JOAN MILKE FLORES
COUNCILWOMAN, 15TH DISTRICT
CITY HALL, ROOM 237, LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA 90012
(213) 485-3347

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BIOGRAPHY

JOAN MILKE FLORES

LOS ANGELES CITY COUNCIL

Elected to the Los Angeles City Council, 1981
Chairwoman, Energy and Natural Resources Committee
Vice Chairwoman, Industry and Economic Development Committee
Member, Public Works Committee

Chairwoman, City Council's Special Committee on Equal Opportunities
Vice Chairwoman, Los Angeles Energy Management Advisory Board
Member, Board of Referred Powers
Member, Energy Commission for the County and Cities of Los Angeles
Member, Interdepartmental Committee on Energy Conservation

BACKGROUND

Born May 9, 1936 Sheboygan Falls, Wisconsin, San Pedro Resident

Daughter Valerie attends UCLA

Served as aide to Los Angeles City Council President John S. Gibson, Jr. for 25 years. Named Administrative Deputy in 1969

Named City Employee of the month by the All City Employees Association

Graduate, Franklin High School of Los Angeles; East Los Angeles College extension program

First woman member Los Angeles Junior Chamber of Commerce

First woman selected Assistant City Clerk of the City of Los Angeles through competitive examinations

MEMBERSHIPS

Board of Trustees, World Opportunities International

California Elected Women's Association

San Pedro-Palos Verdes Assistance League

Civic Center Speakers Club

Society for the Preservation of Drum Barracks

Friends of the San Pedro Library

Toberman Settlement House Association

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15th District Joan Milke Flores

Member of City Council 1981-1993

Born May 9, 1936 Sheboygan Falls, Wisconsin

Joan Milke moved to California with her family in the mid-1940's and settled in Highland Park where she attended Franklin High School. She met and married Los Angeles Police Officer Sam Flores after graduating and a daughter, Valerie was born to the couple.

At the age of nineteen she got a job as a stenographer with the City Clerks Office but quickly moved on to the office of City Council President John Gibson. By 1968 she had grown into a position as chief deputy in Gibson's office and developed strong ties with the community in which she worked.

When Gibson retired in 1981 she was a natural choice to continue his work and she won the post in an upset and then was reelected in 1985 and 1989. Joan Milke Flores gained a reputation as a thoroughly prepared and strong willed council-member and was instrumental in making council meetings more accessible to public scrutiny. She was also the chairwoman of the Council's Commerce, Energy and Natural Resources Committee and a delegate to the 1988 Republican National Convention for George Bush. In 1991 she left the Council to campaign for California Secretary of State.

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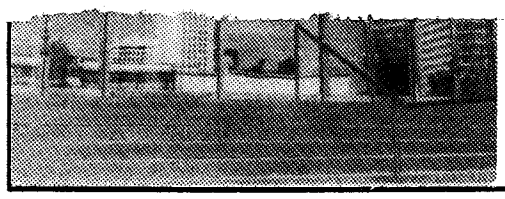

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Spotlight on...Councilwoman Joan Milke Flores

Former Stenographer in Her Tenth Year Representing the Fifteenth District

FLORES

By

DAVID M. WATSON

Staff Writer

Photos by AMBER ECK

Los Angeles City Councilwoman Joan Milke Flores last year convinced three million Californians she was the best qualified applicant for the top secretarial job in state government—the position of secretary of state.

The Republican candidate lost her bid for the state's third-highest elective office—the duties of which are not clerical—to the four-term Democratic incumbent, March Fong Eu. But it was still a pretty impressive showing for the woman who started her public service career as a teen-age civil service clerk/stenographer in City Hall back in 1956.

Flores, who turned 55 last month, has represented the city's 15th Council District for the last 10 years. But it must seem to her and some of the residents of the district—which includes the oddly-shaped tail of the city that stretches south to reach the Los Angeles harbor as well as the community of Watts—as though it's been more like 35.

That's because Flores was the hand-picked successor to 30-year council veteran John Gibson, who was the district's representative when Flores first went to work for the city. One of her first assignments on her new job was taking dictation from Gibson, who was then president of the council—a job he held for a record 16 years.

The two got along well from the beginning, and soon the present councilwoman was working in Gibson's office full-time, first as his secretary and eventually as his chief deputy. By the time she made her own run for the council seat when her boss retired in 1981, she had already accumulated 25 years of experience serving the district, which in addition to Watts includes San Pedro, Wilmington, and the Harbor Gateway and Harbor City communities.

Gibson, she acknowledges, was "both a mentor and a father-figure to me."

Retained Gibson's Staff

The council, Flores recalls, was a very different institution in those days. For one thing, it met five days a week. (It now meets three, leaving council members more time for committee business and their duties in their districts).

For another, Flores says, the role of political ambition has grown along with the rise of ethnic politics and the increased cost of mounting council campaigns.

She reflects:

"People elected to the council now have usually thought more about where they are going from here."

