

Why you should vote YES on the KPFA recall

by Margy Wilkinson (chair, KPFA Local Station Board; member, SaveKPFA)

The problem

Let me paint a picture of where KPFA is now. Because it should concern all of us – no matter which side we're on.

A little over a year ago, Pacifica abruptly took off the air what was then the top fundraiser at KPFA – the Morning Show. It also happened to be the youngest, most diverse, and most listened-to daily program produced at KPFA.

The drop in fund raising was devastating. During fund drives, KPFA used to raise 40% of its money on weekdays before 10AM. The amount has dropped by more than half – based on the number of days KPFA spends in fund drives, we estimate the lost fundraising at roughly \$500,000 per year.

Some say that the station is raising as much money as before. This is true and also very misleading. To maintain its level of fundraising after the morning changes, KPFA had to increase the amount of time it spends in fund drives by 30%. We added 19 days of fundraising last year. We're budgeted to add an additional week this year.

This is really bad news: We know that fund drives send many listeners elsewhere. The longer fund drives are, the more people tune out. The station spends the time in between fund drives trying to bring back the listeners that were lost. And if the fund drives go too long, there is less time to do that and then there are fewer people left listening to ask for money next time.

Let's look at our sister station in New York, WBAI. They spend **one in three** calendar days in some kind of fund drive. They ran a \$750,000 deficit last year, and they're threatening to bring the rest of the network down with them. Pacifica has already been bouncing paychecks and illegally diverting money from retirement funds because WBAI can't pay its own bills. WBAI raises about 80% of what KPFA does – however it broadcasts to a region with almost three times as many people as KPFA's. WBAI should

be raising three times what we do – not 20% less. KPFA's current fund drive is scheduled to run a whopping 23 days – and it's falling behind, so it may be extended.

Meanwhile, two of the three people Pacifica laid off from the Morning Show, Laura Prives and Brian Edwards-Tiekert, are back at KPFA because Pacifica couldn't make their layoffs stick. These are two people who have a proven track record producing excellent programming and raising large amounts of money. But when it was forced to reinstate them, Pacifica chose to put them into other jobs.

How we got here

So, how did we get here?

First, I think it's important to note that killing the Morning Show was the first time Pacifica's executive director had imposed a programming change on any of its stations since the lockout of KPFA's staff in 1999.

Pacifica's executive director did this over the objections of thousands of KPFA listeners who wrote in to protest. She did it over the objections of KPFA's staff union – which got Brian Edwards-Tiekert reinstated with full back pay. She did it over the objections of KPFA's local managers, both of whom quit in protest soon after. And most importantly, she did it over the objections of KPFA's elected Local Station Board – which is supposed to be the body that ensures KPFA's staff and listeners have a say in how the station is run.

Pacifica then proceeded to attack every one of those sites of resistance:

It hired a \$400/hour anti-union law firm to fight KPFA's union. Though Pacifica said publicly that its decision to cut the Morning Show was made out of financial necessity, it spent roughly \$70,000 in legal fees to keep Aimee Allison from coming back to work. (The cost of her salary and benefits for the balance of the fiscal year was considerably less than that.) And rejected over \$60,000 offered by listeners to restore the show.

KPFA's local management, quit not once, but twice as a result – Ahmad Anderson and Amelia Gonzalez were gone by the end of 2010. When Amit Pendyal was hired in early

2011, with the input of KPFA's staff and Local Station Board, he quit after just a few weeks. Then Pacifica's executive director hand-picked KPFA's current interim manager without any input from KPFA's staff or board – in fact, she picked him without even telling us the last manager was gone. She had told us the former manager was taking a leave, and would return and then replaced him with the new interim General Manager.

