

CALIFORNIA BIOGRAPHY
FILE

ALATORRE, RICHARD

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FILE A

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Spotlight on...Fourteenth District Councilman Richard Alatorre

Veteran Politician Plays Key Role in the Restructuring of the Los Angeles Police Department

"It's going to take the focus off of him and put it where it should have been from the very beginning."

The topic is the one which has dominated political discussion in the City of Los Angeles for the last four months—the furor which erupted in the wake of the videotaped beating of motorist Rodney King by officers of the Police Department's Foothill Division March 13. "Him" is the department's embattled top officer, Police Chief Daryl Gates, and "it" is Gates' announced intention to leave office next April if a new chief can be hired by then.

By **DAVID WATSON**
Staff Writer

The speaker is 14th District City Councilman Richard Alatorre, a veteran lawmaker and Latino political activist who—as chairman of the council's Public Safety Committee—is a key player in the battle over what structural changes should be made in police operations to remedy the problems of racism and brutality identified in the report of the Independent Commission on the Los Angeles Police Department, issued last month.

Christopher Commission

The Christopher Commission—as the blue-ribbon panel is usually called, after its chairman, former Deputy Secretary of State Warren Christopher, a Los Angeles attorney—found that a "problem group" of LAPD officers has "repetitively" been guilty of using excessive force. Among the commission's recommendations are limiting the city's police chief to two five-year terms, new training and screening procedures for officers, and a stronger Police Commission. The panel also urged that Gates make way for a new top man.

Alatorre, though he defends the chief—"I don't believe that Daryl Gates is a racist," he says—agrees the time has come for Gates to move on.

"His management style was sufficient for the period of his tenure as chief," Alatorre says. But Gates, the councilman adds, "stayed too long," leading to discontent and instability in the department's leadership.

Alatorre contends:

"There's been a lot of internal bickering by the top level staff waiting for him to retire. Most of the top brass wanted his job. Some of them left out of frustration because they didn't have an opportunity to become chief here. He obviously was impacted by the jockeying for position."

The councilman says the question of Gates' tenure should never have become central to the controversy.



ALATORRE

—Staff Photograph by Amber Eck

"The whole issue being focused on him was wrong," he says.

Alatorre says Gates' decision to leave will allow the city and its politicians to concentrate on implementing the Christopher Commission recommendations—a daunting task, he admits, but one in which he expects to be an important participant.

He declares:

"The implementation of the recommendations is going to be very complicated. There are a lot of pitfalls we're going to have to overcome to come up with a package to present to the people of Los Angeles for their consideration."

Amendments to Charter

The recommendations, Alatorre notes, include items which require amendments to the City Charter and therefore a vote of the people, as well as changes in the working conditions of police officers, whose union is entitled to negotiate the effects of implementation.

The councilman says he is in general supportive of the commission's proposals, though he questions some of them.

As an example of his reservations he cites the commission's suggestion that the

Police Commission be exempted from the provisions of the recently-passed Charter Amendment 5, which gives the City Council power to review and modify previously independent commission decisions.

"I think that idea needs further study," he says. "I'm not sure if that's a good idea."

Another example, he says, is the proposal to grant the Police Commission the independent power to go to court on its own behalf.

Alatorre points out that this could put the council and the commission on opposite sides in litigation with the city footing the bill for both, as happened earlier this year when the commission sought to suspend Gates and the council—exercising its Charter power to control litigation in the face of the chief's threatened court challenge to the action—reinstated him.

The independent litigation power, Alatorre warns, could result in "leaving the city an open pocketbook" outside council control.

Alatorre will give up his chairmanship of the Public Safety Committee this week as a result of Council President

John Ferraro's shake-up of committee assignments last month. He will be replaced by 11th District Councilman Marvin Braude, who will also chair a five-member ad hoc committee specifically charged with overseeing implementation of the Christopher panel recommendations. Alatorre will also sit on that committee.

Hearings Held

But the Public Safety Committee, under Alatorre's leadership, has already held hearings on the recommendations over the past three weeks and completed work on an implementation package which has been sent to the full council.

Though some council members have argued for adopted the Christopher Commission recommendations without alteration, Alatorre questions whether this is politically feasible.

