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Coachella Valley candidates release fundraising reports

With voters already casting early ballots for the Nov. 5 races, new reports show local city council candidates have increased their fundraising efforts in order to afford their final campaign push.

Campaign finance reports filed this week show two Desert Hot Springs challengers — Councilman Adam Sanchez, a mayoral candidate, and council hopeful Joe McKee — have received more contributions than the incumbents they hope to unseat.

But in Palm Springs, Councilwoman Ginny Foat and Mayor Pro Tem Chris Mills have a substantial financial advantage over their challengers.

The reports, which show money raised and spent by Oct. 19, provide the last comprehensive fundraising snapshot before voters head to the polls.

The reports indicate a more assertive money-raising pace than the paperwork filed in September, which showed only two council candidates with more than \$20,000 in contributions.

But this year's bank totals are still a far cry from previous election cycles that saw candidates raise more than six figures.

"Local elections in an off-year are not likely to bust fund-raising records," said Shaun Bowler, associate dean for social sciences at UC Riverside.

While some local candidates have suggested the slow economic recovery has made it tough to solicit political donations, Bowler said the generally lower-than-normal fundraising totals could be a reflection of how people are feeling about government overall.

“This is not a good time to be a politician,” Bowler said in an email. “It is clear that the government shutdown really had an adverse effect on regard for politicians in general — and conservatives and Republicans in particular.

“To the extent that the dollars really are lower than previous elections of this kind, my response would be that what we are seeing is that dollars are a kind of measure of the regard in which people hold politicians.”

The fundraising pace hasn’t deterred some outside investments into the race.

Palm Springs Mayor Steve Pougnet isn’t on this year’s ballot, but he’s spent almost \$7,900 since July. The Democrat recently sent voters a mailer expressing his support for his council colleagues as well as Measure B, a proposed tax on medical marijuana dispensaries.

The Palm Springs Police Officers’ Association also sent out a mailer and a letter to support the re-elections of Foat and Mills.

Association president William Hutchinson said he expected the group would spend about \$25,000 in this election cycle, including some voter outreach the group has planned in the next 10 days.

The association spent about \$100,000 in the last election cycle to help Councilman Paul Lewin oust then-incumbent Lee Weigel, Hutchinson said.

Even though the ballot is smaller than Palm Springs has seen in years past, Hutchinson said the group’s members didn’t want to sit back and assume the incumbents “have the election in the bag.”

“Our philosophy is the second you sit back and have that attitude, people surprise you,” he added. “We have the ability to do that with the healthy (political action committee) fund. If we can get our message out there, it’s important.”

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Fundraising at a glance

Here’s a look at the money races in the two city council elections in Desert Hot Springs and Palm Springs.

The reports, due Thursday, show the money raised and spent between Jan. 1 and Oct. 19, the end of the latest fundraising period.

Some candidates entered 2013 with money already in the bank. The amount raised may include non-monetary contributions to the campaign, such as providing food at a campaign event.

Desert Hot Springs Mayoral race

- **Mayor Yvonne Parks has raised \$18,740, spent \$27,136 and has \$3,396 in cash on hand.**
- **Councilman Adam Sanchez has raised \$19,057, spent \$17,992 and has \$1,065 in cash on hand.**
- **The city clerk did not provide paperwork for challenger John-Paul Valdez. Forms are not late as long as they were mailed before Thursday's filing deadline.**

Desert Hot Springs City Council race

- **Mayor Pro Tem Scott Matas has raised \$16,691, spent \$13,447 and has \$3,255 in cash on hand.**
- **Councilwoman Jan Pye has raised \$13,306, spent \$10,549 and has \$2,757 in cash on hand.**
- **Challenger Joe McKee has raised \$34,636, spent \$27,499 and has \$3,096 in cash on hand. He has a \$10,000 loan from himself that remains unpaid.**
- **Challenger Robert Bentley previously filed a form to say he didn't plan on raising or spending more than \$1,000.**

Palm Springs City Council

- **Councilwoman Ginny Foat has raised \$56,396, spent \$31,394 and has \$25,722 in cash on hand.**
- **Mayor Pro Tem Chris Mills has raised \$43,550, spent \$23,750 and has \$19,295 in cash on hand.**
- **Challenger Judy Deertrack has raised \$18,570, spent \$18,432 and has \$1,359 in cash on hand. She has a \$10,000 loan to repay.**
- **Challenger Jeffrey Nichols previously filed a form to say he didn't plan on raising or spending more than \$1,000. This week, he filed a form to say he has \$150 in the bank, but did not itemize any donations or expenses.**