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Judge won't reinstate CWA local chief

Ousted leader Carla Katz ran New Jersey's largest state worker union.

By Angela Delli Santi

Associated Press

TRENTON - A federal judge yesterday declined a request from ousted union chief Carla Katz to reinstate her as head of the largest state worker union.

U.S. District Judge Freda L. Wolfson, however, postponed a Tuesday hearing that national officials of the Communications Workers of America (CWA) had scheduled for Katz so that she would have more time to prepare.

Meanwhile, federal prosecutors are investigating operations of Local 1034, the 16,000-member local Katz has led for a decade.

A subpoena was served Tuesday on the national CWA headquarters in Washington, according to a person familiar with the investigation who requested anonymity because he is not authorized to speak publicly about it. The subpoena sought investigative materials that the national union developed in its probe of Local 1034, the source said.

The federal investigation was first reported by the Star-Ledger of Newark.

Katz and 13 other officials from Local 1034 had sought to be returned to their positions until their dispute with their national union was resolved. They also requested an impartial hearing into their ouster.

The CWA national relieved Katz and the others of their duties last week, then took over Local 1034.

"This is a fight worth fighting - 16,000 members of Local 1034 democratically elected an executive board," Katz said after the hearing. "For the national union to walk in the door, change the locks, seize the assets, seize the checking accounts with no notice and no hearing - regardless of what was said here in court today - is wrong on its face."

The hearing yesterday was in response to a federal lawsuit Katz and the others filed last week contending that the CWA national violated federal labor law and its constitution by removing Katz and the executive board.

"We're gratified that the court today rejected the motion for a temporary restraining order and affirmed that CWA executive board acted in accordance with the CWA constitution and federal law when it decided that in order to protect the dues and the democratic rights of the members a temporary administratorship was necessary," said Bob Master, spokesman for CWA District 1.

The national union alleged that Katz and the Local 1034 board engaged in fiscal malpractice and

suppression of dissent.

Katz, who dated Gov. Corzine from 2002 to 2004 when he was a U.S. senator, also is embroiled in a fight in state courts to stop e-mails between her and Corzine and his staff from being disclosed. The e-mails were exchanged during contract talks.

The CWA found "a clear and ongoing pattern" of fiscal wrongdoing by Katz, according to a July 3 report by national president Larry Cohen.

The local spent money to send people to an April CWA conference in Washington, D.C., and to a June convention in Las Vegas, the report asserts, largely to support Katz's candidacy to be national vice president. Katz lost the election.

Katz, in the lawsuit, contended it wasn't unusual for Local 1034, as the CWA's largest, to send many members to a conference. Her suit also maintains there was more interest this year because presidential candidates Barack Obama and Hillary Rodham Clinton were speaking.

Cohen's report determined Katz worked only part time as a local president while accepting a full-time salary. She worked only two to five hours a week from September 2004 to present while she attended law school, the report says. She recently graduated.

In her suit, Katz responded that school did not interfere with her ability to fulfill her responsibilities.

Cohen also asserts that Katz improperly gave more than \$700,000 in political contributions without approval from the executive board, including \$20,800 to Newark Mayor Cory A. Booker's 2006 campaign, even though only 36 Newark residents are members of Local 1034.

Katz responded, in the lawsuit, that she complied with all CWA obligations on political donations.