"If we could adopt the Christopher Commission report in totality I wouldn't have a problem," Alatorre says.

But, though he has sided with those of his colleagues on the council who favor waiting to draft a ballot measure until an entire package of reforms can be put

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together to be submitted to the voters, perhaps not before next June, the councilman says he doesn't believe compromises can be avoided.

He adds:

"There has to be an attempt to strike a delicate balance, trying to bring together as many of the players as have to be brought together in order for us to be successful once the measure is taken to the people."

In other words, it's a matter of politics. And that is something Richard Alatorre knows well.

Alatorre was first elected to public office in 1972, serving in the state Assembly for 13 years, and is starting his second full term on the council representing the city's predominantly Latino east side. But his political background extends back to the civil rights struggles that convulsed the Mexican-American community in the 1960s.

East L.A. Native

An East Los Angeles native and the child of a working-class family, Alatorre studied political science and history at California State University-Los Angeles and public administration at USC. Both then-President Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty and the civil rights movement were in full swing in the middle 1960s, and Alatorre combined political activism with federal or other government funding in a series of positions including work with gang members, community organizing, and teaching.

For a time, Alatorre was western regional director for the NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund, working throughout the southwest on discrimination issues and beginning the process that led to the formation of the Mexican-American Legal Defense and Education Fund. In the late 1960s he worked as a consultant to the U.S. Civil Rights Commission, and also taught part-time at Long Beach State.

In 1969, with a graduate degree under his belt, Alatorre became a faculty member at UC Irvine, teaching in the school of comparative cultures. But after a couple of years, the academic life began to pall.

"I was somewhat bored," Alatorre reflects.

His opportunity to get a foothold in mainstream Democratic Party politics came in 1971 with Walter Karabian, then majority leader of the state Assembly. Alatorre joined his staff and also worked—"during my off-hours"—on his campaigns.

Two months into the job, then-Assemblyman David Roberti made a successful run for the state Senate in a special election. Alatorre worked on the campaign, with Karabian's promise that if Roberti won, Karabian would give Alatorre "financial assistance" to run for the resulting vacancy in Roberti's 48th District Assembly seat.

Alatorre won the Democratic primary, and had only to defeat Republican Bill Brophy in the heavily Democratic district to win the seat.

He recalls:

"It was primarily a working class district, a real mixture of ethnic and racial minorities with a large gay population. Needless to say, I wasn't expected to lose."

Shots Give Boost

But the day before the election, shots were fired into Brophy's house and the resulting publicity, according to Alatorre, gave the Republican's campaign the boost it needed.

Alatorre and others involved in that campaign have expressed suspicions that Brophy arranged the shooting incident. (Brophy completed Roberti's unfinished term, then entered a race for a congressional seat, but dropped that campaign when his 19-year-old wife was charged with manslaughter after a traffic accident which killed two people.)

The councilman also contends he

was the victim of Republican "dirty tricks" engineered by Donald Segretti, a lawyer who was later implicated in the Watergate scandal and admitted involvement in attempts to smear Democratic candidates in the 1972 presidential election. His assembly race, Alatorre says, became a "trial run" for the questionable tactics employed by Richard Nixon's presidential campaign the following year.

Alatorre also says the Republicans funneled money to a third-party campaign mounted against him by the La Raza Unida party, which ran Raul Ruiz,

into a bitter political struggle over redistricting. He was appointed—"it was perceived in some circles as a kiss of death," he recalls—to head a committee seeking to create a Latino council district to comply with the demands of a lawsuit brought by the U.S. Department of Justice.

An initial plan, which would have thrown freshman 13th District Councilman Michael Woo into a majority Latino district, drew protests from Asian activists. A compromise proposal, which

