
Building Trades Win Big in Local, National Elections

By Paul Burton

Contributing Writer

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At the local level, hundreds of union members walked precincts and called union households for labor's candidates in the Bay Area. Dozens of Building Trades union members participated in the electoral work organized by the San Francisco Labor Council, as well as the San Mateo County Central Labor Council and San Mateo County Building Trades Council. Many Building Trades unions also sent members to crucial Southwestern battleground states such as Nevada and helped turn those states blue.

Local Measures

Labor's efforts paid off in San Francisco with the passage of Proposition A, the \$887.4 million bond measure to finance construction to bring San Francisco General Hospital up to state-mandated seismic standards. Members of the Iron Workers Local 377, Operating Engineers Local 3, Bricklayers Local 3, IBEW Local 6, and Cement Masons Local 300 attended the rally to kick off the Yes on Prop A campaign September 15 and made passage of Prop. A a priority. It needed a two-thirds majority to pass and won overwhelmingly, 84 percent to 16 percent.

Prop. A was supported by a broad coalition of organizations, including labor, the business community and Chamber of Commerce, all the members of the Board of Supervisors, the Democratic, Republican and Green Parties. District 10 Supervisor Sophie Maxwell said that the project to retrofit and rebuild the hospital will create jobs for local construction workers as well as for young people who will be brought in to apprenticeship programs.

Prop. D also was passed with over a two-thirds majority, 68 to 32 percent. It needed just a simple majority to pass. The measure will give the Board of Supervisors the ability to approve a broad land-use plan for the 65-acre waterfront area at Pier 70 instead of approving individual projects and leases. It would also allow tax revenue generated by the new development to be used to pay off bonds issued to build projects like parks and sidewalks. Prop. D will provide the Port Commission, the mayor and the Board of Supervisors tools to promote the reuse of Pier 70 while preserving existing ship repair operations. It was supported by labor.

Board of Supervisors

As Organized Labor went to press, results for the Board of Supervisors were not yet finalized for some districts, because of the City's ranked choice voting system. In races where no candidate receives a clear majority, the second place votes of the lowest ranking candidates are added to higher-ranking candidates until one emerges with over 50 percent.

Three candidates did receive over 50 percent on Election Day and were declared winners. Labor's candidates Ross Mirkarimi and Sean Elsbernd were re-elected easily in Districts 5 and 7, respectively. Mirkarimi received over 77 percent of the vote in a three-way race, becoming the first Green Party member to be re-elected to the Board. Elsbernd got just under 70 percent of the vote in his district against two challengers. Both have been solid votes for labor and were praised for their integrity and accessibility. Mirkarimi was supported by the SFBCTC and SFLC, which made no recommendation in District 7.

In District 4 incumbent Carmen Chu—appointed by Mayor Newsom when Supervisor Ed Jew was removed from office under indictment for corruption—emerged with just over 50 percent of the vote to defeat Ron Dudum, who was backed by the SF Building Trades Council. The San Francisco Labor Council made no recommendation in the race. In 2006 Dudum was the top vote getter until all second and third place votes were added up and Ed Jew was declared the winner. Chu did show a strong understanding of union concerns when interviewed by the SFBCTC and was supportive of many of the labor movement's issues.

As of press time, results were not yet finalized, but labor's candidates were doing well. In the First Supervisorial District, School Board member Eric Mar was leading among nine candidates on Election Night with 41 percent of the vote, but after two rounds of rank choice voting, it looks like Mar has over 51 percent of the vote. Mar was endorsed by both the SFLC and SFBCTC. He is a strong supporter of labor and was instrumental in getting the Project Labor Agreement between the School District and Building Trades approved. Mar would be part of a bloc of Supervisors that sometimes included current District 1 Supervisor Jake McGoldrick, while Lee was supported by Mayor Gavin Newsom, who often is opposed by a bloc of members on the board.

Building Trades union members worked hard for the Mar campaign, in conjunction with the SFLC. The outreach to union members included a "Labor to Neighbor" effort that saw Iron Workers Local 377 organize Chinese speaking members to call Chinese speaking households to vote for Mar and Prop. A. Local 377 Organizer Danny Prince said anywhere from 15 to 35 Chinese speaking members staffed phones at the union's hall during the last month leading up to Election Day. Many drove to the City from jobsites around northern California to make the evening calls. The San Francisco Labor Council provided cell phones for the phone bankers. Prince said many of the Chinese members were newly organized into the local after working for non-union contractors and were very thankful to the union and supportive of labor's election campaigns.

In the race to succeed 3rd District Supervisor Aaron Peskin, the building trades backed Joe Alioto, Jr., and Denise McCarthy, while the SFLC endorsed David Chiu. Chiu was the leading vote getter on Election Night with 38 percent of the vote, but after rank choice voting tabulations, he ended up with over 59 percent of the vote, with Alioto coming in second and McCarthy finishing third among nine candidates. The process of tabulating votes to name a winner was not yet finalized as Organized Labor went to press. All three were well-informed and vowed to be open to union members and supportive of organized labor.

