

# Ramapo workers tied to \$130G anti-ward campaign



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RAMAPO — An anti-ward system group with ties to town government said it raised about \$130,000 — with good a chunk from developers and consultants — toward defeating the referendums to add two more Town Board seats and create election districts.

In an email obtained by The Journal News, Ramapo Democratic Party Chairwoman Mona Montal listed her concerns about the opposition's ability to pass the referendums, the money already raised and a victory strategy.

(Photo: TJN Staff)

Montal, the town's director of purchasing, sent the email at 6:43 a.m. Sept. 29, the day before the referendums went before voters.

Immediately after the vote, [the ballots were impounded \(/story/news/local/rockland/2014/09/30/ramapo-ward-system-vote-registered-voters-two-elected-officials/16474431/\)](#) until a state Supreme Court judge could decide on a procedure for the Town Clerk's Office to count the paper affidavits of non-registered voters and absentee votes. On Tuesday, the judge [invalidated the election and ordered new balloting \(/story/news/local/rockland/2014/10/07/judge-margaret-garvey-new-ward-system-vote-ramapo/16871873/\).](#)

"We were not prepared in terms of funding for the type of campaign we needed to launch in order to vote the ward down," Montal wrote. "In one week we needed to raise \$170,000. Thus far we have commitments for \$130,000 of which \$95,000 is already in."

She added the group needed the money immediately and "most of the developers are contributing between \$10,000 and \$20,000 — some consultants have given \$5K. We are still short and without checks in hand today the print house and media organizations will not send out (our) material."

She also said the town's bond counsel, Teno West, would collect the checks. She noted that a referendum doesn't set a maximum amount donors can give. No campaign donation filings are required for referendums, according to the state Board of Elections.

In an interview, Montal downplayed her role with the political action committee 63isEnough, led by Brett Bekritsky, who is related to attorney Ryan Karben's wife. The PAC's name refers to the number of elected officials in the town and its villages.

She insisted that whatever work she did was on her private time and was sent to a small number of people. She said she didn't know how much money was raised, or the names of the developers or consultants who were heavy contributors. She said in her Sept. 29 email the PAC spent money on a video and mailings and those targeted by the email had "the wherewithal and the incentive to make sizeable contributions."

"My email was personal, sent from my personal address on my personal time and had nothing to do with my role as an employee of the Town of Ramapo," Montal said in an email to The Journal News. "I don't believe any of my actions are 'news worthy' and I would hope that once you have all of the facts you would see it that way as well."

"The bottom line is that people on both sides did whatever they could to get their vote out," Montal wrote. "I personally do not believe a ward system will solve any problems that Ramapo is experiencing and therefore I voted no, asked my friends and family to do so as well and sent an email to a few people to help."

Michael Castelluccio of Preserve Ramapo, which opposes the administration of town Supervisor Christopher St. Lawrence, said he was astounded at the amount of money reportedly raised, though not surprised St. Lawrence's supporters had reached out to developers.

"The amount of money shows this effort against us was not about a principle or democracy," Castelluccio said. "This was about developers trying to hang onto their power base on the board and they were willing to spend whatever it took."

Castelluccio said Preserve Ramapo only spent money on signs and a mailing.

Town Board member Daniel Friedman, who's been critical of recent decisions by St. Lawrence, said he was not aware of Montal's involvement, the fundraising or why West got involved.

"I have no idea the extent of their involvement as I wasn't involved or informed," Friedman said.

The referendum was marked by accusations of corruption and dirty tricks.

A woman answering the phones at an anti-ward system phone bank apparently gave the impression that one caller had reached the Board of Elections. Her supporters say she erred in her comments as the phone bank's job was to provide transportation to the polls for "no" voters.

Ramapo GOP treasurer William Weber encouraged ward system supporters in an email to flood the phone bank with calls to clog up its operation. Critics said that he committed a crime and disenfranchised voters. Weber has declined comment.

The Rockland District Attorney's Office is investigating the referendum votes and has declined to comment.

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