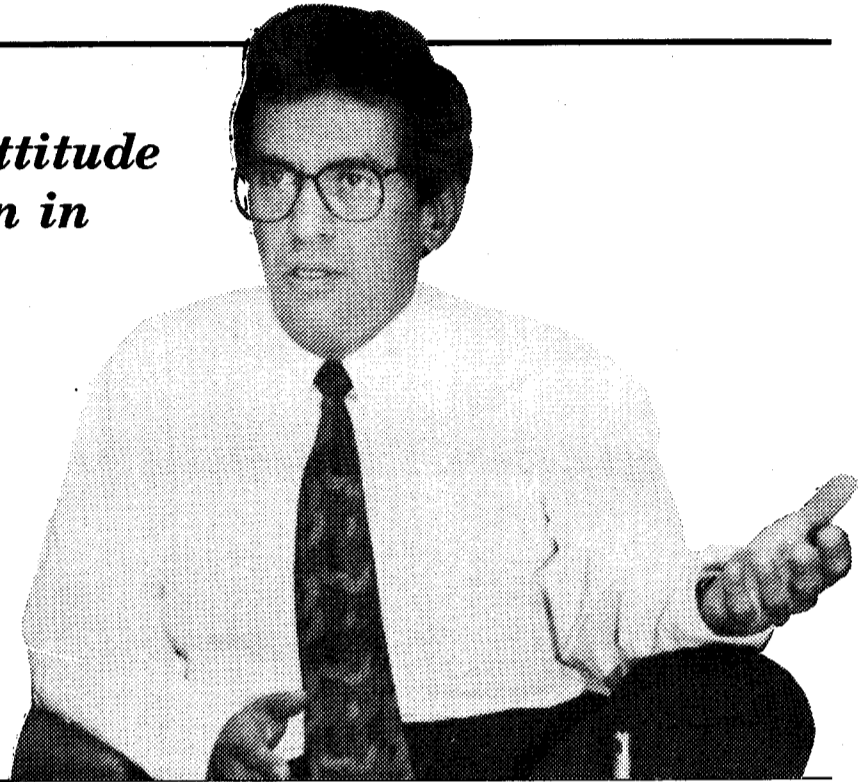
dicts—Mayor Tom Bradley does not seek a sixth term.

"There's a prevailing attitude by people that he's been in too long and there's a need for a change," Alatorre, one of the council members closest to the mayor, says. "I don't think it would be smart of him to attempt to run for reelection."

And he says "major, major changes" are on the political horizon for the city in the wake of the amnesty granted to undocumented workers under the 1986

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—Councilman Richard Alatorre
on Mayor Tom Bradley



a professor and Chicano activist, for the seat. Ruiz ridicules the suggestion as "totally crazy."

La Raza Unida was a community-based party which attracted volunteers but "didn't have any money," Ruiz says.

"Our donations were mostly \$25, \$30," Ruiz adds. "If there had been any infusion of money it would have shown up."

When the seat came up again the next year, Alatorre won the election, quickly becoming one of the first Latino politicians to gain admission to the circle of Sacramento's powerful elite.

He helped Willie Brown, now speaker of the Assembly, rise to power by toppling then-Speaker Leo McCarthy in 1980. He was one of the shapers of the state's farm labor law, which gave collective bargaining rights to migrant workers. And he took charge of the process of redistricting the state Legislature after the 1980 census.

1985 Restlessness

But by 1985 Alatorre had again become restless. When Councilman Arthur K. Snyder announced, in the midst of an investigation into charges he had molested his 9-year-old daughter, his intention to resign his seat, Alatorre decided to seek the City Council job.

He remembers:

"I was one of two or three that were close confidants of Willie Brown. I left probably under the best set of circumstances and probably having all the influence and power I ever wanted to. But I grew up in Los Angeles. There hadn't been a Latino on the City Council for 25 years. I saw it as an opportunity because Los Angeles is going through so much change. I wanted to be involved in that change."

Snyder, who was never charged in connection with the molestation allegations, and Alatorre lobbied the council to appoint Alatorre to the seat. The council balked and called a special election after protests by the Mexican-American Political Association, which charged a "back-room deal." But Alatorre, raising and spending more than all his opponents combined, easily won the race in the district which included many of the same communities he had represented as a legislator.

Almost at once Alatorre was thrown

would have split Koreatown into three different council districts, quickly became the object of complaints from that community.

1986 Carving

When First District Councilman Howard Finn died in August of 1986, the council took the opportunity to carve up his north San Fernando Valley district, distributing the pieces to other districts and creating the new, majority-Latino First District extending from Westlake and Pico-Union to Highland Park.

Alatorre was and remains unapologetic about the grief his reapportionment efforts caused to fellow council members whose districts changed or were threatened with change.

