

# Money sought in gang fight

*Special to Sentinel-Voice*

LOS ANGELES (NNPA) - The City Council last week directed the city attorney's office to draft a ballot measure seeking voter approval for a parcel tax to raise \$50 million for gang prevention and intervention programs.

The proposed tax for property owners would be \$5 per month, according to City Council member Janice Hahn, who introduced the plan Jan. 16.

Despite a push to place the measure on the May ballot, Hahn agreed with council colleagues to hold off until the start of 2008 in asking voters to approve the proposed tax.

"I think the public will be willing to spend \$5 a month to raise \$50 million," Hahn said. "Los Angeles is now becoming the gang capital in America. Every day ... we're hearing about violence."

Several council members supported the plan, but expressed reservations about placing the measure on the ballot in May, when voter turnout is expected to be low.

"We are not going to have the turnout necessary in May, you're just not," Councilman Herb Wesson told Hahn.

"I've run too many campaigns to know that," the former Assembly speaker said. "The people are depending on us to deliver something. Let's not just deliver a ballot measure, let's deliver a winning ballot measure."

Hahn's proposal comes in response to a report released Jan. 12 by the Advancement Project, which found that some 40,000 gang members live in Los Angeles, contributing to rising violence that costs taxpayers more than \$2

billion annually.

The study also found that the city's scattered gang prevention and intervention programs lack accountability and should come under the direction of a single "gang czar" to become more effective.

Gang-related attacks in Los Angeles were up in 2006, despite an overall citywide reduction in crime for five consecutive years, according



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— Antonio Villaraigosa  
Mayor of Los Angeles

to Los Angeles Police Department statistics.

In response to the disturbing trend, Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa and Police Chief William Bratton have beefed up anti-gang measure citywide, particularly in Harbor Gateway and the San Fernando Valley.

The Harbor Gateway area has been plagued by recent violence against African-Americans by Latino gang members.

Recently, Villaraigosa and Bratton were joined by FBI Director Robert Mueller and county Sheriff Lee Baca in announcing a plan to crack down on Latino gang members who have been terrorizing the neighborhood.

"Violent crime, particularly when motivated by the color of the victim's skin, will not be tolerated in the city of Los Angeles — not in

any form, not by any race, not in any neighborhood," Villaraigosa said Jan. 18.

"And so we have a message for the gang leaders: We're coming with everything we have. We're coming with services and support, and we're putting you out of business."

The community is still struggling with the aftermath of the shooting death of 14-year-old Cheryl Green last

month. The Black teen was shot and killed while standing with her friends.

Authorities said the eighth-grader was not involved with gangs and was targeted solely because of the color of her skin.

Ernesto Alcaraz, 20, and Jonathan Fajardo, 18, alleged members of the 204th Street Gang have been charged with one count of premeditated murder and six counts of attempted premeditated murder in connection with the shooting.

Under the enforcement program targeting the 204th Street Gang and involving federal, state and local agencies, the Los Angeles Police Department will serve as the lead agency in all investigations.

The Sheriff's Department will head up arrests for curfew, truancy and other viola-

tions while the FBI and the federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms will conduct electronic surveillance of gang activity and monitor the area from a series of observation posts.

The city attorney's, county district attorney's and U.S. Attorney's offices will coordinate civil, criminal and federal prosecution of crimes committed by the gang.

Additionally, the Los Angeles Unified School District police force will patrol the gang's territory and coordinate gang prevention and intervention programs at neighborhood schools.

FBI Director Mueller said cooperative work by multiple agencies is critical to combating gangs.

"We've learned from our war on terrorism, we've learned from our experiences working with state and local law enforcement, that working together on task forces maximizes the success for us in addressing these serious issues," he said.

Baca said the crackdown will put more gang members behind bars, and he would find room for them to serve their full sentences when convicted — even in the overcrowded jail system.

"There isn't anything drastically wrong with having someone sleep on the floor for a few hours," Baca said. "If the men and women of our armed forces can go to Iraq and sleep in the dirt to defend this great nation, our criminals ought to be able to surrender a good night's sleep once in a while."

If deemed successful, the joint effort, which also involves the state Department of Corrections, could be enforced in other gang-plagued neighborhoods across the city, officials said.

South Los Angeles activist Najee Ali believed he had negotiated a truce with the 204th Street gang last week, but no gang members showed up for the truce-signing ceremony Ali scheduled last week.

