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## **Ethnicity raised in Van Nuys vote dispute**

**By James Nash**  
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CHATSWORTH -- In a meeting that lasted until 2 a.m. Wednesday, several people who won Van Nuys Neighborhood Council seats in a disputed election said those challenging the results are attempting to deny Latinos a role in local governance.

"The issues here need to be seen in terms of race relations, in terms of people who have had power and don't want to share that power," said Marianne Kanter, who was elected to the council as part of a self-labeled "diversity slate."

Five people have formally challenged the Feb. 8 election for the Van Nuys Neighborhood Council, one of about 100 panels set up to advise Los Angeles officials on local concerns. The challengers accuse winning candidates and activists of illegally campaigning within 100 feet of the polling place and encouraging people to vote even if they have no connection to Van Nuys.

The Los Angeles Board of Neighborhood Commissioners, which oversees the advisory neighborhood councils, recommended during the lengthy meeting that the Los Angeles County Registrar-Recorder's Office intervene in the election dispute.

Chief Deputy Registrar Kris Heffron said she is researching the issue and hasn't ruled out offering assistance.

Losing candidates and neighborhood activists who dispute the election said they are protesting what they consider manipulation of the election process, not the winners' ethnic backgrounds. The challengers have called for a new election, also advised by the Los Angeles League of Women Voters, based on election-day campaigning at the polling place.

"Our integrity is being violated," said Daniel Wiseman, who did not run in the election but has taken a prominent role in challenging the results. "Our civil rights are being violated."

Winning candidates and their supporters said there are other civil rights to consider: those of the approximately 61 percent of residents in the Van Nuys Neighborhood Council boundaries who are Latino.

The leaders who launched the neighborhood council -- some of whom unsuccessfully ran for seats in the February election -- didn't reflect the ethnic

makeup of Van Nuys, said Enrique Aragon, an activist who campaigned for many of the winning candidates.

"I'm here to tell you, diversity has arrived," Aragon told the board. "Look at us. We represent the community of Van Nuys."

Hal Netkin, an unsuccessful candidate who filed a challenge, said Aragon and others are attempting to obscure the facts outlined in the challenges by characterizing the election as an exercise in Latino empowerment.

"The use of the buzzword of 'diversity' to promote certain agendas is a form of racism itself," Netkin said.

Amalia Sanchez, who won a neighborhood council seat reserved for renters, said she and other successful candidates reached out to immigrants who were ignored by other candidates.

"We did do outreach to the community, and that is the reason why we won," Sanchez said.

The board voted to investigate allegations that Anglo neighborhood activists cursed at and attempted to intimidate the challenged neighborhood council board members. Several of the activists denied the charge.