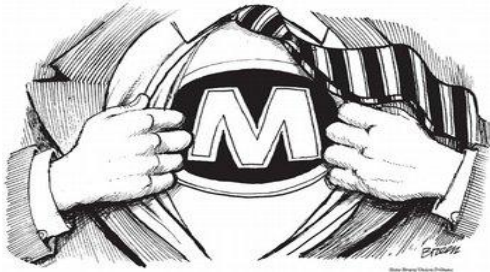


Strong feelings on strong mayor

Mayor must communicate, vote in open

By Norma Damashek

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The League of Women Voters has spent five years closely monitoring San Diego's experiment with a strong mayor form of government.

And, after that careful scrutiny, we oppose Prop D on the June ballot.

Cheerleaders for the strong mayor system aren't shy about advertising false claims of mayoral accountability and saving the city money.

But an objective look at the state of our city under strong mayor tells us something different.

After five years under the strong mayor system, the League of Women Voters finds that:

- Our streets, neighborhood parks, libraries and fire and police services are rapidly deteriorating.
- Budget deficits are soaring. Bad fiscal management continues. Everyday services are being financed with borrowed money – pushing disastrous debt onto our children and grandchildren.
- There is no comprehensive plan to rescue the city from financial disaster.
- Checks and balances are weakened by over-concentration of power in a strong mayor.
- There have been cover-ups, political pressure on city officials, misleading financial statements, shrinking internal controls, withholding public information and gag orders.
- For a more detailed candid review of the underside of the strong mayor system over the past five years, go to the League's website: www.lwvsandiego.org

The mayor was once the head of the City Council and the city's chief statesman. As our top leader, the mayor was required to hear the public's concerns before voting or making new policy.

But under Prop. D, the strong mayor has no direct communication with the public. City business will get done behind closed doors. The strong mayor makes decisions, vetoes City Council actions and appoints top-level officials without ever having to see, hear or consult with the people of San Diego.

Rubbing salt into the wound, Prop. D then forces taxpayers to increase the size of government by adding a new, unnecessary council district at a cost of millions – more financial dead weight from a strong mayor system that already costs taxpayers more than twice as much to run as the old system.

People recognize the League of Women Voters as a unique organization with a 90-year history of promoting good government. We believe local government must effectively operate the city for the benefit of all its citizens.

Voters must ask themselves: Does the strong mayor system benefit the citizens of San Diego? At a time of uncontrolled budget deficits and cuts to our police, fire stations, libraries and parks should taxpayers agree to make city government even bigger and more costly?

Our answer is: No.

A no vote on Prop. D will provide San Diegans with a mayor who presides over council meetings, communicates directly with constituents and votes out in the open.

A no vote on D will bring in a professionally trained city manager who can be readily fired by the mayor and council if the job is not done satisfactorily. Important safeguards provided by an independent budget analyst, the audit committee and city auditor will be maintained.

Last but not least, your no vote on D will establish reliable checks and balances, permitting the sun to shine into the darkest corners of the failed strong mayor system. This is the honest definition of real accountability to all San Diego citizens.

Damashek is co-president of the San Diego League of Women Voters.