

Council candidate says contributions are conflict of interest

By Amy Sylvestri

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District 6 City Council candidate Hermy Almonte has called out his opponent Jim Prola, urging him to return a \$2,500 campaign donation from the San Leandro Police Officers' Association because it may influence the council's ongoing negotiations with the union about their salaries and pensions.

But Prola called Almonte's allegations a "desperate campaign act" and said Almonte should apologize to the police and to him.

The campaign financial statements for the period of Oct. 1 to Oct. 21 show that the police union gave \$2,500 each to Prola in District 6, Benny Lee in District 4, and Ursula Reed in District 2.

Almonte says that Prola and Reed should refuse the cash because they are incumbents and are involved in the current negotiations. Almonte has promoted pension reform for the police during his campaign, saying the city can save \$3 million annually by having the police pay into their pensions instead of the city paying the entire amount.

“Because of the negotiations, this money could affect their decision-making process,” said Almonte. “I believe what they are doing is improper.”

Prola countered that the police have actually seen their benefits decrease during his time on the council through furlough days and compromises in insurance plans. He emphasized that the policy of paying the employees’ portion of their pensions was put in place before he joined the council. He added that he believes some kind of pension reform is inevitable.

Prola said that Almonte implying that he and Reed could be bought through campaign donations is “insulting.”

Reed did not return calls for comment and neither did police union president Lt. Mike Sobek.

Reed has said in a past interviews that when it comes to pension reform “both sides are going to have to bend.” She also argues that the City Council itself is not the one negotiating with the union, the council hires a negotiator to do that.

But Almonte says that notion is disingenuous because the negotiator acts under the command of the City Council.

“The bottom line is, whatever the negotiator is bringing to the table, that is coming from the City Council,” Almonte said.

Other October Donations:

In District 2, Morgan Mack-Rose received \$10,254 in donations during the October home stretch for a total of \$36,404 year-to-date. Her major last minute donations include \$2,500 from the San Leandro Chamber of Commerce.

District 2 incumbent Ursula Reed collected \$6,297 since the first of October for a total of \$15,397, including the \$2,500 from the police union and \$500 from David Irmer (who is the developer behind the Village Marketplace project). Her largest expenditure was \$2,000 for a campaign consultant.

District 2 candidate Dan Dillman didn't receive any new donations since Oct. 1 and has a total of \$3,107 in donations.

In District 4, Chris Crow raised \$4,073, including \$500 from Innisfree, the Village Marketplace developers, and \$1,000 from the San Leandro Chamber of Commerce. His year-to-date contributions total \$10,256.

Benny Lee received \$3,625 in late contributions and a total of \$18,066 and he has spent \$2,849. In addition to the \$2,500 police union donation, he got \$500 from the firefighter's association and \$100 from former mayor Tony Santos.

Other District 4 candidates Darlene Daevu has received \$13,448 year-to-date and Justin Hutchison received less than \$1,000 so he didn't need to fill out the detailed statement. Neither received any donations after Oct. 1.

And in the District 6 Almonte versus Prola race, Prola raised \$10,209 in contributions during the month of October, for a total of \$44,439. Besides the police union money, he got \$500 from the firefighter's union, \$1,000 from the San Leandro Chamber of Commerce, and several other donations from unions.

Almonte received \$5,390 in October donations, all from individuals, for a total of \$9,890.