

TO: San Diego City Council
FROM: San Diego League of Women Voters
DATE: November 18, 2008
RE: Item 334 – Selection of Council President 2009

In 2005, following the passage of Prop F (which set up San Diego's 5-year trial period with a strong mayor form of government), a Citizen's Advisory Committee was appointed to assist in the transition from a city manager system to a mayor-council system.

It was a peculiar time, as I'm sure some of you remember well. In April of that year Mayor Dick Murphy -- the person slated to become San Diego's first strong mayor -- abruptly resigned. Fortunately, the transition process stayed on course and was brought to a satisfactory conclusion by the end of the year.

As an officer of the League of Women Voters, I was honored to chair the strong-mayor Citizens Advisory Committee, a balanced group of 11 leaders representing wide community and business interests. We held public hearings and worked with city staff and a San Francisco consulting firm hired by the city council to develop a series of recommendations aimed at ensuring that, above all, the new balance of power at city hall would be beneficial to the public.

The CAC recommendations dealt with crucial items like the creation of the office of Independent Budget Analyst; development of a new budget process; council committee structure; and of course the powers, authority, and selection of the presiding officer – now known as council president.

On the issue of council president, the CAC understood that a strong presiding officer could be an asset in terms of city council stability, efficiency, and political clout. On the other hand, the CAC also placed high value on a rotation system to promote increased equity and fair representation for all council districts.

It seems clear that a renewed discussion about the optimal balance between the promotion of council efficiency and the promotion of wide democratic representation is in order.

And it seems self-evident that this discussion, along with the selection of the next council president, belongs in the hands of the soon-to-be seated new city council and not in the hands of outgoing council members.

We respectfully urge you to continue this item until the new city council is seated.

Norma Damashek
San Diego League of Women Voters