

Democrat Pacheco brings odd twists to Fresno Co. District 1 Supes race

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Posted by John Ellis on March 13, 2014

Fresno County District 1 supervisor candidate Brian Pacheco is in an interesting position.

The Kerman dairyman is a registered Democrat, but has several high-profile Republican endorsements for the seat, including the guy who holds the post now — retiring Supervisor Phil Larson.

Fellow Republican supervisors — and hard-core conservatives — Judy Case McNairy and Debbie Poochigian have also endorsed Pacheco, as has Assembly Member Jim Patterson of Fresno.



The situation has baffled some people, especially because there's a viable Republican in the race — Kerman Mayor Gary Yep.

In a recent appearance on the Bill Manders radio show on KALZ (FM 96.7), widely known as Powertalk 96.7, Pacheco said he registered as a Democrat at age 19 when he had an opportunity to work with Fresno Democrat Jim Costa during his time in the state Legislature.

Pacheco described himself as one of the Valley's old-style conservative Democrats, but also said that on the non-partisan Board of Supervisors, such labels are not important.

"I have an open mind and I will sit down with anyone," he told Republican businessman Tal Cloud, who was guest host of the show.

But in this case, there is no doubt that party affiliation does matter, as does political philosophy.

There are a total of five people seeking to replace Larson. Besides Yep and Pacheco, they are Mendota pastor John Flores, teacher/construction carpenter Frank Maldonado, and Fresno City Council Member Blong Xiong.

Pacheco is widely perceived as the front runner because, through the end of last year, he had raised more than \$265,000 and had more than \$220,000 in his campaign account.

But Republicans have their eye on Xiong. They expect the Service Employees International Union, which represents 4,900 Fresno County workers, to weigh both politically and financially for Xiong, a Fresno Democrat.

If it plays out along the predicted political lines — and Pacheco and Xiong emerge from the June primary — it could set up an interesting November election runoff battle between a union-backed Democrat Xiong and a Republican-backed Democrat Pacheco.

But there is some evidence that calls into question such political prognostications among the local political watchers.

For one, Yep — the lone Republican in the race — has received the Fresno County Republican Central Committee endorsement. For those Republicans that vote party line, it could be a considerable cache of votes.

Yep thinks so. He's thinking he'll do quite well in the primary because, he predicts, nearly half the voters will be Republican.

Then there's Pacheco's recent radio appearance.

On the show, a caller asked Pacheco about meeting with the SEIU and the Fresno-Madera-Tulare-Kings Central Labor Council.

In a recording of the show, Pacheco responded: "I did attend a Central Labor Council meeting. However, I did not participate in the SEIU."

He then said he passed on the SEIU because to participate, you had to sign a candidate pledge to support the union. He didn't elaborate beyond that.

A short time later, a second caller pressed Pacheco on the union question, asking if he had requested a private meeting with the SEIU executive leadership. Pacheco then said he went into the SEIU office "early on in the campaign to tell them who I was. They couldn't see me at that time, so I left my card."

That in turn led to a third call in to the radio show. It was from Democrat Matt Rogers, who said he was with SEIU Local 1000. He told Cloud and Pacheco that he wanted to "correct something (Pacheco) said. You met with us, our local leadership... in a personal meeting you requested, and you just said that you didn't, and I want to correct what you said."

Pacheco then backtracked. After he left his card at the SEIU office, he said he got a call from Tom Abshere, director of the local SEIU chapter, and eventually ended up meeting for coffee in early November with Abshere, Rogers and Maggie Thao from the Service Employees International Union-United Healthcare Workers West.

Cloud then stepped in to help Pacheco, saying there was "two issues at point." What Pacheco didn't attend, Cloud said on the radio, was an SEIU candidate forum. What he did do is have coffee with three SEIU leaders.

Whatever the case, Yep's campaign jumped on the issue, issuing a news release Thursday. Other local Republicans also questioned what was up.

Michael Der Manouel Jr., a Republican businessman and chairman of the Lincoln Club of Fresno County, didn't hear the broadcast, but forwarded Yep's news release to his email network.

"This is a very big deal," he wrote at the top of the email. "Nobody 'forgets' meeting with SEIU. That is an outrageous claim and an out an out lie. It calls into question the very character of this candidate. Serious question."

In an emailed statement on the matter, Pacheco said:

"As a candidate for supervisor, I have a policy of meeting with everybody and listening to their opinions. I don't believe a good representative shuts out anybody, even those he or she disagrees with.

"I have had hundreds of meetings in the last six months with groups and constituents and I will always have an open door policy.

"As far as the SEIU goes, I had an informal meeting with a couple of their representatives several months ago, but I rejected an invitation to attend their endorsement meeting and did not fill out their candidate questionnaire."