That truce was shattered Saturday morning when a 34-year-old Black man, whose name was withheld, was wounded in front of an apartment complex near 225th Street and Harvard. Witnesses told police a Latino gunman walked up the passenger side of the car he was in and opened fire. Ali responded by scheduling a Saturday rally in the community (See Gangs, Page 13)

# Reports: Hate groups active

NEW YORK (AP) - Huge street protests made millions of immigrants more visible and powerful last year, but they also seem to have revived a hateful counterforce: White supremacists.

Groups linked to the Ku Klux Klan, skinheads and neo-Nazis grew significantly more active, holding more rallies, distributing leaflets and increasing their presence on the Internet — much of it focused on stirring anti-immigrant sentiment, a new report released by the Anti-Defamation League says.

"Extremist groups are good at seizing on whatever the hot button is of the day and twisting the message to get new members," Deborah M. Lauter, ADL Civil Rights director, said Monday. "This one seems to be taking hold with more of mainstream America than we'd like to see."

Old Klan chapters have been revived and new ones started throughout the South, historically the heart of the group, and in other places such as Michigan, Iowa and New Jersey, says the report, scheduled for official release this week.

Last May in Alabama, an anti-immigration rally included slogans such as, "Let's get rid of the Mexicans!" according to the document, titled "Ku Klux Klan Rebounds."

"The Klan is increasingly cooperating with other extremist groups and Neo-Nazi groups," Lauter said. "That's a new phenomenon."

Between 2000 and 2005, hate groups mushroomed 33 percent and Klan chapters by 63 percent, according to Mark Potok, director of the Southern Poverty Law Center, which tracks hate crimes.

Precise data are difficult to pin down, but Potok's group counts as many as 150 Klan chapters with up to 8,000 members nationwide. More than 800 hate groups exist around the country, Southern Poverty research shows.

In the late 1990s, memberships in such groups was crumbling as they lost leaders and struggled to organize, said Brian Levin, director of the Center for the Study of Hate and Extremism at California State University, San Bernardino. Many hit bottom around 2000.

"Whenever you think the Klan is down and out, they find another way to reinvent themselves," he said of the recent resurgence.

Historically, the Klan's focus had been to terrorize African-Americans — through race riots, lynchings and other killings — but it reached peak membership at more than 4 million in the 1920s by focusing on immigration.

Newcomers from Ireland and Germany were portrayed as Catholic usurpers invading the United States, taking jobs from native-born Americans and undermining national fabric, Levin said.

Said Potok: "It's remarkable to look back at the nativist sentiments toward Catholics — it's very similar to what we're seeing with Mexicans now."

Today, many White supremacists blame immigrants, particularly Hispanics, for crime, struggling schools or unemployment, for instance. With many Americans already divided on how to revamp laws and practices to address the nation's swelling immigrant communities, immigration "is an issue that works for hate groups," Potok said.

Many Latinos are feeling the effects firsthand. Last September, a Kentucky family originally from El Sal-

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# Wal-Mart

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duct an environmental impact report.

Other participants in the conference included: Democratic State Senator Gilbert Cedillo from Los Angeles; Steven Pitts, labor specialist with the University of California-Berkeley Center for Research and Education; Deborah Scott, a Georgia-based community activist; and Adrienne Shropshire, executive director of New York Jobs With Justice.

"In order for our communities to achieve the American dream, we need more than poverty-wage jobs," Cedillo said. "We need economic development that meets the real needs of our communities... good jobs that allow working people to support their families and provide a better life for their children."

During the day of the news conference, the Los Angeles Alliance For a New Economy, a consumer advocacy group, re-

leased a report that allegedly documents the negative impacts Wal-Mart has on communities.

Titled "Wal-Mart and Beyond: The Battle of Good Jobs and Strong Communities in Urban America," the report also offers a series of strategies that hold Wal-Mart and other companies accountable and ways to create good jobs in urban neighborhoods, said the report's author, Tracy Gray-Barkan, director of retail policy at the LA-based alliance.

"Wal-Mart has positioned itself squarely in the path of workers and communities seeking to realize Dr. King's dream of civil and economic equality," Gray-Barkan said. "But it's not enough to criticize Wal-Mart. Urban communities must come together around a new vision for economic development and empowerment."

Gene C. Johnson Jr. writes for Wave Community Newspapers.

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