

Endorsement

Chuck Reed for San Jose Mayor

This may be one of the most important elections San Jose voters have faced in modern years. It is an election that will determine whether citizens will have a level playing field, or whether insiders will quietly receive special favors and access to information. In short, it's about open government.

After eight years of secret backroom deals, contempt for public process, costly decisions and indictments, there's a chance to make San Jose government accountable again. And the differences between the candidates are like night and day.

Chuck Reed has been a champion of open government. Among other proposals, he endorsed a comprehensive sunshine ordinance that would require government business to be conducted in the full light of day. His opponent, Cindy Chavez, created a set of "sunshine reforms" during secret living room meetings, then arranged for them to be sent to a task force without including a sunshine ordinance. Chavez's allies are now working hard to obstruct and narrow any ordinance that could make it to council.

Chavez is good at keeping a secret. She knew about Mayor Gonzales' private negotiations for a Grand Prix subsidy months before it came to the council as an 11th-hour surprise—yet failed to share any information publicly, or with her colleagues.

It's hard to imagine that Chavez, given her close ties to labor, didn't know about the Norcal garbage labor contract debacle, which has cost San Jose taxpayers millions. She has not exactly been forthcoming either. During an interview with this publication in May, she dodged questions about her meetings with Norcal and Teamsters officials. And in three appearances before the Norcal grand jury, Chavez answered "I don't recall" or "I don't remember" more than 60 times.

An even bigger question surrounds the secretive money machine of the South Bay Labor Council, Chavez's former employer and leading supporter. The SBLC engages in political activities on behalf of candidates while commingling funds, office space and executive staff with its charitable arm, Working Partnerships. Since taxpayers subsidize, through tax exemptions, the activities of charities, it's illegal to use any charity resources for political campaigns. Both Chavez and SBLC have resisted calls to open the books of these groups.

In an echo of the failed mayorship of Ron Gonzales, Chavez has stopped talking to media that ask tough questions. The last thing San Jose needs is another mayor that refuses to talk to the press. Frankly, we think it's despicable that a public official won't explain her actions to grand juries, or to news organizations whose job it is to keep the public informed about civic matters. Reed, on the other hand, has been open and accessible, and doesn't demand a loyalty oath from reporters.

While neither Reed nor Chavez are tree huggers, we believe that Reed would be the more likely candidate to hold the line on unwise development. Developers have showered money on Chavez, who seems to find creative ways to accommodate friendly interests. Reed is a straight shooter who likes to follow the rules; as a land use attorney and former Planning Commission chair, he is steeped in the balanced growth philosophy of the General Plan. Staying the course is critical to maintaining the valley's livability.

While Chavez is charismatic, with an uncanny ability to work her way with the council, she has not been particularly effective at problem solving for her district. During her representation of downtown, it failed to develop a competitive strategy toward suburban competition, major development initiatives languished, and entertainment patrons abandoned it in the face of a police strategy oriented toward a visual projection of force rather than enlightened community partnership-style law enforcement. An effective councilmember would have mediated these disputes, rather than leave divided factions fighting.

Reed knows downtown well. He was president of the San Jose Downtown Association during its grassroots days, and has worked downtown for almost 30 years.

It saddens us to write an endorsement this way. Overall, we're optimistic about San Jose and would love to endorse an amiable, progressive Latina to become mayor of this great city. But the job of community-based media is to call events as we see them. We've lived and worked in this community a long time, have watched both players in action and have followed their actions closely. Chavez remained too quiet and passive during Gonzales' lies and scandals over trash, phone systems, car race subsidies, sexual misconduct, free golf games, lobbyist influence and slush funds. San Jose just cannot afford another eight years of Gonzales-style backroom politics.

Sure, we'd like to see more style and excitement, but fiscal prudence and common sense are not bad attributes for a political leader, either. Reed best represents our vision of a political system that shares information and promotes accountability. It's the only way San Jose can heal from the broken public trust of the Gonzales era. ♡