And Pacifica has done everything it can to overturn the democratic will of the listeners and staff who elected SaveKPFA members by a 2-1 margin last fall. First, Pacifica's national elections supervisor, who was the candidate supported by Tracy Rosenberg, disqualified three staff members' ballots – AFTER the vote was counted. She removed their individual ballots, identified by code numbers printed on the ballots from the counted votes and as a result changed the outcome of the staff election. This blatantly illegal action was overturned by a court injunction. Then, Pacifica barred two of our representatives from taking their seats on the National Board – the one that actually has some power over Arlene Engelhardt. This was overturned by court injunction as well. But Pacifica defied that injunction, and didn't change course until the judge scheduled a contempt of court hearing ordering the chair of the PNB who lives in LA and the secretary who lives in NY to come to Oakland prepared, depending on what happened in court, to surrender themselves to Alameda county sheriffs. These maneuvers kept our representatives from taking their seats on Pacifica's Board for the first six months of their term.

This was the point at which it was decided the only recourse was to run a recall campaign – the point at which Pacifica had violated all the mechanisms of accountability, of local control, of democratic process, that KPFA's listeners and staff fought so hard for 10 years ago.

Why Tracy?

So let me tell you why we're recalling Tracy in particular. Because at every step of the way, Tracy has been behind the problems we're dealing with.

Let me backtrack: We think the Morning Show was targeted because Brian Edwards-Tiekert was one of Tracy's strongest opponents when he served as a staff representative on the KPFA Local Station Board. Brian survived an attempt to recall him by a 2 to 1 margin in a vote counted after his term on the board had expired.

In September 2010, by her own admission, Tracy drew up a list of people to lay off at KPFA. Again, by her own admission, the list did not follow seniority order, as required by KPFA's union contract. She presented this list to Pacifica's executive director at a secret meeting with other national board members from her faction – and Pacifica acted on it.

Then KPFA's union proposed cost-saving measures to avoid layoffs – more than enough to save Aimee Allison's job – Tracy told a meeting of the Pacifica National Finance Committee that it should discuss them and vote them down “to send a message.” Pacifica's executive director, Arlene Engelhardt, then rejected the union's proposals, citing the vote of the finance committee.

When Pacifica handed out the Morning Show's time slot to its political supporters, in violation of the Pacifica by-laws, Tracy picked most of the people who took over the air. Peter Phillips, who got one of those time slots, has confirmed this in writing.

Then, without the knowledge or permission of anyone in any position of responsibility at KPFA, Tracy misappropriated a list of emails for all of KPFA's members, loaded it onto a server outside KPFA's control, and started sending out emails purporting to be from KPFA promoting the “Morning Mix” – and nothing else. This was all in violation of KPFA's email policy and after an extensive investigation, the LSB censured her for her actions.

In January 2011, when Pacifica voted to bar our local representatives from being seated on the National Board, it was Tracy's motion that Pacifica voted through. In fact, to get her motion through fast enough to keep Dan Siegel and Laura Prives from taking their seats, Tracy actually lied to the Pacifica National Board. She said her motion to overturn

the results of our election was the product of a committee she chairs. In fact, the committee had never seen the motion, much less voted on it.

At this point, we simply can't do the job you all elected us to do – to put KPFA on a healthy footing again – with Tracy in office. And that's why we're asking you to remove her.

Tracy Rosenberg has consistently violated KPFA and Pacifica's rules, is openly unapologetic about those violations, and refuses even to acknowledge them as violations.

Tracy's defenders will tell you that this is a financial burden on KPFA – we think removing Tracy is the one way to get KPFA back on a sound financial footing.

Tracy's defenders will tell you that this recall is divisive – as if her actions over the past year and a half have not even more divisive. But what we will say is this: at every turn, we have tried to find solutions and common ground.

KPFA's union proposed cost-saving measures to avoid layoffs – this is a union whose members were willing to sacrifice their own pay to save another union member's job but Pacifica rejected them, at Tracy's urging. SaveKPFA raised \$63,000 in pledges from listeners to restore the Morning Show but Tracy dismissed it as “a novelty check”, and Pacifica rejected the pledges, opting instead to pay an anti-union law firm more than \$70,000 to fight to keep Aimee off the air. Every time KPFA's staff and listeners have tried to put solutions on the table, to work through this crisis, they have been rebuffed – and Tracy has been at the center of it. If you want to diminish the divisiveness at KPFA, then I urge you to vote YES on the recall of Tracy Rosenberg.