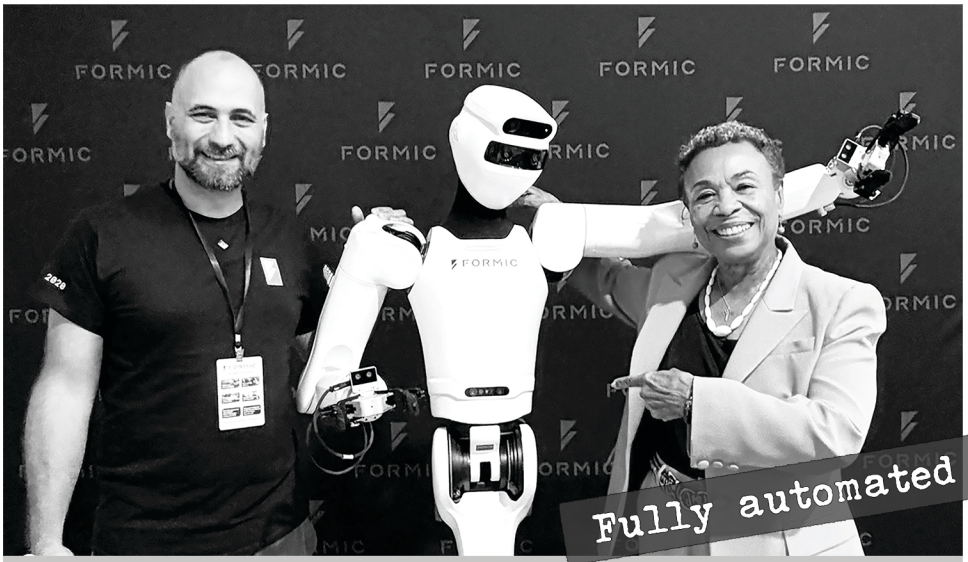
Oakland Watch
ACCOUNTABILITY - ETHICS - GOVERNANCE- ANALYSIS
ONE DOLLAR | OAKLAND, CALIFORNIA | ISSUE # 2

THE NEW BOSS

SAME AS THE OLD BOSS.



BARBARA LEE WAS THE MACHINE'S DESPERATION CHOICE TO KEEP POWER.

Former mayor Sheng Thao is on trial for bribery and corruption. But the Oakland city Machine that elected Thao is still running City Hall today. After voters threw Thao out of office and the feds indicted her, the city hall Machine was desperate to cling to power. It chose Barbara Lee as its new figurehead. Barbara Lee defended Thao against the recall, and still hasn't recanted that support. The Machine rewarded Lee by throwing its support behind her mayoral campaign. Sheng Thao is on trial... but the Machine isn't (yet).

Public sector unions, the Chamber of Commerce, Piedmont billionaire Quinn Delaney, "progressive" nonprofit activitsts, and an in-group of city staff and consultants are still firmly in control at Oakland city hall...

INSIDE:

- Oakland's new boss... same as the old boss
- Who's paying for Thao's lawyer?

...and MORE › › ›

WHO'S PAYING FOR SHENG THAO'S LAWYER?



A BROKE, RECALLED MAYOR — AND A WHITE-SHOE LEGAL DEFENSE. HER DISCLOSED LEGAL DEFENSE FUND WOULDN'T COVER ONE WEEK.

SOURCES AT OAKLANDWATCH.ORG

Sheng Thao's attorney is Jeffrey Tsai, managing partner of DLA Piper's San Francisco office. Tsai is a former federal prosecutor and special assistant attorney general under Kamala Harris. Lawyers like that bill thousands per hour. A six-week federal trial, with a defense team behind it, will easily cost millions.

Thao is a renter. Her own attorney told the jury she does not live "a luxury lifestyle." So who is paying for her defense? Here is what the public record shows – and what it suggests... *(continued on p. 7)*

ONE DOWN, MANY TO GO...



(L to R) Sheng Thao, Rebecca Kaplan, Nikki Bas, Carroll Fife

Four politicians, one photo. They campaigned together, voted together on City Council, and branded themselves Oakland's "Squad."

One of them – Sheng Thao – is on trial in federal court, accused of selling her office to the Duong family: secret hit mailers, a promised recycling contract, and 300 modular homes. The other three? Still on the public payroll.

Nikki Fortunato Bas is on the government's witness list – and now is an Alameda County Supervisor.

Rebecca Kaplan employed both Thao and her co-defendant partner Andre Jones. She spent 16 years deep in the city's waste contract wars. She now holds a $149,000 City Hall job made for her (on Barbara Lee's watch) with no public recruitment. Not charged. Not a witness. *Why not?*

Carroll Fife is all over the trial record: a recorded call files by prosecutors describes "Carol" demanding those housing units for West Oakland "to do all the press release." Not charged. Not a witness. *Why not?* Turn the page. ›››

OUT WITH THE OLD...