He observes:

"The city's earlier redistricting clearly violated the voting rights of Hispanics. Now to correct that somebody was going to be impacted. Somebody ultimately would have been on the short end if it hadn't been for somebody dying."

Woo's 13th District, Alatorre says, had been "singled out" when the 1980 redistricting was done as the next Hispanic district because of the potential for Latino population growth in the area.

Alatorre downplays his disagreements with Gloria Molina, the assemblywoman who rode the tide of her successful leadership of opposition to siting a new prison on the East Side to election in the new district, and who now sits on the county Board of Supervisors.

"They never talk about the agreements," he complains. "We worked together on so many issues."

Alatorre is now supporting a close Molina ally, Mike Hernandez, in tomorrow's runoff election for Molina's First District seat. He says he expects Hernandez to win over Chinatown attorney Sharon Lowe and anticipates he and Hernandez will enjoy good relations on the council.

Potential Mayoral Candidate

Ever since his election to the council, Alatorre has been touted as a potential mayoral candidate in a city that the 1990 census figures show has more Latinos than any other ethnic group.

He says he "doesn't foreclose the possibility" of running if—as he pre-

immigration law. Those who qualified for amnesty are only now beginning to attain citizenship and voting rights, the councilman points out.

He suggests:

"That population is more political and more interested in what is going on in their communities. They understand the importance of the political process and of representation."

Alatorre adds:

"When you all of a sudden enfranchise close to a million people—let's say 40 percent of them adults—you're talking about a significant change in the political climate of this city, and ultimately this county and this state."

The change will become more pronounced, he says, as the children of both legal and undocumented immigrants grow to voting age.

"Out ultimate political strength lies in the youth—children who are American citizens because they were born in this country," Alatorre says. "When they get to voting age you are going to have this large untapped resource."

Some observers of the Latino political scene say Alatorre's chances of becoming mayor are handicapped by what one of them calls his "baggage"—potential liabilities likely to be exploited by opponents and the media in the intense scrutiny of a campaign for citywide office.

Twice Paid Fines

Alatorre has twice paid fines in connection with allegations of official improprieties. Shortly after his election to the council, he and his campaign committees agreed to settle a lawsuit filed by City Attorney James K. Hahn by paying a record \$141,000—much of it to reimburse his state Assembly campaign fund for money spent on the council race in violation of newly-enacted spending restrictions.

Alatorre says he received confusing advice from Hahn's office about what was permitted under the new law.

"There were not clear signals as to what we could and could not do," the councilman says. "But ultimately, I accepted the responsibility for the violation."

But Gil Avila (a longtime staff member for then-Gov. George Deukmejian),

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Last Week in Los Angeles

Supervisors Vote to Continue Victim-Witness Assistance Program, to Seek State Grants to Finance Project Under District Attorney's Office...Dispute Between City Council and Former CRA Head Tuite May Lead to Litigation...Police Panel Overrules Gates on Gay/Lesbian Officers Recruiting in Uniform

Board of Supervisors

•Took the first steps toward developing a program of providing public health and welfare services for children on school campuses. Supervisor Ed Edelman's motion ordered the Los Angeles Children's Planning Council to appoint a subcommittee to study the project—which could relieve overcrowding in county clinics and create early detection of problems that result in more costly county services in later life.

•Accepted a \$3.9 million from the Health Resources and Services Administration to supplement emergency relief programs for AIDS victims.

•Approved a motion by Supervisor Mike Antonovich ordering county lobbyists in Sacramento to seek introduction of legislation requiring immediate confiscation of driver's licenses whenever there is an arrest made for driving under the influence of drugs.

•Accepted an estimated \$3,000 worth of travel and accommodations from NEC Technologies, Inc. for one county employee to go to Tokyo to participate in a week-long analysis of the firm's Automated Fingerprint Identification System.

•Approved a motion to convene a courthouse security task force to strengthen public safety measures following the stabbing of a woman by her estranged husband outside the Van Nuys Superior Court last Monday. Two years ago when then-Assistant District Attorney Jessica Perrin Silvers, who is now a Municipal Court judge in the Van Nuys Courthouse, was the subject of an attack in the same courthouse, the Judicial Security Committee of the Los Angeles Superior Court undertook a study to determine the need for additional courthouse security. At about the same time, City Attorney James Hahn asked the Board of Supervisors to install metal detectors in all courtrooms in Los Angeles County. Some judges balked at the measure as being too costly and intimidating to attorneys and citizens. Installation of metal detectors took place on a limited basis, including the downtown Criminal Courts Building and in the first floor lobby of the Van Nuys Courthouse. The attack Monday, however, took place near the temporary court facilities adjacent to the main courthouse.

