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LOCAL NEWS

City of Industry chooses close friend of consultant as city clerk without discussion

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The City of Industry's council passed on three candidates with a combined 65 years of experience to give the reins of their upcoming election to an attorney and former legislator who has never worked as a city clerk.

Former Assemblyman and State Senator William Morrow is the best friend, former classmate and political ally of one of Industry's most influential consultants, convicted politician Frank Hill.

Hill now works for the Cordoba Corporation, a consulting firm hired to transform Industry's under-used public utility into a powerhouse capable of supplying the small city's thousands of manufacturers, warehouses, tech companies and retailers with electricity.

On Thursday, Morrow was chosen to serve as Industry's city clerk until the June 2017 election wraps up. One councilman objected to the appointment — expected to pay \$5,000 a month — but no one discussed Morrow's qualifications or background before the vote.

“I didn't really have enough information, I was hoping we'd maybe do an interview process or something,” said Councilman Newell Ruggles, the lone dissenter. “The first time I had ever heard of him was when I got my agenda packet.”

Ruggles said he wants the county to handle the city's elections, because the small, interconnected nature of Industry makes it easy for the electorate to get pressured to vote a certain way.

“I don't want people to feel intimidated, or to be evicted from their homes, or to lose their job because they voted the wrong way,” he said.

How Morrow was chosen

Mayor Mark Radecki nominated Morrow as a follow up to a comment from Ruggles about the need for independence in the election. Within seconds, the nomination was seconded and approved.

Reached by email, Radecki replied with a statement and chose not to answer questions about his familiarity with Morrow or Hill's influence on the decision.

"I supported the appointment of Mr. Morrow because I believe he will be impartial as he resides away from the San Gabriel Valley and as an attorney he will pay attention to the details," Radecki wrote in his statement. "I have no doubt that Mr. Morrow is committed to a fair and legally correct election process."

Does he need experience?

City Manager Paul Philips serves as the city's appointed city clerk, typically a role that relies heavily on professional staff. But Philips felt he shouldn't handle the upcoming election and wanted someone else to step in. The three other candidates had 10, 25, and 30 years of experience, respectively.

Byron Pope, the city clerk for Beverly Hills, said it's not unheard of for the role to go to someone without any experience, as many cities in California elect city clerks. Beverly Hills similarly runs its elections without assistance from the county.

"They could very easily do it, without having known it before, if they have the people in place that know what to do," Pope said.

It is standard for cities to hire a firm to help run their elections, Pope said. Industry also recently promoted Philip's assistant, Diane Schlichting, to Chief Deputy City Clerk.

Elections in Industry are rare. The city has less than 100 registered voters, with most living in city-owned housing or homes owned by the city's former mayor. Few people run against incumbents.

Industry's last election, the first **contested one in decades**, was chaotic, with attorneys repeatedly and unsuccessfully challenging voters' residency. That election resulted in three new council members, with ties to former Mayor David Perez and Hill, winning seats.

Several city employees and residents were fired or **evicted** following the turn over.

The election attracted media attention because of the nasty battle that occurred around it. Former City Manager Kevin Radecki **sued Perez** and his family's companies, right before the election after an internal review found the city **paid \$326 million** to the companies over a 20 year period.

Perez's attorneys accused Radecki of **timing his lawsuit** in an attempt to disrupt the Perez-backed candidates in the race.

Who is William Morrow?

It's not clear how Morrow ended up in the running. During the meeting Thursday, Philips said he reached out to the three other candidates because of his familiarity with their past work.

It seemingly was the other way around for Morrow, who sent a letter to Philips offering his services. Neither Morrow or Philips returned repeated calls on Thursday and Friday.

"I strongly believe that it is crucial to our democratic system of government that the integrity, security, transparency and voter access in all elections be fully preserved," Morrow wrote in his letter. "Unlawful or inappropriate efforts to affect the outcome of any election must be fully guarded against and prevented."

The Republican politician is a private attorney, whose business address listed with the California Bar Association is a residence in Oceanside.

A website listed on his letter to the city was not finished as of Friday.

Morrow served in the Assembly for three terms and in the State Senate for two. His districts covered northern San Diego County and southern Orange County.

According to **The San Diego Union Tribune**, Morrow was supported by and worked with the Minutemen, an anti-illegal immigration group known to patrol the borders.

While Morrow does not list any direct experience as a city clerk, he does mention having worked closely on elections as a candidate, an attorney and a consultant. He noted he attended an annual conference for the California Association of Clerks and Elected Officials last month.

The Frank Hill Connection

In 1994, State Senator Frank Hill was convicted for taking a \$2,500 payoff from an undercover FBI agent to help with legislation. He spent four years in prison.

After the sentencing, Morrow hired Hill's wife, Faye, for a \$60,000 a year job as an administrative assistant.

"I cannot help the fact that what brought Faye Hill into the job market was the conviction of her husband," Morrow said in 1994. "I would have hired her whether or not Senator Hill was a state senator."

Frank Hill and Morrow were student body vice president and president, respectively, at Mt. San Antonio College and went to UCLA together, according to a 1994 article in the Whittier Daily News.

Hill was the best man at Morrow's wedding and loaned him \$106,000 for one of Morrow's campaigns.

Hill later forgave nearly half of the loan, according to news reports at the time.

Another of Hill's former allies in the legislature, former Democratic Assemblyman Mike Roos, was appointed to the board of a city-subsidized convalescent hospital earlier. Roos and Hill worked together at a consulting firm after Hill left prison.