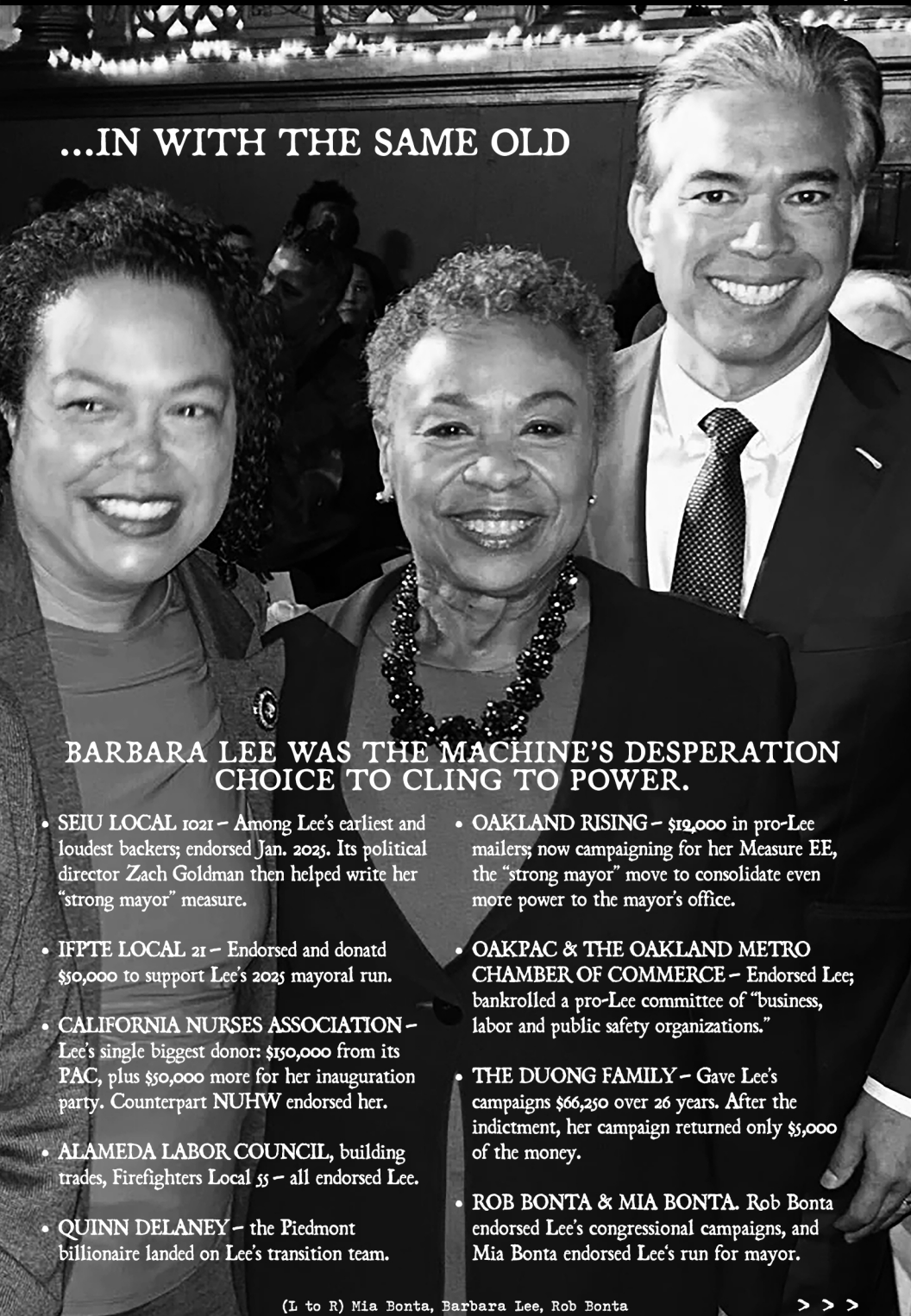


(L to R) Sheng Thao, Rob Bonta

SHENG THAO — UNIONS AND ALLIED DONORS SPENT ~$800,000 TO ELECT HER MAYOR IN 2022.

