

# Local Democrats draw fire from recall supporter

**PINOLE: Man says Central Committee did not give timely notice on last month's vote backing mayor, councilman**

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**By Tom Lochner**

**A** leading supporter of a drive to recall two Pinole City Council members says the Contra Costa County Democratic Party could use a lesson in democracy for the way it took a stand on the recall issue at its Central Committee meeting last month.

Jeff Rubin, spokesman for recall sponsor Concerned Citizens of Pinole, said no one from his group got timely notice of the Nov. 15 Central Committee vote opposing a recall of Maria Alegria and Stephen Tilton.

Others have questioned why a matter purportedly brought to the party's attention several months ago was not publicized sooner. More questions have arisen since, including why an agenda that circulated days before the meeting did not mention the recall, and whether the lone tape of the Central Committee meeting will be made public.

Nagaraja Rao, central committee chairman, has said that Pinole Councilwoman and recall supporter Mary Horton's appearance at the Nov. 15 meeting shows that there was adequate notice. Horton has said she found out about the vote just hours before it was scheduled.

On Nov. 20, Rao told the Pinole City Council about the party's position on the recall and also announced that he had received several death threats in connection with it. Rao said he was in Berkeley on Nov. 17 when he received the first of four threatening calls on his cell phone. All the calls showed "Private" on the screen, he said.

Rao said he received five more calls Nov. 20, before the Pinole council meeting.

Berkeley police have executed a search warrant and identified one possible suspect, Lt. Wes Hester said. Police could not say if a crime was committed.

Rao said last week he could not comment on whether he had received more threats since.

At the Nov. 20 Pinole council meeting, Rao also addressed lingering concerns that the vote had not been adequately noticed.

"Mayor Alegria requested several months ago to put ... the Pinole recall on our agenda for the Nov. 15 meeting for the purposes of no recall motion," Rao said during the public comment period. "Our November agenda clearly reflected this. Our agenda item No. 7 says, 'Honorable Mayor Maria Alegria,' and it says, in parentheses, oppose recall."

Outside the council chamber Nov. 20, Rao showed a reporter the agenda with the words "Honorable Mayor Maria Alegria (oppose recall)."

But an agenda that Rao e-mailed to a member of the party's executive committee Nov. 5 says only "Hon. Mayor of Pinole Maria Allegria (sic)."

Rao said matters often come up at the 11th hour and that "you go into more detail on the agenda the day of the meeting."

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Recall proponents were not alone to say the party's scheduling of a vote caught them by surprise.

"I didn't even know about this event until the last minute," Tilton, a self-described Democrat, told the Pinole council Nov. 20 after stepping off the dais to speak under public comment. "The mayor asked if I would go with her, and I said, 'sure.'

"I'm surprised Mary Horton didn't bring some of you recall people with her."

Days earlier, Tilton told the Times that Horton's "silly antics" had been recorded as part of a taping of the committee meeting.

Central Committee member Greg Enholm, who made the tape, said parts of meetings are aired on cable TV, but only in East County. Because he thought a Pinole recall issue would find little interest in East County, Enholm said he gave the only tape to Alegria.

Alegria said she would have to check with Rao about supplying a copy of the tape to the Times.

"I'm not sure what their (the Central Committee's) policy is," she said.

Rao said he could not agree to a release of the tape without the consent of the other members. But even then, it might not be advisable to do so, he said.

"It could generate threats against the other members," he said. "As chairman, I have a responsibility."

He said that because the December Central Committee meeting is a Christmas party, the earliest he would bring the matter up would be the January meeting.

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