

Observations - Elections 2010 and the Past

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By Eliseo Solis

In an effort and for the purpose of providing a factual as well as an opinionated point of view regarding issues before our community, I respectfully offer the following perspective. But first, some background.

In the late 70's and early 80's, an atmosphere of solidarity embraced minority politics and community activism in Lubbock which, to my lament, no longer exists. One example of that solidarity was the Conference of Organizations (CofO) that included up to 35 groups representing the white, black, and brown communities here in Lubbock. One of the co-chairs, whose name I forget, was Muslim, Carolyn Lanier represented the Anglo community, and I, representing the Chicano community, headed the Conference for a period of time. Lanier was head of the Human Relations Department and I was Director of the Community Services Department, both with the City of Lubbock. Lanier and the League of Women Voters, headed by Betty Anderson at the time, were examples of the enlightened Anglo establishment. Other organizations included the NAACP and the Nation of Islam representing the black community; LULAC, GI Forum, Brown Berets, and Raza Unida (all six of us declared members) were examples of Mexican-American/Chicano representation, a group that is now referred to as Hispanics. The list of names, that comes to mind, but is not all inclusive, includes Lanier, Tavita Dorow, Esperanza Solis*, Diane Henderson, LOIC, Jessie Rangel, Professor Don and Cathy Dietz, Joan Erwin, Chevo Morales*, Bidal Agüero*, Harry Stokely*, Juan Cervantez, Paula Montoya, Steve Carrizales, Lisa Ramos, Harold Chatman*, Betty Anderson, Robert Narvaiz, Gilbert Herrera and many others that an old abused brain fails to remember.

*-Que en Paz Descansen

The Conference could be likened to present-day West Texas Organizing Strategy (WTOS) and a main objective being voter registration. This in turn led to the affiliation with the Southwest Voter Registration Education Project headed by Willie Velásquez around 1980-81. The cooperation between SVREP and local activists in the area led to the filing of over 70 lawsuits (all won) in West Texas which in turn resulted in an increase of minority elected officials from about 5 in the early 80's to over **150** by 1992. This phenomenon took place in an area from Amarillo to Midland/Odessa including Fort Stockton and Monahans. I am proud to say that I traveled most of the communities, large and small in this area, seeking plaintiffs and initiating voter registration in conjunction with SVREP. Cities like Midland-Odessa and Cactus, north of Amarillo were visited (I accompanied Willie on the Cactus trip and marveled at his dedication about visiting such a small city in the Panhandle of Texas. One couldn't have had better mentors than he and his staff at that time).

Another issue that the Conference of Organizations pursued was the lack of minority representation on the Lubbock Chamber of Commerce and a Committee on Economic Development of the South Plains Association of Governments (SPAG). These all-white organizations unfortunately did not feel it was important to have minority representation on their Boards and resisted until the federal agency providing the funds to SPAG, under pressure from the Conference of Organizations, withheld funding until minority members were allowed on the SPAG and Anglo Chamber of Commerce. Again, it was most unfortunate that minorities had to gain their right to representation in this way, but we had to do what we had to do. As a consequence, Blas Mojica landed a SPAG post and Ester Sepeda was named to the Lubbock Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors.

As the Conference of Organizations faded in the early 1980's, the single-member district lawsuit against the City of Lubbock became the central issue in local minority politics of Lubbock and for obvious reasons. We wanted representation. It was reported that up until this time, the city council and school board were filled by persons living within a 7 block area. It is my understanding that the lawsuit was initiated by Gene Gaines and the NAACP around 1974 (I arrived at Lubbock in 1977) and that it began to lose momentum because it lacked sufficient broad community support. Froy Salinas then agitated interest within the Chicano constituency and in 1979, the case was ultimately joined by the Southwest Voter Registration Education Project (SVREP), the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund (MALDEF), the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC), and the American G.I. Forum. Local attorneys, including Tom Garza, Albert Pérez, Dan Benson-Professor Emeritus of Texas Tech, and Pat Abeyta joined in, as well as Rolando Ríos of San Antonio representing the SVREP. Plaintiffs joining Gaines were Gonzalo Garza, GI Forum, and Juan Antonio (Tony) Reyes, LULAC.

U.S. District Judge Halbert O. Woodward ruled against the plaintiffs (minorities), and the case was appealed to the 5th Circuit Court in New Orleans. Knowing that he had violated the Voting Rights Act of 1965 with his ruling, Woodward was basically reprimanded and ordered to review the case. Upon "seeing the light," he finally ruled in favor of the above mentioned plaintiffs in the fall of 1983. The City of Lubbock then considered an appeal to the Supreme Court of the United States. Our community that demanded ethnic representation organized a group called "Concerned Citizens of Lubbock" and immediately organized a march (see photo) against an appeal and the city gave in and did not appeal. After spending millions of dollars in taxpayer money trying to deny minority representation to elected office, the Lubbock power structure lost. Our goal of at least allowing Chicanos and Blacks to represent (or mis-represent) ourselves had been met. For us to make our own political decisions and mistakes was now a reality. *Jones v. City of Lubbock*, 727 F.2d 364 (5th Cir. 1984).

