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Pro-water forces outspending opponents

By Tom Friesen
Staff Writer

NIPOMO — Less than two weeks before election day, pro-state water forces appear poised to far outspend their opposition in the campaign leading up to the controversial May 19 vote.

The Nipomo State Water Committee also enjoys the active support of two directors of the Community Services District, despite public commitments from the board to remain impartial.

The anti-state water forces, organized as Nipomo Citizens for Democracy, forced the May 19 vote

with a referendum petition after the district board tried to overturn the voters' Nov. 5 rejection of the State Water Project.

Both board President David Manriquez and Director Kathleen Fairbanks said they are helping with the pro-state water campaign as individual citizens, rather than as board members.

That is perfectly legal and legiti-

mate, according to both the state Fair Political Practices Commission and the Attorney-General's Office.

The board itself is not allowed to do any electioneering, although it could let its opinion be known through an endorsement, according to a spokesman in the Attorney General's Office.

"I'm not using any district funds or anything they have," Manriquez

said. "We're just citizens like everybody else, just like the NAAG committee. We are a bunch of citizens trying to do what they feel is best for the community."

Members of the Nipomo Area Advisory Group, formed by 4th District Supervisor Ruth Brackett last year, have also been active in the state water committee.

Manriquez said he and Fairbanks

carefully checked the election laws before committing to help the state water committee.

"We're not actively promoting the State Water Project when we're sitting as a board," he said. "We're trying to be factual and accurate in everything we say."

Manriquez said he has been to more meetings and taken a more active role than Fairbanks in promoting state water.

According to a campaign statement filed by the Nipomo State Water Committee, Fairbanks is among seven people who donated

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Pro-water outspends opponents

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\$100 between Feb. 25 and April 7.

The others were listed as Christmas tree farm owner Paul Marsalek, Realtors Peggy Miller and Mrs. A.S. Fitzgerald, retired school teacher Wayne Bernard, teaching assistant and former NCSD director Barbara Haslam, and pharmacy owner Barbara Papageorge.

The committee has received \$200 from Nipomo Oaks, an agribusiness managed by Donna Mehlschau, who is the committee treasurer. But the largest single donation has come from mini-storage owner Don Pruit, according to the campaign statement.

It also shows that the committee took in \$1,795 and spent \$889 between Feb. 25 and April 7. Two full-page advertisements in the Adobe Press cost \$585, and other printing costs accounted for the remainder.

Manriquez said more ads are being planned for the Adobe Press along with other methods of getting the message out.

On the other side of the campaign, the Nipomo Citizens for Democracy mailed fliers to every household in the district late last month.

Charles Gulyash, the main author of the flier, said it cost "a hair over \$500" to copy and distribute, including \$150 for a bulk mail permit.

A second mailing is in the works, but it will be cheaper because the group now has the permit, Gulyash said, estimating that about \$800 will be spent throughout the campaign.

Carol Thorpe at the FPCC said campaign statements need not be filed if less than \$1,000 is raised by an organization.

Gulyash said donations have been received from fewer than 10 people, and only one donation has been over \$100.

"We're well below \$1,000," he said. "We certainly can't fight them dollar for dollar, so it will have to be a well thought-out campaign."

The flier includes a request for donations in the \$5 range, and Paul

Luiz said the Nipomo Citizens for Democracy would try to do more than another mailing if its finances allow, but that seems unlikely.

"We're kind of going hand to mouth here," he said. "We're doing what we can to get the word out and clarify: If you don't want state water, vote yes."

Gulyash and Luiz both said they weren't surprised to learn that two board members are working on the campaign for state water.

"I'm not surprised at all. I consider anyone on the board and the employees of NCSD as adversaries," Luiz said. "They still haven't proven me wrong. They overturned an election, and I didn't think that was possible."

Fairbanks said she donated money to the state water supporters because "I felt there needed to be both sides heard" instead of the small but "vocal portion" of the residents who don't want state water.

"If we don't have state water, it keeps the downtown from being able to expand in a nice way," she said. Several years ago, a sewer moratorium stopped new development in the area, and residents could only add on to their homes while more modern houses were being built all around the district.

Fairbanks fears that, without state water, the same thing will happen again.

"I don't know if ghetto is the right word" for the area's future, she said, but state water would bring with it "a better grade of development" inside the district borders.

Fairbanks is also convinced that the Nipomo Citizens for Democracy is receiving financial support from several outside groups related to the Citizens Planning Alliance, which had its name on the flier that has since been blamed by district officials for the defeat of state water in November.

"They're getting money from some of these slow-growth, no-growth organizations. They all have the same telephone number" as the planning alliance, she said, appar-

ently referring to the ECOSLO number where callers are referred to contact people for smaller mostly environment-oriented organizations.

Gulyash, who wrote the flier and is president of the Citizens Planning Alliance, describes the organization as a political watchdog group concerned mainly with planning and development issues in the county.

He said he wrote the November flier on his own, and didn't have enough time before the election to seek formal approval from the planning alliance board. However, the flier's contents were "totally consistent" with that group's goals, he said.

"The Citizens Planning Alliance is not going to participate" in the Nipomo election campaign, Gulyash said. "This is a local issue at this point."

Vote 'No'

There is a special election 19, about the state water project. Let's remember one thing: "No" vote is in favor of state water against it.

Nipomo needs water and the best chance to get it.

Opponents of state water are coming to Nipomo. They are zealots prevent Nipomo from thinking not.

The coastal branch of the State Water Project is the source of new water for Nipomo. Community Services District customers pay for the first five years, then about \$100 a year that's cheap insurance to assure water in the future. Your children will be drinking it.

I urge a "No" vote, which is the only way to stop it.

Question on the ballot

NIPOMO — "Shall Ordinance 91-64 be repealed?"

That is the complex and controversial question facing voters in the May 19 election as they make perhaps the single most important decision facing the Nipomo area.

In a nutshell, this is how the vote came about and what the ballot question means:

The Community Services District board adopted Ordinance 91-64 after district voters turned down state water by a slim margin in a binding election on Nov. 5. The ordinance would have retroactively made the election non-binding and allowed the NCSD board to sign up for the State Water Project.

But a referendum petition signed by hundreds of district voters then forced the board to either rescind Ordinance 91-64 or hold an election on the issue.

So, technically, the vote will decide the issue of whether the board should be allowed to overturn the results of a popular election.

But the practical result of the vote

will also be a decision on whether to join the State Water Project before the NCSD directors have indicated they will contract for at least 100 acre-feet if the voters allow it.

Simply put, a "yes" vote has several meanings. It would disallow the NCSD board's attempt to overturn the Nov. 5 election and it would allow state water from Nipomo.

A "no" vote means yes to state water. State water supporters say they need for new water sources during the debate over democratic processes. More water is needed to accommodate further development and to assure the district's rights to draw from the groundwater basin.

Opponents question the reliability of the Coastal Branch and point out that local water bills would be higher with state water.

The question will be settled at two polling places between 7 and 8 p.m. Polling will be at the NCSD office or boardroom, 1000 Wilson St., and at the Light Christian Center, 726 W. Telford.

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