•Voted to continue the Victim-Witness Assistance Program and apply to the state for \$2.9 million in state grants to finance the project under the direction of the district attorney's office.

•Voted unanimously to add 15 beds to the 29-bed Martin Luther King Jr./Drew Medical Center in Watts to expand and improve the hospital's neonatal intensive care unit. The board took the action in lieu of an earlier plan to add 33 beds to the hospital overall.

City Council

•Voted Tuesday to continue for one week consideration of a motion that would exempt GTE from the city's sanctions against South Africa to permit the purchase of communications equipment.

•Met on Wednesday with former Community Redevelopment Agency administrator John Tuite, and his attorney, Gloria Allred, to discuss the \$1.7 million retirement package agreed to between Tuite and the CRA commission as part of

a buyout of his \$148,000-a-year employment contract. The CRA had already paid Tuite \$500,000 but sought council approval for further disbursements. The council balked but failed to pass by one vote a motion by Fifth District Councilman Zev Yaroslavsky not to pay any more funds to Tuite. It did approve 8-4 a motion to receive and file the matter—which in council terms means to kill further discussion on the subject. An outraged Allred on Thursday filed a \$1.5 million claim against the city. She said that if the city refuses to pay the claim she will file suit seeking \$1 million in damages for interfering with Tuite's contract and alleged emotional distress, \$435,814 for pension payments plus interest and lawyer fees.

•Voted Wednesday 11-0 to call on the Police Commission to consider whether to overrule Los Angeles Police Chief Daryl Gates' action barring gay and lesbian police officers from wearing uniforms while recruiting at a weekend festival.

Miscellany

•The Los Angeles County Claims Board on Monday settled a brutality case for \$25,000.

Department by a Compton man who claimed he was falsely arrested after being incorrectly identified as the driver of a car being chased by a deputy. The panel also recommended to the Board of Supervisors that they approve a \$152,200 settlement of a traffic accident involving a deputy and pay \$552,472 to compromise a disagreement with an insurance company covering the county against employee fraud.

•This district's Court of Appeal upheld a ruling by Los Angeles Superior Court Judge David Yaffe denying a preliminary injunction requested by two local attorneys and the Juvenile Courts Bar Association to halt juvenile representation by Dependency Court Legal Services Inc. The lawyers bringing the action used to receive court appointments to represent parties in dependency proceeds before the county formed DCLS as a non-profit corporation to do the same work. The lawyers claimed the DCLS, by representing three different parties in a single proceeding, failed to meet ethical standards for protecting clients. The Court of Appeal held that by separating itself into three separate divisions, DCLS had avoided traditional conflict of interests and should not be treated as a single law firm for ethical considerations. By midweek the Los Angeles County Children's Commission said it would ask the Board of Supervisors to review the costs and quality of attorneys representing abused or neglected children in the Dependency Court—including representation by DCLS. In announcing the request, commission vice chairman, retired Santa Anita Municipal Court Presiding Judge John H. Saunders, said up to 15 percent of the attorneys don't even speak with children until they get into a courtroom.

•The ACLU flooded the First Council District with thousands of postcards urging residents to push the two candidates competing to fill the seat formerly held by Gloria Molina to disclose their respective positions on Los Angeles Police Chief Daryl Gates and the recommendations for reforms of the LAPD contained in the Christopher Commission report. Voters will decide the winner of the race

tomorrow: Highland Park businessman Mike Hernandez or Chinatown attorney Sharon Mee Yung Lowe.

•On Tuesday, Los Angeles Police Chief Daryl Gates banned gay and lesbian officers from wearing uniforms to recruit officers at a weekend community festival in Silver Lake. The City Council voted on Wednesday to have the matter considered by the Police Commission, which on Tuesday elected new members Stanley Sheinbaum and Jesse Brewer to be the panel's president and vice president, respectively. On Friday, the panel overruled Gates and also ordered him to report by Aug. 27 on changes in LAPD policies on recruiting gays and lesbians generally.