- **SEIU LOCAL 1021 –** The city workers' union backed Thao's 2022 run; gave $50,000 to fight her recall. Her first hire as mayor, Zach Goldman, came straight from SEIU's payroll.
- **IFPTE LOCAL 21 –** The city professionals' union; $20,000 against the recall.
- **CALIFORNIA NURSES ASSOCIATION –** Endorsed Sheng Thao for mayor. Its counterpart, NUHW gave to fight her recall.
- **ALAMEDA LABOR COUNCIL –** Building trades, carpenters, firefighters – listed under "Our $" in the "kitchen cabinet" notes of Thao's own chief of staff, released by the city.
- **QUINN DELANEY & AKONADI –** Piedmont billionaire mega-donor; "Akonadi/ Quinn 501c4" appears in the anti-recall notes.
- **OAKLAND RISING & APEN –** The nonprofits noted as "credible messengers" to defend Thao in the Black community.
- **OAKPAC & THE OAKLAND METRO CHAMBER OF COMMERCE –** "Chamber" sits in the notes too. The Machine controls both sides of the table.
- **THE DUONG FAMILY –** Feds say the oenwers of California Waste Solutions paid for $75,000 in secretly funded hit mailers against Thao's opponents, plus roughly $9,900 in alleged straw-donor money into her 2018 council race.
- **ROB BONTA & MIA BONTA –** Attorney general Rob Bonta was the "architect" of Thao's mayoral campaign. He and his wife Mia, an assemblywoman, endorsed Thao.

...IN WITH THE SAME OLD



BARBARA LEE WAS THE MACHINE'S DESPERATION CHOICE TO CLING TO POWER.

- **SEIU LOCAL 1021** – Among Lee's earliest and loudest backers; endorsed Jan. 2025. Its political director Zach Goldman then helped write her "strong mayor" measure.
- **IFPTE LOCAL 21** – Endorsed and donatd $50,000 to support Lee's 2025 mayoral run.
- **CALIFORNIA NURSES ASSOCIATION** – Lee's single biggest donor: $150,000 from its PAC, plus $50,000 more for her inauguration party. Counterpart NUHW endorsed her.
- **ALAMEDA LABOR COUNCIL**, building trades, Firefighters Local 55 – all endorsed Lee.
- **QUINN DELANEY** – the Piedmont billionaire landed on Lee's transition team.
- **OAKLAND RISING** – $19,000 in pro-Lee mailers; now campaigning for her Measure EE, the "strong mayor" move to consolidate even more power to the mayor's office.
- **OAKPAC & THE OAKLAND METRO CHAMBER OF COMMERCE** – Endorsed Lee; bankrolled a pro-Lee committee of "business, labor and public safety organizations."
- **THE DUONG FAMILY** – Gave Lee's campaigns $66,250 over 26 years. After the indictment, her campaign returned only $5,000 of the money.
- **ROB BONTA & MIA BONTA.** Rob Bonta endorsed Lee's congressional campaigns, and Mia Bonta endorsed Lee's run for mayor.

(L to R) Mia Bonta, Barbara Lee, Rob Bonta

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NO MORE CORRUPTION IN OAKLAND!



PIN IT UP * THEY REALLY JUST KEEP COMING

When Sheng Thao ran for mayor, she didn't win the most votes in the first round of vote-counting. Her opponent did. But Oakland has ranked-choice voting, so the clerk kept counting, round after round, until Thao finally won on the 9th round of the algorithm. The funny thing is, she shouldn't even have been on the ballot at all. Thao missed the filing deadline, but a city employee faked the timestamp.

SHENG THAO IS BROKE. HER LAWYER COSTS MILLIONS

(continued from p. 2)

After the FBI raided her home in June 2024, Thao set up a legal defense fund. Its largest donation was $5,000 from C.C. Yin, the wealthy McDonald's franchisee & politico.

Kamala Harris once called Yin the "godfather of Asian politics in California." (For the record, he's a Republican.)

FBI files describe Yin as a professional associate of Christine Fang ("Fang Fang"), the suspected Chinese intelligence operative, and allege contacts between his brother and the United Front, China's foreign influence arm.

C.C. Yin's family has given $4.4 million to California politicians over the years, including multiple donations to attorney general Rob Bonta's political campaigns.

THE MATH DOESN'T WORK

A $5,000 check doesn't buy a week of Thao's attorney, Jeffrey Tsai and his white-shoe law firm. Neither does a recalled mayor's savings.

Someone is covering the difference. No public disclosure we can find says who. Oaklanders are entitled to keep asking the question: *Who is paying for Sheng Thao's lawyer?*

THE MACHINE GRINDS ON...

The Sheng Thao corruption trial isn't just about one mayor, one family, one scandal.

The Machine that made Sheng Thao possible is still running over Oakland. As this series will show, that is the much bigger story than this one trial.

The dysfunction we endure every day – the deficits, the broken services, the favoritism, the zero accountability – is the product of a system that has been consolidating power for decades.

Oakland has been the test track for a political Machine that is exported across California and the country.

The trial is the starting line. Here is a roadmap, and a warning.

See oaklandwatch.org for sources. Don't just take our word for it. Read it and decide for yourself what to think.

Oakland Watch is a community-led nonprofit. We are real humans who live in Oakland. This series is not AI.

NO MORE LIES!

NO MORE CORRUPTION IN OAKLAND!

