

# Politics go to the ballet

By Editor Ken Martin · September 23, 2019 10:34 PM



Ballet Austin's photograph for Carmina Burana

## Program distributed as Long Center performance included a flyer urging "Vote No in November"

Ballet goes settling into their seats for a look at the program before the performance of Ballet Austin's *Carmina Burana* Saturday night were surprised to find a political flier inserted. (See photo.)

The flier printed on brown paper asks "Why Vote No on Proposition A?" and "Why Vote No on Proposition B" and provides bullet-point answers.

The bottom of the flyer lists the Long Center, Austin Symphony, Austin Opera, Ballet Austin, and Zach Theatre.

The Texas Ethics Commission's description of political advertising would ordinarily require political advertising like this to be labeled as such, and include who paid for it, and name the committee that authorized it. Texas Election Code, Section 255.001(d), however, states that requirement does not apply to "circulars or flyers that cost in the aggregate less than \$500 to publish and distribute."



Julie Loignon

Julie Loignon, director of audience engagement, sales and services for Ballet Austin, said in a telephone interview the flyer "was something the Long Center wanted to insert in our program."

A staff member at the Long Center, responding to *The Austin Bulldog's* call, said she would check with others and see if she could get someone to call back to provide more information, but no one has done so today.

### Vote-no committees were not consulted

**PACE PAC**—The bottom of the flyer lists two website links, one of which is [www.allaustingainsta.com](http://www.allaustingainsta.com), which states on its home page: "Proposition A will inflict devastating consequences on our community and on many iconic Austin cultural events and institutions."



James Russell

James Russell, chair of the Visitor Impact Task Force since January 2017, founded PACE PAC, a specific-purpose committee (SPAC) August 14, 2019, for the purpose of opposing Proposition A on the November 5, 2019, ballot. The PAC will not need to file a contribution and expenditure report until 30 days before the election.

Russell told *The Austin Bulldog* he started the PAC because he has been an Austin resident almost his entire life and part of organizations that would be adversely affected if Proposition A is approved by voters.

"I feel a moral obligation to be sure that cultural institutions and events stay intact," he said.

The site indicates it is Paid Political Advertising authorized by PACE SPAC and list its top donors as SXSW LLC, Robert Littlefield, and Anne Burrridge. **Annie Burrridge** is general director and CEO of Austin Opera.

Annie Burrridge

SXSW LLC is managed by SXSW Holdings Inc. and Starr Hill Presents SX LLC. SXSW Holdings Inc., in turn, is managed by Roland Swenson, president; *Austin Chronicle* Publisher Nick Barbaro, vice president; and former *Austin Chronicle* Editor Louis Black, secretary.

Robert Littlefield is actually Austin political consultant Robert Mark Littlefield. He said in an email that he will ask the website listing to be changed to avoid confusion.

Russell said he was not involved in putting out the flyer but he had seen a picture of it. He said that he had a legal memo that supported the first three reasons to vote no on Prop A listed in the flyer. He said he would email a copy of the legal memo but it was not received by deadline. He did not respond to follow-up phone messages.

Mark Littlefield

**PHAM PAC**—As reported September 11, Jim Wick founded this SPAC July 12, 2019, for the sole purpose of making sure that Proposition B on the November 5 ballot goes down in flames.

In a telephone interview today, Wick said the first time he saw the Vote-No flyer was when *The Austin Bulldog* emailed it to him for comment.

He said he had nothing to do with putting out the flyer, but added, "I'm happy to see it out there."

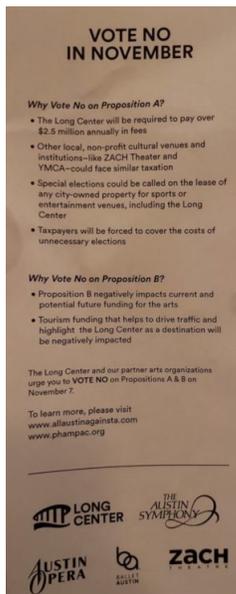
Jim Wick

Wick said the two reasons listed in the flyer for voting no on Prop B are correct and said it "apparently" been produced by the Long Center, which is listed as one of two dozen entities and organizations listed as supporters of PHAM PAC on its [website](http://www.phampac.org).

The PHAM PAC website does not name its top donors, stating only that it is political advertising paid by PHAM PAC. That appears not to be in compliance with the Austin City Charter, Section 2-2-33, which requires "the names of the five largest contributors" ... to be "clear and conspicuous" on "internet advertisement."

Wick said, in a 10:17pm email, "As we discussed today, the website is fresh and still under construction... I'll make sure to get the disclaimer in tomorrow when completing the site. I'd note that the Unconventional Austin [website](http://www.unconventionalaustin.com) does not contain a proper disclaimer."

Wick is correct. The site states, "Paid Political Advertisement by Unconventional Austin PAC."



This flyer was inserted in the program booklet for Ballet Austin's performance of Carmina Burana.

**Unconventional Austin criticizes flyer**

Contacted earlier today for comments, Unconventional Austin backer John Riedie, CEO of Austin Creative Alliance, said in an email, "The (flyer's) points on Prop B are patently false. Prop B not only locks in funding, it protects it from potential cost overruns and increased losses from the conventional center."

*John Riedie* Responding to *The Austin Bulldog's* question about whether Prop B if passed would affect the \$3 million approved by the Austin City Council to support music, Riedie, a member of the City's Tourism Commission since June 2018, said, "If Prop B passed there would be even more money available for music. Moving money from the Convention Center to live music, as the council did last week, is something I suggested at the very first Tourism Commission meeting."

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Ken Martin has been covering local government and politics in the Austin area since 1981. See more on Ken on the [About page](#).

Email [ken@theaustinbulldog.org](mailto:ken@theaustinbulldog.org).

**Who funds this work?** This report was made possible by contributions to *The Austin Bulldog*, which operates as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit for investigative reporting in the public interest.

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