Those that entered the process and benefited from this struggle for single-member district representation included Billie Caviel, Maggie Trejo, and Linda Deleon. I did not know Billie or Maggie very well at the time. Some of us activists had been asked to

participate in a march against the closing of Thompson Junior High that had been organized in part by Deleon. That was the first time I met Deleon. The result was that Caviel and T. J. Patterson won for school board and city council, respectively, in District 2. Trejo beat Ester Sepeda for city council District 1 and Deleon won the school board seat for District 1. This was in May of 1984. I ran and indirectly benefited by winning the Lubbock County Commissioner's post in November of that same year. Precinct 3 includes Districts 1 and 2 represented by the above mentioned. Another indirect activity coming from the Single-Member District episode was the development of the West Texas Association of Minority Elected Officials, WT-AMEO (see photo). The primary purpose for WT-AMEO was to develop leadership skills for those of us newly elected Black and Brown officials to properly represent our neglected communities. What wonderful historical events!

Forward to the Present and the Loss of Activism

I may be wrong, but it seems that some in the Hi-spanic community feel that racism and unequal application of laws and policies no longer exist. According to them, we must now merge (Think: Hispanic division-Lubbock Chamber of Commerce) because things are hunky-dory and the Republican Party better responds to our community needs. I remain Raza Unida philosophically and am no avid fan of the Democratic Party, but the party that overtly expresses racism and disdain for the poor certainly does not represent me. At least the Democrats hide it somewhat and make us have to think in order to distinguish between the hypocrites and those that were fair-minded. I see so many Chicanos rising through the economic strata thinking that the Republican Party more properly represents their interests, obviously unaware that the party basically represents the upper class and corporations. Many in the Democratic Party hierarchy feel that Chicanos should be led by the more "qualified" Anglo leaders. What's more disappointing is the mentality used by our minority representatives, i.e., Linda Deleon and Floyd Price, in appointing members to the commission to review the charter of the City of Lubbock. I have nothing against appointing Anglos (I worked for David Langston in his run for Senate and respect him. He would have been an outstanding ally), but isn't there at least one or two Chicanos or Blacks out there that possess enough intellectuality to review the charter. Why did we work so hard for single-member districts?!!

Where Did We Lose Linda?

Upon taking office and several years after, Linda Deleon was a true advocate of our community. She fought tirelessly for the children in our schools while at the same time raising her children and holding a full-time job. She deserves much credit for her sacrifices serving. Cavazos Junior High should really be Linda Deleon Junior High, in my opinion.

But in the latter years of her city council stint, things seemed to change. Something was feeling strange and again, in my opinion, positions taken by her seemed to contradict the desires of her constituency in District 1.

- *In an El Editor article sometime back, Deleon advised people not to run for office because people do not appreciate it. To my friend and former colleague, Linda: We did not get involved to be appreciated, we got involved to change the oppressive climate of a political system as it relates to minorities. You are a product of the work conducted by others in making it possible for you to get elected. We're not sacrificial lambs thrown to the den of political degradation. We were and should be warriors, men and women, ready to fight for justice for our people, come what may.*
- *Even though our goal is to beautify our Barrios, it should not come at the expense of senior citizens (nuestros viejitos) losing their savings to upgrade their homes after paying fines. I ran into such a person at the municipal court who was in his 80's pleading that he had no money to pay the fine of over \$300. I asked the City of Lubbock Code Enforcement Department to help him and after hearing his dilemma, dismissed the fine. If I ran into this gentleman by accident, how could I not, as a city council person, research the effects of code enforcement rules that I support.*
- *A bond election was held and passed that provided monies for neighborhood enhancement. After the money was approved through a most sacred institution of our democracy, someone or two, no doubt in a secret meeting room, decided that the money approved for District 1 neighborhood improvement would be better spent on a baseball complex on Highway 1586 that is certainly appreciated by residents in the cities of Woodrow and Wolfforth . Well, Councilwoman Deleon voted in favor of the funds transfer. How sad and...in other times, this would have been as offensive as closing down Thompson Junior High. We would have been marching in protest.*
- *The expansion of the dog pound into the Mackensie Park area was of much concern to the Guadalupe Neighborhood Association, headed by Carlos and Lili Quirino. Even though initially proposed for the McAllister Park, Deleon organized a rally to discourage placing the animal shelter at Clapp...and later meets with Guadalupe residents to promote building it at the entrance of Mackensie Park.*
- *As it relates to Chicano economic development, the South Park Club owned by Chris Gonzales though flourishing, was nevertheless condemned to demolition with a "yes" vote by Deleon. Her response was that the majority was going to condemn the club anyway and a protest vote would be useless. We shouldn't have wasted our time marching against the closing of Thompson Junior High.*

In conclusion, if anyone is aware of making mistakes in the political arena, I stand at the front of the line. The commitment made by many of us though, was to be in the public arena for the purpose of enhancing the position of our people in this society— educationally, politically, economically and socially. A friend of mine serving on the school board in Austin told me about a year ago that he has noticed the change in the so-called leadership of our communities go from fighting injustice and inequality to a "Me" society. There is now not only fighting within the minority community but among the

Hispanics as well.

Somebody outside the minority elected community needs to take on the task of establishing a dialogue in the neighborhoods and rising above the single issue squabbles that are ravaging and destroying the fragile base that was set in the 70s and 80s. I say outside the "minority elected community" because those in office now are too concerned about something or other; but it doesn't seem to be about righting the wrongs existent in their particular field or governmental entity.

Please community, start conversing, organizing and making not only your elected officials accountable but the self proclaimed leaders that need help in formulating issues of real importance to the betterment of our neighborhoods. We will all benefit as a result.

Sí Se Puede!