

*La Opinión*  
May 25, 2003

## **LOS ANGELES: Alex Padilla, Wise and Tenacious**

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City Hall has heated up with a fight on the budget.

The City Council has engaged in a nasty conflict with Mayor Jim Hahn and Police Chief Bill Bratton that will impact the future of the city.

The principle plot has its twists, with the biggest one being the confrontation between Councilman Alex Padilla, President of the Council, and Mayor Hahn.

The motive behind the conflict is the proposed budget that was presented by the Mayor and the level of revenues available to both finance city services and expand the number of police by 350 officers.

The Council fears that the Mayor's revenue projections do not reflect reality and that this discrepancy could force the city into a budget deficit in the coming year – a deficit worse than what we have seen to date.

As for Chief Bratton, he has had a difficult time containing his anger with the council.

This exemplifies the dead-end street with no exit that pops up from time to time in politics: the City Council versus the Mayor and the chief of police. It is also a sort of grand theater played out in front of the eyes of the public, and it serves as an important lesson about the budget process.

The significance of this issue is somewhat tied to the quality of city services that will be affected by the Mayor's incorrect forecast.

Each side has argued in defense of their own calculations.

On the one hand is Bill Fujioka's forecast, the CAO of the City who is allied with the Mayor.

On the other are the calculations of Ron Deaton, the Chief Legislative Analyst, whose budget projections are fueling the Council's fiery criticism of the Mayor.

The result of having two different entities involved in a budget battle is directly related to city charter reform, and with the fight to maintain the position of the Chief Legislative Analyst (CLA). The CLA serves as the Council's independent consultant on city programs, legislation and, most importantly, the annual budget of the Mayor.

The confrontations between the two have had a long history in Los Angeles politics.

The key issue is that revenues adequately balance with the funds necessary to finance all of the Mayor's programs, especially the increase in the number of the LAPD officers.

The debate around this potential discrepancy was the touchstone that set off the disagreement that emerged between the council and the mayor.

Chief Bratton has taken sides on the issue and has taken no prisoners.

Bratton censured the council for not supporting the mayor, but he has had a hard time not showing in his disdain for the entire council in public.

This does not serve the LAPD well, since the city never has looked kindly on controversial police chiefs, especially those that are brought in from the outside.

Chief Bratton had barely arrived on the West Coast when he began ordering L.A. around with arrogant words, assuring that he will clean the city of graffiti.

This naive level of understanding of L.A. history was forgiven because he was new and had just arrived. But looking back on it now, it is obvious that he is not as quick a learner as one might have hoped.

Now, in his first conflict with the council, instead of negotiating and making concessions, he has decided to be condescending and while spewing out arrogant words.

It is regrettable, but it gives the impression that the LAPD is going to annually evaluate its work on the streets in the same fast and loose fashion as its budget requests.

It appears that the Chief feels that with his small army of officers, he now owns Los Angeles.

In the middle of the controversy has emerged a promising person: Alex Padilla. After a period of relative tranquility, and a time of discrete gestation in charge of the council, Padilla, the president of the council, has finally emerged.

Prior to the present problems, Padilla had drawn attention to himself when he got ahead of many deciding to support the candidacy of Jim Hahn - who then occupied the position of City Attorney - for Mayor.

This created a major split with the Chicano voters of the city. The only thing that saved him was that he backed Hahn very early - before Antonio Villaraigosa began his campaign as the Latino candidate of LA.

Since then, Padilla has comported himself like Mayor Hahn's foot soldier, always supporting him.

This is why things don't make sense in the present controversy.

It is obvious that Mayor Hahn is livid with the Council and particularly angry that President Padilla has had the audacity - some say, the courage - to step out in public as the leader of the opposition when the council received the Mayor's version of the budget.

His potential as a strong political leader is finally apparent. He is now exhibiting a level of political knowledge and tenacity that has never been seen before.

This conflict, which will be resolved when the Mayor makes some small concessions, indicates that Councilman Padilla has finally ended his learning period and will soon arrive at a position of greater importance and political power.

His career is unusual for two reasons: his springboard was Pacoima - one of the poorest areas of the city - and he climbed rapidly to the position of leadership when - to speak frankly - he started as a novice in matters of politics.

This is how he has taken only a few years in the political arena to mature.

Alex Padilla had risen and established himself with his intelligence, and has now arrived at a level to challenge Hahn, his best ally, and to say NO to the most important document that the Mayor of LA presents to the city each year: the budget.

The Mayor is the one who will leave the loser in this fight.

He has weakened his base of support in the council, and his years left on the council will be plagued by conflict.

The Council has now evolved into a force confident that it can challenge policy proposals of the Mayor, who also knows this will be the case once Villaraigosa assumes his position as councilman of the 14th district.

Also, the Mayor's budget analysts can be, as Padilla figured out, vague. It would appear imprudent in this difficult time with a poor economy and with sinking revenues to make optimistic projections that obligate the city to further debt.

As President of the Council, Padilla had every right to lack faith in proposals that don't appear to be sound.

What he has done in confronting his ally, the mayor, is to signal that he now has in his own hands his future and a mature and effective politician.

He is demonstrating that he is a leader and that he will not let down those who first believed in him when he decided to run for council.

Now it is Mayor's and the Chief's turn to make concessions.

President Padilla has indicated clearly that the final decision about the budget will pass before him or it will not be approved. Mayor Hahn does not have an alternative because he doesn't have another base of support.

The President of the City Council, Alex Padilla, has won this battle.

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