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Atkinson Gates recall group files signatures

The County Commission chairwoman may face a special recall election if enough of the 7,500 names on a petition are valid.

[By Steve Friess](#)
[Review-Journal](#)

Attempting to dislodge one of Clark County's most prominent and controversial public officials from office, a group of citizens filed about 7,500 signatures they say should spark a recall election on Yvonne Atkinson Gates.

Atkinson Gates, the County Commission chairwoman accused of ethical lapses, could become the first Clark County commissioner ever to face a special recall election if Registrar of Voters Kathryn Ferguson determines enough signatures are valid.

North Las Vegan Charles Bennion, flanked by his wife, mother, two toddlers and other supporters, ceremoniously delivered the stacks of petitions to Ferguson's office Thursday and filled out the requisite paperwork. Ferguson's staff is expected to take a raw count of the number of signatures today and likely will choose 500 random names to verify as registered voters in Atkinson Gates' district.

Ferguson said if more than 90 percent of the signatures are



Hattie Canty, president of Culinary Local 226, shows her support for Yvonne Atkinson Gates while watching a group drop off a petition and

valid, she likely will receive word from the secretary of state on Wednesday that she is authorized to pick an election date. The earliest date for such an election would be during the last week of June, she said.

If not enough of the signatures check out, however, the secretary of state's office could order Ferguson to verify every signature instead of just the sampling.

Bennion, whose group has raised about \$20,000 and hired a professional signature-gathering agency to push the petition, said he was proud to have garnered so many signatures since he only needed 4,380 to spark the recall election.

"Right now we have government of Yvonne Atkinson Gates, by Yvonne Atkinson Gates and for Yvonne Atkinson Gates," Bennion said, reciting a catch-phrase used often by members of his group, Citizens for Honest and Responsible Government. "This is wrong, and the people are tired of it. They want her out."

About 30 Atkinson Gates supporters stood quietly beside Bennion holding up "I support Yvonne Atkinson Gates" posters as Bennion listened to instructions from Assistant Registrar Larry Lomax.

Almost all of those signs were from the Culinary union or other labor organizations.

"Yvonne was there for us on the picket line, so we're going to be there for her," said Wanda Mathews, a cook at the Frontier during a six-year strike that ended last year. "Also, being a black lady of the community, I will be 100 percent behind her."

Many supporters said Sheldon Adelson, owner of The Venetian, is behind the recall, and Bennion acknowledged Adelson had contributed to the effort. Adelson is known for being anti-union and for feuding bitterly with Atkinson Gates.

Atkinson Gates, who represents large parts of North Las Vegas and downtown Las Vegas, is in Washington, D. C., and unavailable for comment this week.

signatures seeking her recall.

Photos by [Jeff Scheid](#).



Valerie Miles, left, and Katherine Smith, who work in the registrar of voters office, count pages of signatures seeking the recall of Clark County Commissioner Yvonne Atkinson Gates.

She was reprimanded in January by the state Ethics Commission for lobbying casino executives to give her a lease deal on a proposed daiquiri-stand business.

The commission resumes an unrelated inquiry next week on whether she voted to give airport concession contracts to her friends without disclosing her relationship to the vendors.

Atkinson Gates could file a lawsuit opposing the recall election if Ferguson receives authorization to pick a date. That move would halt the process until it is resolved in court, but Atkinson Gates attorney Aviva Gordon said it is too early to tell whether the commissioner would file a lawsuit.

Gordon said she was retained a month ago by Atkinson Gates.

Atkinson Gates would be the first Clark County commissioner ever to face a recall election, Ferguson said, and the first public official in Clark County to face a recall since the successful ouster of Mesquite Mayor Bill Lee in 1993.

Yet she may have company on the ballot in North Las Vegas City Councilwoman Paula Brown, whose opponents have until Tuesday to submit the signatures necessary to cause a special election.

If that effort is successful, Ferguson said she would schedule the elections on the same day. A combined election would cost about \$100,000, whereas doing both on separate days could cost as much as \$75,000 each.

Republican chiropractor Terry Akers has announced he would run against Atkinson Gates, a Democrat, if a recall occurs.

Akers would have two weeks after Ferguson called for the election to submit a petition of at least 4,380 registered voters in Atkinson Gates' district to get his name on the ballot.

"I'm doing very well, ahead of schedule," said Akers, 34, of the signature collection process. "I'm confident I will be able to do it."

The number 4,380 is one-quarter of the those who voted in the 1996 election, when Atkinson Gates won with 79 percent of the vote.

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