

Present: Tom Brown, Steph Feiring, Marilyn Bair, Steve Noetzel, Jean Tokarek, Tim Durning, Tim Hsu, Jim Cowan, Susan Pfeifer, Mark Nagel, David Quan, Joni Eisen.

I. Welcome: Tom called the meeting to order at 7:10PM.

II. Minutes approved from the November 30, 2006 General Membership Meeting.

III. Agenda approved, with Steve requesting to bring up an additional item at the end.

IV. Ratification of acting director positions

By acclamation, the group ratified the following members to fill out vacated terms until elections in the spring: Julie Tsai as Acting Communications Director, David Quan as Acting Political Director, Joni Eisen as Acting Secretary.

V. Amendments to our bylaws in support of 501.c.4 status with the IRS

Mark and Tom reported on the likely conclusion of a lengthy process, the IRS only recently having responded to our 2-year-old application to become a 501.c.4 (incorporated in CA as a nonprofit social welfare organization exempt from paying taxes, donations to which however are not tax-exempt). Requirements for approval include changes to the by-laws, e.g., deletion of any mention of Howard Dean or the word "candidate," and creation of an entirely separate PAC for candidate- and (as Jim pointed out) party-related political activity. Tom went over the changes to the bylaws.

Mark explained that this process, while complicated and costly, will ultimately be simplifying and freeing. The third lawyer Mark and Tom consulted (Peter Bagatelos) proved to be the charm, able to state clearly to the IRS that we are able to stay within the law for 501.c.4s. The lawyer approved changes made by Tom and Mark, and made a few more.

To avoid trouble with the IRS, we are creating a State PAC to oversee and account for our "political" (meaning candidate-driven) activities. The burden of being a PAC: reporting expenditures to state and local elections and ethics commissions. Eventually, we expect to create a federal PAC as well. Tim D said that as Treasurer of Harvey Milk Democratic Club he's learned that it's important to file the necessary spending reports in a timely fashion. The advantage: freedom to do what we want without fear of getting into trouble. The accounting for SF4D PAC activities must be completely separate from SF4D, even though our expenditures for these activities have always been below the \$1,000 threshold for mandatory reporting. We also must be very clear as to which entity is sponsoring activities in terms of communications with the general public.

Steve asked about SF4D existing as purely a PAC. If we filed only as a PAC, we would not be free to do issue advocacy without tax consequences. Having both affords the greatest freedom to engage in both overtly political and nonpartisan public policy activities. Website must have separate pages for PAC and SF4D. Members must be informed that part of their dues will go to PAC activities.

All members present were given a copy of the newly amended draft bylaws. After discussion, the members passed the amended bylaws by a two thirds majority vote.

VI. Approval of supplementary budget for legal and accounting services

Tom explained that we did not know precisely what our final legal costs would be for these changes. The proposal was to approve a supplementary budget, with the provision that the expenditures were not to exceed available funds, taking into account our other expenses.

After discussion, the membership approved a supplementary budget for legal and accounting services made necessary because of our pending 501.c.4 application and reporting requirements for our new PAC: 10 yes votes, 2 abstentions.

VI. Should we adopt an official policy on the Iraq war escalation?

Suggested position statement: "San Francisco for Democracy supports an early and orderly withdrawal of US troops from Iraq."

On the Iraq war and escalation, the membership voted to adopt the following official policy, after substituting the word “immediate” for “early”: “San Francisco for Democracy supports an immediate and orderly withdrawal of US troops from Iraq.” The vote was 6 yes, 5 no, 1 abstain. Members can now appear at antiwar protests and elsewhere as official representatives of San Francisco for Democracy against the war.

VII. Should San Francisco for Democracy officially endorse the DC Voting Rights Act (HR 328)?

At the request of former member Clayton Mansfield (now a member of DC for Democracy), we considered officially endorsing HR 328, the DC Voting Rights Act, which would give the (mostly Democratic) residents of Washington, DC their first voting Representative in Congress, at the same time adding another Representative to Utah’s (mostly Republican) Congressional delegation. Jean and others wondered what giving Utah another rep had to do with voting rights for DC residents. It’s how to garner bipartisan support and therefore passage of the bill. Some people said that they trusted Clayton’s political astuteness in this matter. The endorsement carried: 8 yes, 2 no, 1 abstain.

VIII. Should San Francisco for Democracy adopt the following Health Care mission statement:

“San Francisco for Democracy is committed to the principle that quality health care should be available to all Americans, regardless of their socioeconomic condition.”

Next we voted on adopting a healthcare mission statement (see above). After a lively discussion and input from other members, Joni suggested the following alternative statement:

“San Francisco for Democracy is committed to the principle that quality healthcare is the right of all U.S. residents.”

The motion carried with a vote of 8 yes, 3 abstain. Jim expressed the hope that this will not be an empty statement, but instead will be supported by actions concerning healthcare, spearheaded by a healthcare task force.

IX. Should San Francisco for Democracy officially endorse the California Health Insurance Reliability Act (SB 840), the single-payer measure passed by the Legislature in 2006, vetoed by the Governor, and scheduled to be reintroduced by Senator Kuehl in 2007?

Membership voted unanimously to endorse this legislation.

X. Committee reports.

Program - Susan said there will be a joint event with Sierra Club and Democracy Action on global warming April 19 in connection with Earth Day. It will either be Al Gore’s “Inconvenient Truth” PowerPoint presentation by a live, trained non-Al Gore, or another slide show with emphasis on what YOU can do. The membership indicated that it preferred the former.

Membership & Meetup - Tim H reported that of 111 members, 52 have paid their dues, and that the March 7 meetup will feature Tom Ammiano on city healthcare (probably) and Jim Soper on SF election integrity (definitely).

Political Affairs – David listed the Coordinators of various issues that we already have, with or without associated working groups, and mentioned the need for an Environmental Issues Coordinator.

XI. New item. Steve suggested a merger with Democracy Action, since our membership, goals and values overlap. In the ensuing discussion, others pointed out that there are in fact such important differences (e.g., DemAction is a strongly partisan chartered Democratic club and SF4D wants the freedom to endorse candidates from any party) that it would be best to continue simply to partner and co-sponsor activities.

Meeting adjourned at around 9:10PM.

Respectfully submitted,  
Joni Eisen, Acting Secretary