

Union reportedly helped housekeeper confront Whitman

San Jose Mercury News (California)

November 23, 2010 Tuesday

Copyright 2010 San Jose Mercury News All Rights Reserved

Section: NEWS

Length: 591 words

Body

SAN FRANCISCO -- The California Nurses Association helped the illegal immigrant former housekeeper of billionaire Meg Whitman make her story public, a revelation that helped sink the gubernatorial hopes of the former eBay chief executive, according to a report published Tuesday in the San Francisco Chronicle.

Nicky Diaz Santillan, whose story knocked Whitman's tightly orchestrated campaign off message when she came forward in September, reached out for help from the union because she believed she was unfairly fired by Whitman, the newspaper reported, citing people who were close to the matter but would only speak if their names were not used.

Diaz Santillan contacted a friend who knew a member of the nurses union, according to the Chronicle. The union then put the Mexican-born housekeeper in touch with an immigration attorney and celebrity attorney Gloria Allred, who appeared with her at a Los Angeles news conference in September.

Diaz Santillan, who lived in Union City while working for Whitman, said Whitman knew she was an illegal immigrant during her nine years as a maid. She and Allred also produced a 2003 Social Security document saying the government number given by Diaz Santillan did not match her name, a tip-off that she might be in the country illegally.

The letter included a handwritten note from Whitman's husband, a Stanford neurosurgeon, directing the housekeeper to check it out.

Whitman said she fired the maid when she learned of her illegal status in June 2009, just months after Whitman had formed an exploratory committee to run for governor. She blamed the campaign of Democratic Gov.-elect Jerry Brown and his union supporters for exposing her.

Nurses union executive director Rose Ann DeMoro declined to comment Tuesday to The Associated Press on whether the union helped Diaz Santillan. But in an interview with the AP and in a public letter addressed to Diaz Santillan published last week, she praised the illegal immigrant for her courage in coming forward.

DeMoro said the union's goal is to help working women and advocate for those who don't have a voice.

"So it's natural that if someone would come to us for help, that we would help them," she said.

She said Diaz Santillan helped highlight "the arrogance of wealth." Whitman set spending records in her race, giving her campaign \$144 million from her personal fortune.

"It is really just a striking thing. She's one of the richest women in the world and (Diaz Santillan is) someone who is essentially living paycheck to paycheck on survival mode," DeMoro told the AP on Tuesday.

Union reportedly helped housekeeper confront Whitman

A campaign adviser to Whitman, Rob Stutzman, was traveling Tuesday and did not immediately return an e-mail message seeking comment.

Whitman hired Diaz Santillan through an agency and paid her \$23 an hour for 15 hours per week.

The nurse's union backed Brown's candidacy and campaigned vigorously against Whitman, following her to events with a character it dubbed "Queen Meg."

The newspaper said the housekeeper was emotionally and financially devastated by her sudden firing by Whitman in 2009, for whom she had worked since 2000. Afterward, Diaz Santillan had asked Whitman for help finding someone who could help her gain legal status.

Whitman refused and the former housekeeper claimed Whitman later left her a voicemail message, warning her: "You don't know me, and I don't know you."

Diaz Santillan and her immigration attorney are now addressing her status with the U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

Associated Press writer Juliet Williams contributed to this report.

Classification

Language: ENGLISH

Publication-Type: Newspaper

Subject: ILLEGAL IMMIGRANTS (90%); IMMIGRATION (89%); NURSES & NURSING (89%); WEALTHY PEOPLE (89%); US STATE GOVERNMENT (89%); WOMEN (78%); EXECUTIVES (77%); INTERVIEWS (77%); LABOR UNIONS (76%); WOMEN WORKERS (72%); WRONGFUL TERMINATION (71%); PRESS CONFERENCES (68%); LAWYERS (67%)

Company: ASSOCIATED PRESS (53%)

Industry: NURSES & NURSING (89%); LAWYERS (67%)

Person: MARGARET C WHITMAN (79%); JERRY BROWN (58%)

Geographic: SAN FRANCISCO, CA, USA (79%); LOS ANGELES, CA, USA (78%); CALIFORNIA, USA (79%)

Load-Date: November 27, 2010