

POINT OF VIEW

Our View

Election for city's top post has sad turnout

And the Oscar goes to Well, in this case, the prize up for grabs was the job of mayor for a city touted by recent studies as one of the nation's 10 most livable.

Oscar Goodman, who built an eclectic legacy in 35 years as a criminal defense attorney, trounced 12-year City Councilman Arnie Adamsen in Tuesday's general election for the city's top job. Goodman captured 64 percent of the vote to Adamsen's 36 percent.

And while media pundits and Goodman skeptics are jockeying to play the position of prophet and declare when and on what issue Goodman will make an egregious freshman mistake, they would be better served trying to decipher the abnormally low voter turnout for such an important election.

If they have any inkling of the magnitude of what Tuesday's low voter turnout means, they will rush to study. That only 22 percent of the eligible voting populace cast votes for the most influential position in city politics is baffling.

Yes, the mayor is more or less a figurehead and has scant more power than the members of the City Council, but lest anyone think the post doesn't wield significant power, just look at former mayor Jan Jones.

The former auto sales executive used the pulpit to bring unprecedented media attention to Las Vegas, stumping for the city in venues far and near. Articulate and driven, she proved a powerful mouthpiece for the good that gaming can do a community. She was extremely successful in pitching Las Vegas as a family-oriented vacation place and trumpeted the city's relatively lax private and business tax structure to lure firms here.

Make no mistake. The mayor has clout. Whether Goodman proves apt at using his newfound power, only time will tell. Nonvoters waiting for him to slip up can smirk when Goodman goofs. But they're double losers. If he fumbles, they must reconcile the fact they had the chance to elect someone else. If he lives up to his campaign promises, they'll eat crow.

Voters approve seven-member City Council

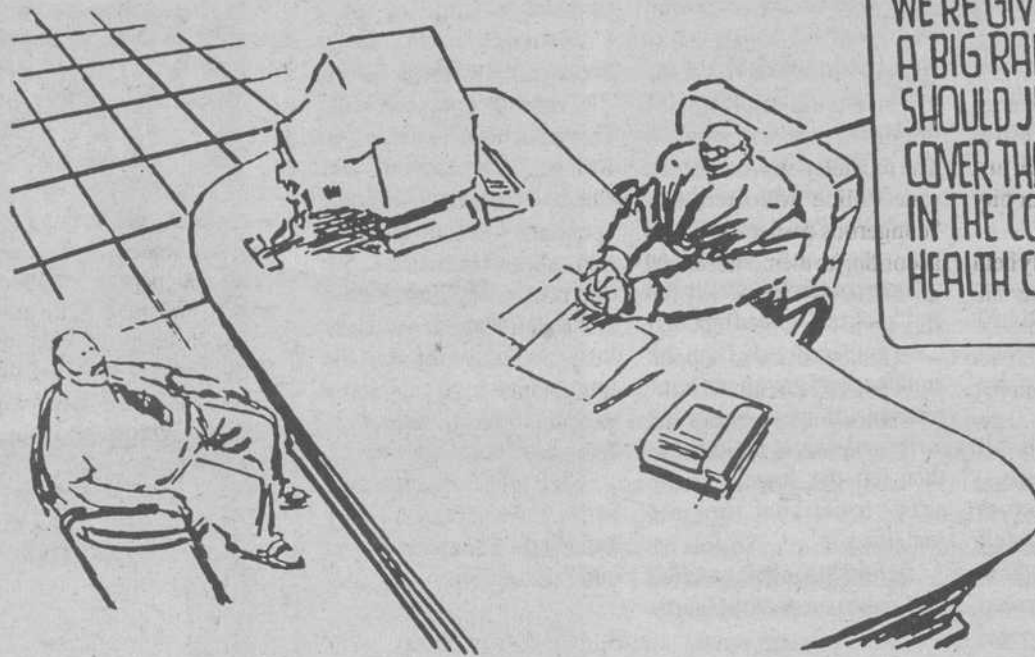
Also on Tuesday, voters approved a ballot measure expanding the City Council from four to six seats. The measure, approved 54 percent to 46 percent, pushes the council to seven members, including the mayor.

Championed by North Las Vegas Senator Joe Neal, the measure counters the 1996 reapportionment in which blacks and hispanics claim they were herded in one ward and left to fight among themselves for a representative who looks like them.

Given the voter-approved mandate, it's up to minority voters to track city officials and opponents of the ballot for attempts to dilute its power, as has happened with the police review board. Any attempt to defang the ballot should be met with resistance.

Non-caucasian voters must also focus on finding or fashioning representatives that will champion their issues. If not, the status quo will remain.

REXBABIN THE SACRAMENTO BEE



Storm brewing over welfare reform

Special to Sentinel-Voice

The recent news across the nation's economic front has been splendid.

The stock market is soaring. Inflation is low, as is the overall unemployment rate. And most of the nation's cities are on solid fiscal footing, a remarkable turnaround from a decade ago.

But, amid all the good news, problems within the changing welfare program warn that trouble lies ahead.

I, and other critics of the new welfare laws, have always said that those receiving welfare must make a meaningful effort to get off the welfare rolls.

But should those in welfare programs have to work for less than the minimum wage or the area's prevailing wage?


Should they not have the job-related health and safety protections other American workers enjoy? Should they not be eligible for overtime, promotions, the earned income tax credit, unemployment insurance and Social Security?

Since welfare recipients can be paid below the minimum wage, should cities, states and private companies be allowed to use people in welfare programs to displace low-wage workers who weren't on welfare?

Is that welfare reform or the exploitation of those on welfare? Most people are protesting that it's the latter.

In New York City, a

To Be Equal
By Hugh B. Price
President
National Urban League



coalition of 68 churches, synagogues and nonprofit agencies are refusing to hire workers from the city's 38,000-person welfare program until the city treats those workers with greater dignity and pays them far more than the minimal wages.

About 2,500 welfare recipients work for nonprofit agencies under the program; the remaining work directly for the city cleaning streets and parks and doing other jobs.

City officials defend the program as fair and effective in moving people from welfare to work. The officials in nonprofit groups acknowledge that welfare workers enable them to stretch their tight budgets and provide services that they could not otherwise afford.

But those in the citywide coalition say the overall effect of the program is to force welfare recipients to work without pay and drive down other workers' wages. They note that the city does not classify its own welfare workers as employees — which means that it doesn't have to pay them the same as

city workers for what they do, nor provide them with job-related protections and rights.

The issue is as controversial at the New York State level. The debate over changing the state's welfare laws to meet these objections has blocked passage of the state budget, now 119 days late.

Earlier this year in Maryland, churches, labor unions, synagogues and nonprofit groups persuaded state officials to bar communities from using welfare workers to displace government employees.

And President Clinton told

attendants at the National Governors' Association that welfare recipients in state workfare programs should be paid the equivalent of the minimum wage. He also said that state officials should use the savings gained from moving people off welfare for the remaining welfare recipients.

The workfare problem is even more worrisome for other reasons.

First, there is yet no indication that current workfare programs can quickly move a sizable number of welfare recipients into jobs that pay livable wages.

That means that workfare - with few exceptions - is likely to add to the ranks of the working poor whose wages barely surpass federal poverty standards, according to a recent study by the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, a Washington-based think tank.

The study said that (See Welfare, Page 16)

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