Gibson's health began to fail during his last term in office, and more and more of the job of running the district fell to his staff, which Flores by then headed.

"About the only I didn't do was press the voting button," she says, recalling the last years before Gibson retired.

Her candidacy for the City Council seat, Flores says, was Gibson's idea.

She recollects:

"He had been in a run-off in his last reelection campaign, and though he had won easily, his age and health had become issues and he wasn't sure he wanted to go through that again. He called me into his office and told me if I would agree to run, he would prefer not to make the race. But otherwise, he said, he planned to run for another term."

It wasn't a possibility she had seriously considered before, the councilwoman says, and she had some sleepless nights making the decision.

"I had to think both about what I wanted to do and about what was best for him," she remembers.

Her decision came as no surprise to current Council President John Ferraro, who was then in his fourth full term representing the city's 4th Council District.

"She was a hard worker, very knowledgeable, and had recently moved into the district," Ferraro recalls. "She had been Councilman Gibson's top aide, and was an obvious choice for the job."

Flores retained Gibson's staff—some are still with her—and has continued the emphasis on constituent services, which was a Gibson trademark. She maintains four district offices, the most of any councilperson.

She also tries to spend one day each week in the district, meeting with constituent committees, visiting schools or businesses, or sometimes just walking door to door and talking to people. These "DIDs," or days in the district, are a big part of the reason she has twice won reelection with ease, she says.

Despite her name, Flores is not ethnically Hispanic. She was married for nine years to John Flores, who is now retired from the city's police department.

But the councilwoman says she feels a close identification with the city's Latino population. Her district has increased from 34 to 46 percent Latino over the past decade.

The marriage produced a daughter, Valerie, who is now an attorney, and Flores says she remains close to her ex-husband's family.

Her own ethnicity is about three-quarters German—her maiden name, Milke, which she still uses, is German—and the remainder mostly French. She was born in Sheboygan Falls, Wis., and came to Los Angeles with her parents when she was eight.

Non-Political Move

The family settled in the Highland Park area, and Flores attended Luther Burbank Junior High and Franklin High School there. Her father was a welder and machinist.

Flores moved to San Pedro only two years before she ran for the 15th District seat, but she says the move was unrelated to any political plans. At the time, she asserts, she had none.

Instead, the move came because her daughter had finished high school. Flores says her duties as Gibson's top deputy were requiring her to spend a lot of time in the district, and the long commute from Highland Park to San Pedro was becoming a strain.

Though some of her opponents in the 1981 race—Gibson's retirement drew a field of 13—tried to make an issue of her residency, Flores says it didn't get them far.

She explains:

"I had spent too many years working in the district for anyone to question my ties to the local communities."

The councilwoman's Repubican Party affiliation comes from her midwestern parents. Though Gibson was a Democrat, Flores calls him a conservative Democrat who believed strongly in the nonpartisan character of his office. Party politics never caused any discord between them, she says.

Although she served as a delegate for then-Vice President George Bush at the 1988 Republican convention in New Orleans, Flores says she believes many of her constituents and others in Los Angeles were not aware she was a Republican until she made the run for secretary of state.

She explains that while she had thought about becoming a candidate to oppose Eu four years earlier, the decision

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Joe Cerrell Writes on Parks and Politics, Roger Grace Rebuts *Page 4*

Fred Kline Says GOP Received Mandate From Taxpaying Voters *Page 5*

TOKYO KAIKAN: Three Restaurants, Three Separate Ratings *Page 12*

FLORES

(Continued from Page 1)

to make the race in 1990 came almost on the spur of the moment.

She recalls:

"I read an article—which turned out to be wrong—saying that nobody was running for the Republican nomination."

Flores says she decided that if a number of conditions—such as the support of her family, staff and fundraiser—could be met, she would make the run for the office, which controls elections and registration of corporations in the state.

"The office has intrigued me for some time," she adds. "It relates to one of my primary concerns in public life, which has been fostering openness in government."

The councilwoman goes on to explain:

"I thought there were a lot of problems with the way the office was being run, and I didn't think enough attention was being paid to it. One of the things I am happy about, having run the campaign, is that we were able to bring about some changes."

Spending Limits

Flores says Republican Party bigwigs were not involved in her decision to make the run for statewide office. As far as she knows, she says, the party had no plans to try to mount a serious challenge to Eu, who had been the top Democratic vote-getter in most of her reelection campaigns.

"If the party had been looking for someone to run, I'm not sure they would have thought of me," she adds.

One of the conditions she set for making the race involved a little over half a million dollars in accumulated campaign funds that became unusable in council elections when Los Angeles adopted an amendment to its City Charter placing limits on campaign spending. For a while, Flores says, she thought the money would have to be donated to charity.

But when a federal judge ruled unconstitutional parts of the state campaign funding limits enacted by the voters in 1988 as Proposition 73, the money suddenly became available for a statewide race.

Flores says a good part of the nest egg went to win a primary victory over Los Angeles Deputy District Attorney Gordon Levy. Though early polls showed her behind, she edged the party activist—who had already lined up substantial support before she declared—by a margin of 53 to 47 percent.

