

L.A. mayoral race displays politics

LOS ANGELES (AP) - As the city attorney and a former state legislator battle to become mayor, their campaign is reshaping the political alignment of blacks and Hispanics in the nation's second-largest city.

Their June 5 runoff election is taking place against a backdrop of changing demographics, with the city's black population shrinking by 15 percent over the past decade and the Hispanic population rising 24 percent. Los Angeles is now 11.2 percent black and 46.5 percent Hispanic.

But blacks are far from ready to be written off as a political force, and their response to the nonpartisan mayor's race illustrates a growing divide in the community about how best to maintain influence.

Most black voters support City Attorney James Hahn, who is white and has his support base in South Central Los Angeles, the area his father represented for decades as a county supervisor. Hahn was the choice of 71 percent of black voters in last month's primary, according to a Los Angeles Times exit poll.

But a new alliance is forming behind former Assembly Speaker Antonio



James Hahn (left) and Antonio Villaraigosa debate.

Villaraigosa, who would be the city's first Hispanic mayor in more than a century. Despite long-standing tensions between blacks and Hispanics, some black leaders are concluding that with Hispanics the emerging powerhouse in city politics the best way to ensure political viability is to join them.

"You see African-American leaders right now are divided between those who are going with what they know and those who are relatively boldly saying we've got to work in new ways to advance," said David R. Ayon, a political analyst at the Center for the Study of Los Angeles at Loyola Marymount

University.

It would be hard to overstate the power of Hahn's name in the black community, particularly to older residents who revered his late father, Kenneth Hahn. The elder Hahn was elevated to legendary status for such accomplishments as battling for freeway call boxes and bringing a hospital to South Central.

James Hahn, 50, has been elected to citywide office five times and boasts of initiating tough anti-gang programs, among other measures. He's been endorsed by local black leaders including Magic Johnson, Rep. Maxine Waters, D-Los Angeles, and

Ethel Bradley, widow of former mayor Tom Bradley.

Villaraigosa, 48, a Mexican immigrant's son from East Los Angeles and former labor organizer, takes credit for such initiatives as securing money to rebuild and modernize urban schools.

Praised as a consensus-builder, he finished first in the nonpartisan primary with 30 percent of the vote; Hahn received 25 percent. Both are liberal Democrats.

Villaraigosa was endorsed last week by incumbent Mayor Richard Riordan, a popular Republican businessman who couldn't seek reelection because of term limits. Riordan's choice in the primary - fellow GOP businessman Steve Soboroff - came in third and did not make the runoff.

Villaraigosa also has secured endorsements from Gov. Gray Davis and San Francisco Mayor Willie Brown, and is backed by some of the city's wealthiest residents, including billionaire businessman Eli Broad and supermarket magnate Ron Burkle. He is more charismatic than the reserved and relaxed city attorney and also is seen as more liberal.

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Al Sharpton may run for president

NEW YORK (AP) - The Rev. Al Sharpton on Sunday said he wants to explore a run for the presidency in 2004.

Sharpton said he will help organize a national effort to find a progressive candidate to run in the Democratic presidential primary, "and I'm available to be that candidate."

In a telephone interview with The Associated Press, Sharpton said that "the Democratic Party failed to protect us in the last election. They did not deal with the disenfranchised voters that were never counted. In many ways they took us for granted. ... We cannot afford to be marginalized."

Noting the Rev. Jesse Jackson's runs for president in 1984 and 1988, Sharpton said: "Twenty years later, we need to do the same thing, and maybe we need another black activist preacher from New York to run, to galvanize people."

He said his purpose would be to promote issues that concern blacks and progressives "and to win as many of these primaries as possible. It would not be just symbolism."

Sharpton told Time magazine, which first reported the reverend's willingness to run, that the idea came to him while he sat under a tree in Sudan, which he visited in April on a fact-finding tour about slavery.

He denied that he was taking advantage of the Rev. Jesse Jackson's tarnished image. "I'm not one to think that Rev. Jackson's finished," he said. "I'm not trying to take advantage of his travail. My rise is not at Jesse's expense. If I'm rising it's because I've done the work on issues like police brutality that affect huge numbers of our people."



REV. AL SHARPTON

Election

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incumbents - except for Rhodes, who was left to face an opponent in the general election. That opponent is Robert Eliason.

A board member of the Neighborhood Housing Services of Southern Nevada, member of the NLV Parks and Recreation Advisory Board and of the Clark County Steering Committee, and former NLV Planning Commissioner, Eliason wants to serve on the council.

"Going wonderful," said Eliason, when asked about his campaign. "Got a lot of volunteers and we're walking the streets."

"He has experience in planning...I think that's vital for North Las Vegas," former councilman Theron Goynes, who shocked political pundits with an endorsement of Eliason, said of the challenger. "That's my privilege. This is politics...I feel he is a good candidate."

Goynes finished third in his bid to re-enter municipal politics after a four-year hiatus caused by his failed attempt to become mayor of the "friendly" city. "He came to me and asked me for my support," Goynes said of Eliason, acknowledging that Rhodes had not asked for his endorsement.

"I don't want to be considered for anything," said Goynes. "I'm not going to be lobbying anyone for anything."

As the finish line nears, Rhodes' personal problems have taken the spotlight in Ward 1.

"If John Rhodes gets elected...how will we explain it to our children?" read a mailer distributed by "Friends of Robert Eliason." It pointed out the indictments against Rhodes and the possibility that he could be serving a hefty sentence if convicted.

"I have five children and we needed to bring that up...how would you explain that?" Eliason asked. "A man's honesty and integ-



North Las Vegas City Council candidate Robert Eliason (left), has the support of former North Las Vegas mayor pro-tempore Theron Goynes.

ity is what you vote into office." Eliason said the response he receives from amazed and bewildered voters who didn't know about Rhodes' legal troubles, is: "That's not the same guy that's running...no way. You got to trust your elected officials."

"He has failed to attack or talk about my record," Rhodes countered. "They assumed that a crime was committed...I'm innocent...I haven't been convicted of anything, I'll have my day in court," he said.

Rhodes has been indicted on three charges of insurance fraud, with one charge being dropped on a legal technicality. Despite his trial tribulations, the embattled councilman says he still has the support of state legislators - including Assembly members Bob Price (Dist. 17), Vonne Chowning (Dist. 28), Wendell Williams (Dist. 6) and Morse Arberry (Dist. 7), and Senator Joe Neal (Dist. 4) - and of the Culinary Union.

Eliason is endorsed by the NLV Firefighters, Nevada Concerned Citizens and by Citizens for Responsible Government.

Each candidate harped upon the need for more parks, roads, refurbishing of mature areas of the city, and public safety.

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