

DAILY NEWS

August 9, 2002

Neighborhood advocates

In its Aug. 7 editorial, the Daily News argued that our newly forming neighborhood councils would be unable to effectively influence governmental decision-making unless they had actual voting power inside the system. Of course, that's not true.

If the editors had attended the training sessions at Saturday's Congress of Neighborhoods, which was attended by more than 800 neighborhood council leaders, they would have learned that real power isn't given; it's taken. The editors would have understood that a system of grass-roots participatory democracy is most powerful when it operates as far as possible outside the governmental system.

If you give the power of the vote, you create more politicians in the process. The reality is that regardless of how many politicians we have, we need powerful neighborhood advocates who can influence the way the politicians make their decisions, and constantly hold them accountable to their neighborhoods. That is what Mayor Jim Hahn and the City Council are creating in Los Angeles.

The Daily News editors are only pretending to be naive. They know how powerful lobbyists are in affecting decision-making. The lobbyists don't have a vote, and they don't want it.

We're teaching the neighborhoods, and giving them the resources, to become as powerful as the most powerful lobbyists. And with that arsenal, they will be able to go beyond City Hall and influence what happens at all levels of government, including the school board, the MTA, and the county Board of Supervisors. That's power!

Greg Nelson

General manager

Department of Neighborhood Empowerment