

ELECTIONS

Stockton councilmember Padilla may face censure for city-funded event with candidates

Aaron Leathley The Stockton Record

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Two Stockton City Council members have requested a hearing to consider censuring District 1 Councilmember Michele Padilla over her use of taxpayer funds for an event where political candidates spoke onstage.

In their letter to Stockton's interim city clerk Friday, District 3 Councilmember Michael Blower and District 5 Councilmember Brando Villapudua asked to put the censure matter on the agenda for the council's next meeting Aug. 20.

"We believe that Councilmember Padilla specifically violated policy ... when she used council discretionary funds to host an event that was political in nature on Saturday, July 20, 2024 at Michael Faklis Park," Blower and Villapudua wrote.

Stockton's policy governing discretionary funds explicitly bars their use for political purposes. Councilmembers receive \$15,000 in discretionary funds each year, while the mayor receives \$60,000, the policy states.

"The council policy regarding use of discretionary funds just couldn't be clearer," Blower said Friday. "Basic common sense should tell you if the city's paying for the event, you can't make it political."

The event in question was a public cookout Padilla hosted for District 1 residents and other attendees.

During the cookout, Padilla invited city council candidates Mario Enriquez and Jason Lee, as well as San Joaquin County Board of Supervisors candidate Mario Gardea and Stockton mayoral candidate Christina Fugazi onstage, clips shared with The Record show.

Some candidates' comments conveyed specific messages about the November election.

Enriquez, for instance, told the crowd: "I know each and every one of us are tired of the status quo, and electing the same old, same old people who have no idea what they're doing."

"So I'm proud to say I'm running for city council," he added.

From the stage, Lee said, "To get behind anybody else other than Christina Fugazi will take the city of Stockton back a hundred years."

"The person she's running against is bad for the city, he's bad for women and he's bad for the progress of all you who are raising children in this community," he added.

Padilla did not immediately return a request for comment about the possible censure Friday.

In a July 25 interview, the councilwoman said, "'At no time did I ever feel ... or consider that this was politically driven; that their comments were politically driven."

"What led to that is, I was specifically speaking with regard to how partnerships are important throughout the city," Padilla said. "I said I want to invite my friends up, and I introduced them as my friends."

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