In District 9, neither the Labor Council nor Building Trades made an endorsement, as there were three strong candidates in the race to succeed Tom Ammiano. Attorney David Campos was leading at press time with 53 percent of the vote, followed by School Board member Mark Sanchez and affordable housing activist Eric Quezada among seven candidates.

In the 11th District, John Avalos, backed by the SFLC, was leading on Election Day with 29 percent of the vote, but after rank choice tabulations, he captured 53 percent of the ballots. Ashai Safai came in second place and Building Trades supported candidate Julio Ramos came in third. There were eight candidates competing to succeed Supervisor Gerardo Sandoval. Sandoval was labor's candidate in the race for Superior Court Judge and defeated Thomas Mellon, 55 to 45 percent.

Board of Education

Three candidates backed by the SFBCTC were elected or re-elected to the SF Board of Education, where four positions were up for election. Incumbent Norman Yee received 16 percent among the 15 candidates, followed by Sandra Lee Fewer with 13 percent and Jill Wynns with 9 percent of the vote. Rachel Norton, who was not endorsed by labor, will fill the fourth vacant School Board seat.

Labor's other endorsed candidate, Janry Mak, finished sixth. All three winners took strong pro-union positions in their candidate questionnaires and in interviews with the building trades.

Sandra Lee Fewer is the Director of Education Policy and Parent Organizing at Coleman Advocates for Children and Youth, and has been active in education for over 20 years. She is a former member of UNITE HERE Local 2, and a strong supporter of unions. She said she supports the Project Labor Agreement for SFUSD work done under the 2006 bond, adding that, "This is a good agreement that sets the standard for the direction in which we should be going."

College board, State Legislature, Congress

There were four seats up for election on the seven-member Community College Board of Trustees. Incumbent Natalie Berg, along with Chris Jackson, a researcher for the SFLC, were endorsed by both the SFLC and SFBCTC. Milton Marks was the top vote getter in the 9-way race with 21 percent, followed by Berg with 16 percent, Jackson at 13 percent, and Steve Ngo, 12 percent. Marks has been a pro-labor member of the board and was backed by the building trades. The

SFBCTC's other candidate, incumbent Rodell Rodis finished seventh and was not re-elected to a third term.

In state legislative races, Democrats won easily in the heavily Democratic San Francisco Districts. Supervisor Tom Ammiano won election to the State Assembly with 84 percent of the vote; Fiona Ma was re-elected by a 83 to 17 percent margin, and Assemblymember Mark Leno was elected to the State Senate with over 87 percent of the vote.

Ammiano served on the Board of Supervisors for 14 years and was a champion of progressive causes. He authored legislation to provide universal health care to uninsured San Francisco residents, pushed legislation to give benefits to domestic partners in companies doing business with San Francisco, and supported increasing the minimum wage in the city. He also led the effort to institute District elections, rather than citywide elections for the Board of Supervisors, which helped more progressive and neighborhood-based candidates win election. He also initiated a citywide ID program to allow undocumented immigrants who lack government-issued identification to access public services.

In San Francisco's 8th Congressional District, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi easily won re-election with 71 percent of the vote. Pelosi was challenged by peace activist and Gold Star mother Cindy Sheehan, who was endorsed by the Peace and Freedom Party and Green Party. Sheehan received 17 percent of the vote, placing second ahead of Republican Dan Walsh and Libertarian Phil Berg.

Presidential vote

At the presidential level, San Francisco voters backed Democrat Barack Obama by a much higher margin than statewide or nationally. While Obama won the national popular vote over Republican John McCain by 53 to 46 percent, over 84 percent of San Francisco voters chose Obama, while only 13 percent picked McCain. Independent Ralph Nader, running as the Peace and Freedom Party candidate in California, won about one percent in San Francisco, followed by Green Party candidate and former Democratic Congressmember Cynthia McKinney.

As the AFL-CIO reported on the Presidential vote:

- Union voters supported President-elect Barack Obama 67 percent to 30 percent over Sen. John McCain. In the top-tier battleground states the difference was even more stark, with union members going for Obama 69 to 28—a 41-point margin.

- While McCain won among voters ages 65 and up, active and retired union members older than 65 went for Obama by a 46-point margin.

- While McCain won among veterans, union veterans went for Obama by a 25-point margin.

• Working America members, concentrated in key states, supported Obama by 67 percent to 30 percent.

• 60 percent of union members and 56 percent of Working America members said the economy was a top issue.

• Union members got a lot of contact from their unions about the election, with more than 80 percent receiving union mail, more than 80 percent receiving union publications, 59 percent getting live phone calls and 32 percent getting worksite fliers.

• 75 percent of union members say Obama's victory gives him a mandate to make major change. 81 percent support the Employee Free Choice Act.

• 21 percent of voters were in a union or union household.