.5 million to \$3 million more starting in 2021. Whatever the fate of Measure G, the council’s differing views could cause some friction during budget talks this spring.

These political alliances can shift. For instance, Schenirer and Warren are on the same side on Measure G, but on different sides in District 8.

It’s unusual for a council member to publicly endorse a colleague’s challenger. So far, the only instance is Carr backing Katie Valenzuela, an environmental activist running against Hansen in District 4. Carr and Hansen, who clashed over a proposed homeless shelter in Carr’s district, will be on the council together until December, so that could be awkward.

Steinberg, meanwhile, is endorsing all the council incumbents—Hansen, Guerra and Warren—but is not taking sides in the open District 8 race.

If she wins, Vang says the first thing she would do is sit down with the council members who didn’t endorse her and seek common ground. “At the end of the day, we all want what’s best for Sacramento,” she said.

If he’s elected, Simmons also says he would work with those council members who didn’t support him.

“I can’t hold a grudge,” he said. “We’ve got work to do.”

For voters—and especially for political junkies— it’s always intriguing to see how elected officials line up in local elections, particularly when they disagree on their endorsements. That’s the case with Sacramento City Council members in two key contests on March 3.

In the race for the open District 8 seat in South Sacramento, incumbent Larry Carr (who isn’t seeking reelection) and fellow council members Angelique Ashby, Jeff Harris and Allen Warren are supporting Mai Vang, a Sacramento City Unified School District trustee.

But council members Rick Jennings, Steve Hansen and Jay Schenirer are backing Les Simmons, a prominent South Sacramento pastor and community activist.

The council is also divided on Measure G, which would change the city charter to set aside funding for programs for children and youth.

Eric Guerra, Schenirer and Warren are in favor. They signed a ballot argument that says: “Without raising taxes, it’s time to invest in our own future by supporting young people through prevention programs that will clearly save us money in the long run.” They also say the city is flush with cash and accuse opponents of trying to scare voters.

But Ashby, Carr and Harris signed a ballot argument opposing the measure, calling it “a cynical money grab by some nonprofits which will blow a hole in the city’s budget,” and warning that in a recession it could threaten public safety.

Both sides have a point, depending on how far out you look. As of Jan. 1, the city has a \$33.5 million operating budget surplus (plus \$55 million in its rainy day fund), but projections show a \$21