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California

San Diego Coalition Launches Ballot Initiative To Prohibit Use of Project Labor Agreements

LOS ANGELES—The Coalition for Fair Employment in Construction and City Councilman Carl DeMaio Nov. 23 launched a ballot initiative that would ban project labor agreements on municipally funded projects in San Diego.

Proponents call their initiative the “Competition and Transparency in City Contract” proposition. Their goal is placement on the November 2010 general election ballot.

The measure’s stated goals are open competition for city contracts, efficiency in public works expenditures, equal opportunity for all workers, and maximum transparency as to the details of municipal contracts.

“To achieve savings and to open jobs on contracts to all San Diegans, we must turn to the voters to impose clear, fair and open rules for competitive bidding in city government,” said Councilman DeMaio.

Lorena Gonzalez, secretary-treasurer, San Diego-Imperial Counties Labor Council said in a statement, “The only thing ‘transparent’ about Mr. DeMaio’s proposal is how badly he wants to hand out contracts to his friends in the government contractor industry.”

Tom Lemmon, business manager of the San Diego County Building and Construction Trades Council criticized the effort. “They want to outsource our good jobs, do away with local hire provisions, take away training opportunity for future generations, all because they can’t compete head to head. It’s race to the bottom.”

The text of the proposition contains language similar to that in a measure the Coalition For Fair Employment in Construction has successfully placed on the June 2010 ballot in nearby Chula Vista (55 CLR 900, 9/10/09).

It states that the city shall not fund any project requiring a contractor to become party to an agreement with a labor organization, become a signatory to a collective bargaining agreement, or require a contractor’s employees to be represented by a labor organization.

The measure would prevent the signing of agreements requiring contractors to “provide their employees with compensation or benefits in excess of the levels expressly required of the contracting party as an employer under state and federal laws and regulations.”

The measure is also specific in its prohibition of agreements requiring the employment of “journeyman or use of apprenticeship or certification programs beyond requirements required under state law.”

By Stephen Siciliano