

Pro-ambulance fee group in Montgomery County outspent volunteers by 5-1 margin

\$161,000 raised in support of Question A on ballot to opposition's \$32,000

County News | Erin Cunningham

The group that led the failed effort to charge ambulance fees in Montgomery County spent five times as much as the opposing group, according to campaign finance reports.

The fee, proposed by County Executive Isiah Leggett (D) and adopted by the County Council earlier this year, was defeated by referendum in the Nov. 2 election. The topic emerged as one of the most controversial of the campaign season, with political action committees leading efforts on both sides of the issue.

The Vote for A Committee, which supported ambulance fees, raised \$161,356.87. The Committee to Oppose Ambulance Fees raised \$32,000, reports show.

The reports, filed Nov. 23, cover the period from Oct. 18 to Nov. 16.

The Vote for A Committee raised the bulk of its money from unions, including about \$100,000 from Montgomery County's Career Fire Fighter Association (\$50,000) and a related political action committee (\$44,906.87).

Friends of Ike Leggett also contributed \$21,950, and Councilman Marc Elrich (D-At large) of Takoma Park contributed \$1,000 from his campaign funds, reports show.

The Vote for A Committee had about \$83,987.42 left in its account as of its filing, but owes the same amount, the report shows.

The PAC was the focus of some controversy earlier this month when Councilman Philip M. Andrews (D-Dist. 3) of Gaithersburg questioned whether it would report work done by county employees on the ambulance fee issue as in-kind contributions.

The PAC does not report in-kind donations from the county government. The sole in-kind contribution was from Patrick Lacefield, head of the county's public information office, who donated a sound system for the PAC's kickoff. The report valued the donation at \$203.52.

The Committee to Oppose Ambulance Fees raised \$32,000 and spent the same amount, reports show. The group raised half of its funds — \$16,000 — from the county's Volunteer Fire-Rescue Association. The other half came from Andrews' campaign account.

Council could delay recess

to tackle budget cuts

The Montgomery County Council might delay its winter recess until Dec. 21 in order to vote on what could be \$200 million in budget cuts, according to Vice President Valerie Ervin.

Ervin (D-Dist. 5) of Silver Spring is expected to be elected council president during the Dec. 7 council meeting. The council was scheduled to hold its last meeting before break on Dec. 14. The council returns from recess Jan. 18.

County Executive Isiah Leggett (D) expects to propose about \$30 million in budget cuts Friday.

Ervin said the council is likely to meet through Dec. 21 to make a decision on Leggett's recommendations.

The county's increased budget shortfall, which had been estimated at \$145 million until mid-November, was due to lost ambulance fee revenue, an anticipated increase in Montgomery County Public Schools spending and a possible decrease in federal funding, Leggett said.