



CLEAN, PUBLICLY FINANCED CAMPAIGNS IN SANTA BARBARA?

by Patricia Hiles

The Santa Barbara County Green Party is preparing to try to convince the City of Santa Barbara to finance the campaigns for city offices out of City funds. As it is now the candidates seek tens of thousands of dollars in contributions, which will influence their votes if they win election. Public financing also will make it more possible for those with less financial resources of their own to run.

Everyone is aware of the political corruption practiced at the Federal level of government. I would not suggest that such wholesale bribery takes place in Santa Barbara, but the same principle applies: those who make significant donations to elected officials demand more access and expect that their opinions and interests will be weighed more heavily in the decision making process of governing.

In Santa Barbara, it is primarily developers and labor unions which have large amounts of money to give to candidates. Individuals of ordinary means do not give large amounts of money, but it is their interests with which the Mayor and City Council should be primarily concerned. (The wealthy do fine without city help.)

The way to prevent moneyed interests from unduly influencing public policy is to have a means for candidates to be elected without relying upon campaign donations. This can be accomplished if the city provides reasonable amounts of campaign funds for candidates who show a basic amount of citizen support. With publicly financed campaigns, the candidates are beholden to no one and can be free to pursue policies that are good for the City as a whole.

A plan to do this would be the following:

Each potential candidate would have to collect a specific number of signatures from citizens who support that candidate, accompanied by a check for \$5, drawn to the City. The candidate would give the signatures and checks to the city as evidence of his support and to show that he is a viable candidate.

The candidate then would agree in a written contract that he would accept no other contributions and would spend none of his own money on the campaign. In return, the city would give each qualifying candidate a predetermined amount of money, for each contested office.

The Candidate would account for all expenditures and return

to the City any money not used at the end of the campaign.

The City would also require that each City financed candidate participate in a set number of public forums to explain and discuss his positions on local issues.

Candidates that do not participate in the public financing would be limited to a set amount that he could receive from any one entity or person, perhaps a modest sum such as \$250.

Unfortunately, there is a Supreme Court decision, Buckley vs. Valeo, which holds that money is speech and the candidates cannot be required to take the City money in lieu of donations. (Does not this sound more like one dollar, one vote, than "one man one vote"?) As a result, each candidate must voluntarily agree to take the City money.

Those who agree to only public funding will be widely heralded as being beholden to no special interests. By implication, those who refuse the public funding agreement will be inferred to be the lackeys of special interests.

In Santa Barbara, the number of signatures and \$5 checks could be set at about 250 in order to qualify as a candidate for City money. The amount to be given each candidate could be \$40,000. for the mayoral candidates, while other council member candidates might be given \$25,000. each. (These numbers, of course, are just suggestions and are subject to legislation.)

The cost to the City would be in the low six figures, a small percentage of the City budget. That would be a small price to pay if candidates are not beholden to special interests and can be expected to serve the best interests of the populace as a whole.

Mayor Marty Blum and Council Member Helene Schneider have both stated that early this year they plan to push for spending limits for future campaigns. That is a good idea, but we all know that such limits can be avoided by getting group members, employees, relatives, friends, etc., to give many small gifts on behalf a single special interest or business. Special interests could still have undue influence.

Spending limits would be a step in the right direction, but is not the ultimate answer.

Only when the public fully finances campaigns, will the taint of moneyed and special interests, and their influence, be minimized.



GREEN PARTY ALERT!

YOUR LOCAL GREEN PARTY NEEDS YOUR SUPPORT AND PARTICIPATION! COUNTY CONTACTS ARE LISTED ELSEWHERE IN THIS NEWSLETTER .

Earth Festival, SLO And More!

By Colby Crotzer

San Luis Obispo held its second annual Green Earth Festival on Oct 15, and it was bigger and better than the first! SLO Greens, presented with the local chapter of the Sierra Club on Anti-corporate Personhood.

The hour-long presentation was surprisingly well attended, given the wide variety of booths and activities competing for people's attention. There were things going on inside of the SLO Vet's Hall as well as all of the booths outside on the lawn, and filling the parking lot.

Everything from solar powered bands, free-trade coffee, and demo bio-diesel vehicles were happening simultaneously outside, while massage and free trade chocolate and were offered indoors.

Our presentation opened with a review of the seminal history of how corporations began as enterprises blessed by the king (such as the Hudson's Bay Company) to enrich state commerce, with a charter to trade for profit without destroying foreign relations and making the king look bad.

