

Xiong keeps Democratic endorsement despite critics

By Marc Benjamin

Fresno County Supervisorial candidate Blong Xiong said he knew there could be fallout from his mutual endorsement last week of Fresno Mayor Ashley Swearingin, the Republican Party candidate for state controller.

The Fresno County Democratic Party met Wednesday night to consider pulling Xiong's endorsement. After heated debate, Xiong's endorsement remained intact.

"There are certainly strong opinions on it," said Michael Evans, the local party chairman. "This one was unique because it involved a nonpartisan (county supervisor's) race and a partisan race (for controller)."

He said party members were "definitely not unanimous" in Xiong's endorsement.

"They tried everything that they could but it was a small minority group that tried," Xiong said Friday. "It kind of got blown out of proportion."

The vote was on whether to pull Xiong's endorsement and remain neutral in the supervisor's race. Xiong is pitted in a tight battle with Kerman farmer Brian Pacheco, who also is a democrat. Xiong finished first in the June primary by eight votes in a five-man race.

Pacheco is endorsed by three conservative members of the Fresno County Board of Supervisors, Debbie Poochigian, Judy Case McNairy, and current District One Supervisor Phil Larson. Endorsing Pacheco was never under consideration during the meeting.

Xiong said he wanted to talk to his fellow democrats before Wednesday's meeting, but didn't have the opportunity.

He said Swearingin remains a popular figure locally, evidenced by her drawing 51.7% of the county's vote for controller in a five-person race in the June statewide primary, which she won.

"There are some passionate people on both sides who dislike her," said Xiong. "Our mayor is running statewide and it brings out local voters. For me, it's a local race and we want high voter turnout."

Jim Avalos, a Selma City Council member and delegate for the Fresno County Democratic Party, wanted to pull Xiong's endorsement. He said Xiong's support of Swearingin fractured the Democratic Party and the local Hmong community.

"It's a political play for him to get the Republican Party vote in Fresno," Avalos said, "and she was trying to get his constituency."

Avalos is convinced that Xiong will lose funding from some of the same labor constituencies that supported him during the primary.

He said Xiong's endorsement was a "slap in the face to labor," especially those who fought Measure G, Swearingin's plan to privatize trash pickup in Fresno.

"They are going to pull back their commitments to him," Avalos said. "As far as the big amount, they're going to cut back."

It's not clear whether that will occur. Randy Ghan of the Central Labor Council would not comment. Other union representatives didn't return calls.

Evans also refused comment when asked if Xiong's financial support from labor could slow. Since the endorsement on Sept. 26, Xiong has received about \$5,600 in donations, \$4,428 from labor. Pacheco got \$31,750 in the past week, none from labor.

Xiong's endorsement of Swearingin, however, did not sway his fellow Fresno County democrats from their candidate, Evans said.

"We also reiterated our enthusiastic and unwavering support for Betty Yee," he said, referring to the Democratic Party's state controller candidate.

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