

Debate

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Rose McKinney James, CAAN; Brian Ayala, IMPACTO; Ramon Savoy, Las Vegas Sentinel-Voice newspaper; Patricia Cunningham, KCEP 88.1 FM; Xavier Rivas, KRLV 1340 AM, and Eddie Escobedo, El Mundo newspaper.

The debate started around 7:30 in the showroom and ran for about 90 minutes with an audience of more than 100, which included many who showed support for their candidate. The audience was notably diverse in ethnicity with Blacks, Whites and Hispanics.

Stokes moderated and announced the format and rules after introductions.

He explained that each panelist would direct one question to both candidates who would alternate responding first to the first-round questions. Each panelist asked two questions. Limited rebuttal by the candidates was allowed. Near the end of questions from the panel, each candidate could pose one question to his opponent. In closing, each candidate made a two-minute wrap-up statement about his experience, qualifications, goals and candidacy.

The candidates made no introductory statements and the panel questions started with one by Ayala asking for the candidates' views on undocumented immigrants who drive uninsured.

Airola answered: "There are rewards and consequences for everything. For someone who drives without a license and insurance, there should be consequences. A good sheriff needs to think about incarceration, but right now, we don't have a good jail plan since we are overcrowded."

Airola then suggested a tent city program like one which has been implemented in Phoenix, Ariz.

Gillespie responded: "It is more than an incarceration

issue. We know that there is a significant portion of our population unable to obtain a driver's license under current laws. This is a bigger issue than Las Vegas and sheriff of Clark County."

The Latino media representatives asked subsequent questions on the topics of adding more bilingual police officers; day laborers who stand on street corners looking for work; and ways to combat the high crime rate in predominantly Hispanic neighborhoods.

Other topics discussed included strategic plans for running the department, the increase in crime in the area, the number of recent police shootings and the coroner's inquest process.

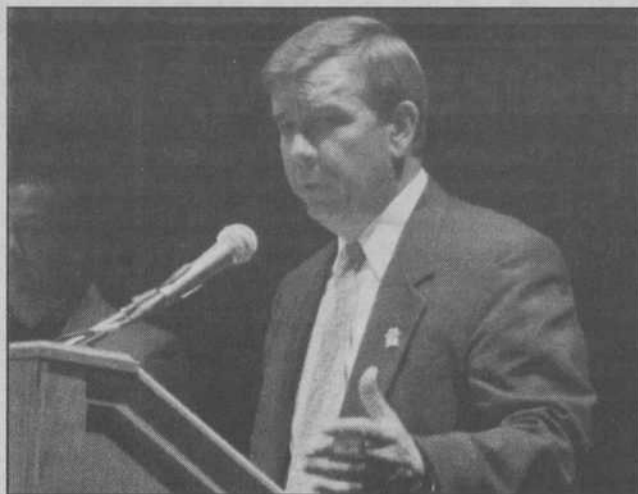
Gillespie, in a reply, spoke of creating partnerships: "The first approach would be for us to reach out to the community and establish a dialogue. Sheriff Young and myself have been working on a multicultural advisory committee, and that is a good first step."

Airola said, "Just because someone is given the title of leader doesn't make them a leader. This is an administrative position, and I am an administrator."

The two candidates have campaigned vigorously for the sheriff position, a non-partisan office. They were the top vote winners in a field of 16 candidates running in the primary.

Gillespie, who is the undersheriff in the department headed by resigning Sheriff Bill Young, has said that he is 25 year veteran of Metro, the Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department, and worked on the SWAT team before the current position he has held since 2003.

Airola, a business owner who operates Silver State Helicopters, a company with a fleet of over 200 aircraft in 29 states, began his campaign aggressively with a highly visible multimillion-dollar ad



Sentinel-Voice photos by Marty Frierson

Undersheriff Douglas Gillespie of Metro responds to questions during Wednesday's debate at the Plaza Hotel.

campaign. Airola's campaign encountered a challenge that narrowed the spread in the polls when Young came out publicly, along with other law enforcement representatives, to speak out against Airola's controversial background and experience as a law enforcement officer.