When in 1886 the U.S. Supreme Court declared that under the law corporations were "persons" and gave them the same rights as human beings, the relationship between the citizenry and corporations underwent a profound change for the worse. We now suffer a situation where corporations actually have a huge advantage over the rights and aspirations of "mere mortals". In a democracy, every citizen is supposed to have an equal voice in decision-making. But because of corporate personhood, a few corporations have a much bigger voice than all of the people combined. Here, taken from WILPF, the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom <www.wilpf.org> we shared just a few ways in which corporate persons have advantages over people:

*FREE SPEECH--You have the right to free speech, which means you can go to any public place and say what you think. But giant corporations own most TV networks, radio stations, newspapers, billboards, bookstores, and magazines, so when /they /exercise their right to free speech many more people will hear and / / be influenced by them than by what any one person could say. What's more, workers do not have the right to free speech while they are on corporate property.

*EQUAL RIGHTS--Because of equal rights laws, people cannot prevent others of different ethnicity, skin color or

religion from buying property or moving into a neighborhood. Corporate Persons" get the same protection, so if a big box chain store wants to move into a community, threatening the existence of small, local retailers, the citizens will have great difficulty preventing it.

*SEARCH & SEIZURE--the government cannot search people or seize their property without a warrant. For corporations, this means that regulatory agencies cannot make random inspections to determine if they are polluting a river or abusing their workers.

And these examples are only the beginning of how we human citizens are being overwhelmed. We are mortal---corporations can live indefinitely. They have unlimited growth potential. Their wealth is staggering, their focus on profit unwavering. But perhaps the most devastating characteristic of a corporation is its complete lack of the obligation of ethical behavior that we humans require of each other. Never having to say "sorry", simply pay the fine and move on.

The first U.S. corporations were required to serve the public good. But today current law allows corporations to consider stockholder profit as their only goal, even when their practices are harmful to the environment and to the majority of families, workers, and communities.

The thirty people who heard the presentation asked so many questions that we ran out of time. It seems that the pervasive power of corporations is so common in our society that it has become easy to overlook, assuming that it has always been this way, that we are powerless to do anything about it. But the mood of the people was obvious by the end of our session:

There should be no such thing as a "corporate citizen" or a "socially responsible corporation." Only living, breathing human beings can be socially responsible citizens and only human beings should have rights. Corporate personhood is an insult to the millions of people who struggled for the right to vote and for equal treatment under the law.

SOMETHING YOU CAN DO

We had a lot of fun performing a 20min skit entitled "Interview with a Corporate Person," available from <www.wilpf.org> . Preparation was one simple run-through, and costumes were simple, out of the closet type stuff. It played to an audience of 35 with great critical acclaim!



Contacts in Ventura County

Adrienne Prince

Phone: (805)218-1344

E-Mail:

adrienneprince@hotmail.com

Stuart Bechman

Phone: (805) 522-3125

E-Mail: sbechman@sbcglobal.net

Contacts in Santa Barbara County:

Nancy Broyles

Phone: 963-2687

E-mail: nbroyles@igc.org

Leo Raabe

Phone: 637-8463

Contacts in

San Luis Obispo County

Nancy Ferraro

Phone: (805)772-3475

E-Mail: nancyhf2@slonet.org

Colby Concho Crotzer

Phone: (805)772-9253

E-Mail:

colbyconcho@charter.net

VENTURA COUNTY GREEN ISSUES - DECEMBER 2005

Most people probably haven't realized it, but the 2006 election season is upon us RIGHT NOW. With the 2006 primary election scheduled for June, candidates for local office will be collecting signatures between now and the end of February to qualify for the ballot. The VC Greens are looking for interested candidates who want to run! We are prepared to mobilize to help any candidate raise the required signatures. Here are some of the local issues that are engaging Ventura County voters right now:

ENDING THE IRAQ OCCUPATION

A strong "Bring the troops home" movement continues to agitate in western Ventura County. With groups such as Citizens for Peaceful Resolutions and Veterans for Peace holding regular rallies and meetings, citizens are continually being reminded that there is a large segment of the population that feels the occupation is wrong.

IMMIGRATION

With Ventura County being one of the state's major farming breadbaskets, the county continues to be afflicted with schizophrenia as the conservative East County wants to clamp down on "illegal" immigrants while the West County farmers decry the lack of workers to harvest the crops.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING & TRANSPORTATION

While Ventura County had a slight break over the past month in its housing prices, housing prices are still close to record highs. Community groups are asking local government officials for help, but cities and counties continue to offer lip service while approving high-value projects such as the Fagan Canyon project in Santa Paula which will provide little to no affordable housing. Mass transit in Ventura County remains a very sad joke as local government officials look to the state to bail the county out by building more and bigger roads to solve our transporta-

tion crisis. These same officials continue to neglect the opportunity to incorporate mass transportation infrastructure in new housing projects, forcing new residents to use cars on already-overtaxed roads and adding to the mounting transportation congestion.