'Good Showing'

Though she lost to Eu by a substantial margin, the race was the closest the incumbent had had in years, and Flores calls it a "good showing."

She says she enjoyed the campaign, made new friends across the state, enhanced her name identification and her political stature, and won the votes of "so many Democrats."

Eu, she says, avoided meeting her head on in the campaign.

"March is not a hands-on person in the way she runs her office," Flores contends. "Her campaign manager and her chief of staff are the ones who were familiar with the issues we were raising, and she let them do her talking for her."

Flores' campaign ads accused Eu of reducing fines against her own campaign committee for election law violations. But the incumbent replied that the reductions were routine for inadvertent errors, and implied that Flores was running a mud-slinging campaign.

The effort left Flores nearly $200,000 in debt. Though she doesn't claim she has enjoyed the effort involved in retiring a deficit from a losing campaign—"I'm the world's worst person at asking people for money," she says—Flores doesn't rule out running for the same office in 1994.

"I still think I'd make a really good secretary of state," she says.

Always a stickler for proper procedure on the council, Flores has helped to revise the council's rules and authored an ordinance preserving advance notice and public input requirements for council meetings after thestate Legislature temporarily waived similar state law.

Ferraro comments that she always keeps a copy of the council rulebook close at hand, and is quick to take him to task for any procedural slip-ups.

She also was instrumental in including televising of council meetings as part of local cable franchising requirements, the council president observes.

Though she admits it has led to some grandstanding, Flores says she thinks televised meetings have improved both the quality of debate and the decorum of members on the council.

She adds:

"I also think it has given people an opportunity to really get to know their council representatives. People who watch the meetings on television wind up knowing the same things about council members that I do."

Her latest pet project—again, she says, a reflection of her interest in promoting access and accountability in government—goes before the voters in tomorrow's election.

Proposed Charter Amendment 5 would make all decisions of the city's appointed citizen commissions subject to review, ratification or alteration by the council. A vote of two-thirds of the council's members would be required for the council to exercise the new review power.

If adopted, the amendment could make major changes in the way the city does business. The charter does not currently allow for council veto of many operational decisions made by the commissions, whose members are appointed by the mayor subject to council ratification.

'[T]he issues I take the ball and run with seem to be those which have some basis in bringing us closer to our constituents.'

—Councilwoman Joan Milke Flores

Although the council can sometimes effectively overrule commission decisions, as it did when the Police Commission sought to suspend Police Chief Daryl Gates after the March beating of motorist Rodney King, the legality of the exercise of such power is open to question under the current charter. And three of the city's departments—Water and Power, Airports, and Harbor, known as the "proprietary" departments—are effectively insulated from council control.

Mayor Tom Bradley has opposed the amendment, and sought to block its appearance on the ballot after he first inadvertently signed it and then sought to withdraw his approval. A Superior Court judge ruled the mayor's mistaken signature could not be revoked.

Bradley has suggested the amendment is a power grab by council politicians which would compromise the independent operation of city departments.

But Flores says the ballot measure would do nothing more than make government more open and more accountable to the people who are elected to run it.

"It's to give the public have some way of getting answers from those commissions who are not now responsible or accountable to anyone."

She adds:

"It's interesting. It's not as though I ever say, 'Now let's see, what else can I do to open government to the people?' But the issues I take the ball and run with seem to be those which have some basis in bringing us closer to our constituents."

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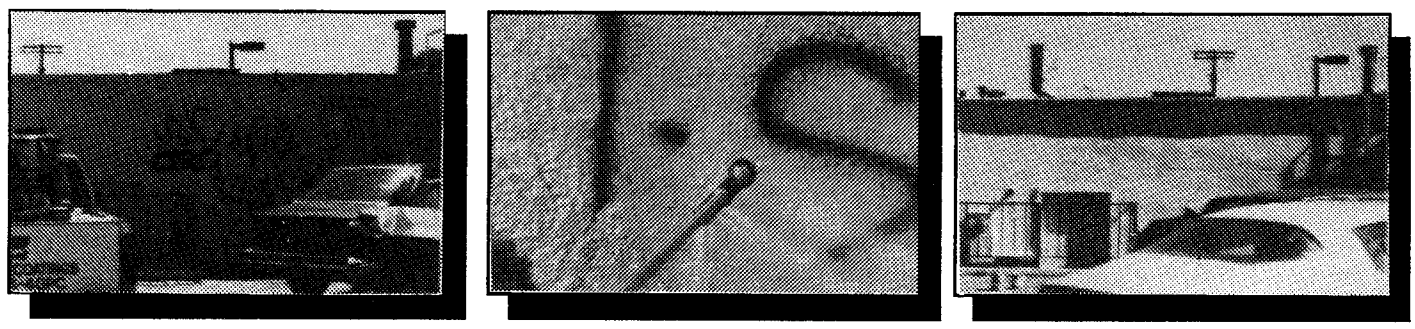

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