Gillespie disputes that Airola has had any significant work experience as a police officer and expressed concerns that Airola's claims were misleading the voters. Airola cites his experience and has responded to the allegations.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the population for Clark County as of 2005 is over 1.8 million and 9.9 percent of the population is African-American and 25.2 percent is Hispanic. In the primary, 27.10 percent of the registered voters participated in the election process, either through early voting, absentee ballot or on the day of the primary. The audience was not allowed to question the candidates during the debate. The candidates made themselves available to the audience for a period following the debate.

Stanley Washington, a 14-year resident of Las Vegas, came to the debate because, "The sheriff's office impacts the entire city, and I wanted to see who the next sheriff is going to be. I want to get a good read on the two candidates, and I always make it a point to know who my sheriff is." After the debate, Washington said, "I was familiar with Airola but to hear Gillespie helped me out. Metro has a long way to go, but I have a better idea about the two candidates."

Luis Hidalgo said he attended because "this position merits my attention and that the candidates will act on what they say." After the debate, Hidalgo said he felt that questions were not really answered and the candidates were just looking for votes.

Houston rift with Katrina evacuees

HOUSTON (AP) - A gun shop is running a radio commercial advising Houstonians to arm themselves against Katrina evacuees, contributing to rising tensions between longtime residents and the storm refugees who have been blamed for the city's rising crime rate.

Gun shop owner and radio talk-show host Jim Pruett said last Thursday that he started running the ad a few weeks ago after hearing a TV interview with a Katrina evacuee in Houston implied he would have to turn to crime if his government assistance ran out.

"There are many evacuees here who are working," said Pruett, owner of Jim Pruett's Guns & Ammo in Houston. "They have become Houstonians now. That is fantastic. That is what you are supposed to do. You are not supposed to threaten the place you are working in."

The city welcomed at least 250,000 evacuees after Katrina swamped New Orleans last year. As many as 120,000 evacuees remain in Houston.

According to police, Katrina evacuees are suspects or victims in 59 of Houston's 262 homicides between Jan. 1 and Aug. 26. Residents in upper-middle-class west Houston have blamed evacuees for violent crime rates that have increased almost 14 percent in one district and homicides that have nearly doubled in another.

Pruett's radio ad says: "When the 'Katricians' themselves are quoted as saying the crime rate is going to go up if they don't get more free rent, then it's time to get your concealed-handgun license."

Pruett, 62, said that gun sales at his store are up 50 percent from last year but that he was uncertain whether it had anything to do with fear of the evacuees.

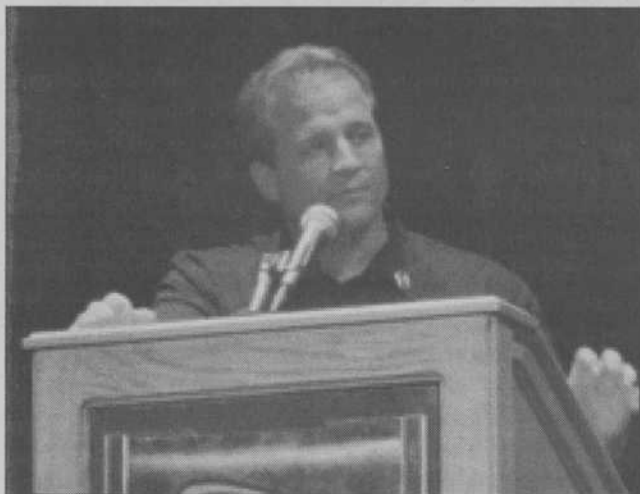
State figures show that from January to Sept. 1, the number of concealed-carry permits issued for handguns was up almost 25 percent from the same period a year ago in Harris County, which includes Houston.

Black activists held a community meeting Thursday evening where they blasted negative stereotypes of evacuees created by Pruett's ad, as well as media reports that they believe portray all evacuees as criminals.

They also took issue with comments earlier this month by independent gubernatorial candidate Kinky Friedman, who attributed a spike in Houston's crime rate to the "crackheads and thugs" who evacuated New Orleans.

But community activist Quanell X said Houstonians and evacuees "can't protect the criminal element around us. Let's talk about hitting the streets and dealing with

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Sentinel-Voice photos by Marty Frierson

Candidate Jerry Airola vying for the top cop spot of Metro explains his views on running the police department.

The Las Vegas Chapter of the National Bar Association's
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Saturday, October 7, 2006



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HONOREE:

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Immediate Past President, Clark County Bar Association

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