OXNARD LNG TERMINAL SITE

Ventura County continues to find itself mired in controversy over several proposals to build a Liquid Natural Gas (LNG) terminal at Hueneme Port. While LNG proponents continue to argue that the terminal will create high-paying jobs and bring in a needed resource to California to offset the use of dirtier fossil fuels, opponent groups have been just as vocal at questioning such claims, pointing out that LNG use will not only increase the risk of local disasters and becoming a target of terrorists, but also allow government officials to continue putting off programs to move towards a post-fossil fuel economy. County officials have not yet scheduled a date to vote on what, if any, terminal proposal will be adopted.

NAVAL BASE VENTURA COUNTY

Ventura County civic officials continue to wring their hands over the downsizing of the Ventura County Naval Base announced by the BRAC Commission earlier this fall. They have little hope of reversing the planned downsizing with President Bush scheduled to sign the Commission recommendations into law in the very near future. Government officials decry the downsizing, claiming that good jobs will be moving out of the county to other naval bases such as China Lake. But given the very serious housing crisis facing the county, Greens wonder whether such job exports will help ease that housing crisis?

Greens continue to organize to confront these issues and provide a sane voice among the cacophony. We urge local Greens to get active, both in working on these issues as well as seeking office this year!

ORDINANCE PROHIBITING MORE "FORMULA RESTAURANTS" IN SANTA BARBARA

By Patricia Hiles

Reining in Corporate Power, an offshoot from the Green Party, is working to enact an ordinance in the City of Santa Barbara to prohibit any more "formula restaurants", i.e., chain restaurants, within the city limits.

If anyone is interested in working on the project with us, please call 687-5321 or 683-0705.

Cities in CA that have ordinances similar to this one: San Francisco, Arcata, Calistoga, Carmel-by-the-Sea, Coronado, Pacific Grove, San Juan Bautista, Sausalito, Solvang, Mill Valley, Fairfax, and Arroyo Grande (as of August, 2005).

Website to pursue this issue: nwrules.org/retailformula - Or for more information call 687-5321 or 683-0705.

GREEN SCENE

WINTER—2006



San Luis Obispo County Greens * Santa Barbara County Greens * Ventura County Greens

Hits and Misses in Santa Barbara

David Wass

The first week of the new year is a natural time to assess the success of the goals that your local Green Party set for itself for the previous year. The Santa Barbara Green Party got a late start but managed to set itself on a totally new course. It decided to convert itself from being an educational and social organization to being an active political group promoting Green values and Green solutions by campaigning in the local arena for political influence and power.

The first goal was to seek positions on city commissions and to ally the local Green Party with other organizations that share some of our goals and principles. As of the end of this year, one Green Party member has been appointed to a local board and the Party has allied itself with four other groups that work with us on particular issues.

The second goal was to select the local issues that the party members wanted to support and promote. Five issues were chosen and explored in forums at the Faulkner----low-income housing, a living wage ordinance, healthcare for All, water issues, and public transportation. In the course of developing these five issues, other concerns rose to the surface, several of which show promise of attracting the attention of the general public----a franchise limitation ordinance and a public election campaign financing ordi-

nance. The latter, in particular, has attracted the attention of several city council members and the Progressive Coalition.

The third goal was to establish a Green Party on the City College Campus. Three events were organized but none gained sufficient interest from the students to reach the prescribed level of demand.

The fourth goal was to find a willing candidate, appropriate and qualified for local public office. As of this date, we have not found such a person.

Looking ahead, what might be some of the Santa Barbara Green Party's goals for 2006? Building on the first goal, how about finding positions for three more greens on city or county commissions? Pondering the second goal, how about dropping the one or two issues that are not displaying much traction at this time and adding the two new comers that came out of the woodwork. As for the city college effort, evaluate it and, perhaps, let it rest for a year before reconsidering it. In closing, consider supporting the California Green Party's Fair Wage Proposition effort, becoming more active in Anti-War/Bring Home The Troops public demonstrations, and keep looking for that hitherto elusive creation—a willing and able candidate for public office.

DUEING IT!!

By supporting the Green Party of Santa Barbara County with your dues, you enable the party to grow, sponsor forums and meetings to educate the general public and promote Green values in the community. **See membership form for 2006. Please let us know we can count on you!!**

GREEN SCENE

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P. O. Box 92141

Santa Barbara CA 93190-2141

(805)884-9259

Email:santabarbara@cagreens.org

Http://www.cagreens.org/santabarbara

Editor: Nancy Broyles

Production Director: Sandy Stites

Green Party of Santa Barbara County

P. O. Box 92141

Santa Barbara, CA 93190-2141

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