•Members of the Los Angeles, Pasadena and West Hollywood city governments held a press conference at the Los Angeles City Hall Tuesday to announce their support for continuation of city-mandated sanctions against South Africa despite threat of federal action against cities that maintain such measures. At the same time the City Council had before it a motion to exempt GTE from the provisions of Los Angeles' ordinance in connection with the purchase of communications equipment.

•The Los Angeles Department of Water and Power Thursday unanimously adopted a 16-point water conservation plan—the product of four years of study and negotiating by the State Water Conservation Coalition.

•The Los Angeles Police Department's Internal Affairs Commission asked at least six police officers from the Hollywood, Wilshire and Van Nuys divisions to explain why they allegedly sent offensive messages on the department's computer equipment.

•A report by the county's Economy and Efficiency Commission made public Wednesday suggested that the county could save \$5.5 million or more annually if county departments were treated like tenants and were charged market-rate rents. The report also suggested that departments be ordered to lease or dispose of wasted county space.

•LAPD Detective Thomas A. Dawson, through his attorney, Diane Marchant, filed suit Friday in Los Angeles Superior Court challenging the department's drug-testing policy. The 19-year police veteran asked the court to declare random testing illegal and require use of warrants based on "reasonable suspicion."

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who finished third in the 1985 race, says Alatorre got off too easy. He charges the councilman struck a "deal" with City Attorney James K. Hahn. Avila says Hahn should have pursued criminal charges that could have forced Alatorre to give up the council seat.

"It was a major, major violation," Avila insists. "He thumbed his nose at the rules and got away with it."

In a second incident, Alatorre was fined \$2,000 for violating conflict-of-interest laws by accepting a speaker's honorarium from the East Los Angeles Community Union and then pressing for the council to award TELACU a contract to provide dial-a-ride bus services in his district. He says that misstep stemmed from his unawareness that an exemption in the law which applied to state legislators didn't cover City Council members.

"I was under the understanding that so long as you disclosed the honorarium there was not a problem," he explains.

Alatorre also quit drinking three years ago after deciding that alcohol "was affecting my personal life," he says.

He recounts:

"Some people would say I was an alcoholic. I would say I found out at a point in my life that I was allergic to alcohol. I chose to do something about it."

Alatorre says he believes alcohol is "probably the most serious problem we have in American society today."

He adds:

"It's a disease. Some people can drink and other people cannot. I was one of the people that could not. I don't think there is ever a cure. I have no interest in drinking, but I am still involved in the program on a daily basis and I have to watch it on a daily basis."

The councilman's 10-year second marriage ended in divorce in 1988. A brief earlier marriage—which produced the councilman's two sons, now 27 and 26—ended while he was still in college.

Though Alatorre easily won reelection over three opponents last April, getting 57 percent of the vote, some of those who ran against him deny that it was an impressive showing for the incumbent.

David Diaz, an environmental planner and planning student who polled 14 percent of the vote to finish third, calls Alatorre "unpopular throughout the district." He points out the 7,600 votes the councilman drew in the primary were less than any other incumbent who won reelection outright and less than either of the candidates—incumbent Hal Bernson and challenger Julie Korenstein—who won spots in the runoff in the Twelfth District.

Diaz says Alatorre's victory reflects little more than his superior fundraising ability—an arena in which few question the councilman's talent.

A major factor that Alatorre—along with any other Latino politician interested in running for mayor in 1993—will have to consider is whether or not Molina decides to enter the race. Her election to the Board of Supervisors less than halfway through her first council term, in an impressive victory over an Alatorre ally, state Sen. Art Torres, vaulted her over Alatorre and other veteran Latino politicians into the front rank of the community's leading voices.

Alatorre says he also "very seriously" considered running for the supervisory seat, deciding not to mainly because, unlike Molina, he was up for reelection to the council this year.

Molina, Alatorre concedes, "if she was interested would be a very viable candidate" for mayor.

But he does make one prediction—that the Hispanic community will field a candidate, and that it will field just one. There will be no "bloodbath," the councilman says.

He says:

"I think there will be a Hispanic candidate running."