

## Lessons Learned

Mayor James Hahn says he heard the message sent by secession advocates and claims there's been progress in providing better services for the Valley in the past year and vows public safety will continue to be his top priority in coming months

By JACQUELINE FOX  
Staff Reporter

With few exceptions, the leaders of the secession campaign of 2002 say, despite certification of 26 neighborhood councils, a new government center in Van Nuys and the establishment of two Valley area service cabinets and satellite city halls, not much has changed in the year since Measure F, the initiative on a breakup, was defeated at the polls.

There is still a call for more police officers and faster response times, business tax reforms, traffic congestion relief and a fairer share of city services.

On the eve of the state's historic vote to recall its governor, Los Angeles Mayor James Hahn reflected on the year since his own "recall" battle was decided by a 51-49 percent vote in favor of keeping the city whole.

Hahn says despite the flaws in the system, neighborhood councils need to be given more time before they are rejected. His focus on public safety remains his top priority and he will push for council support to set aside the funds needed to obtain federal grants to pay for more police officers. Hahn is still in favor of widening the 101 Freeway or extending light rail across the Valley to ease congestion, despite previous and fierce opposition to the idea.

His campaign for re-election in 2005 has already begun. Should it smack up against a renewed secession drive, he says he's ready to fight it head on.

Question: It's been nearly a year since the vote on Measure F and what you described as the biggest battle of your political career. What's been your primary focus for the Valley since?

Answer: Really it's the same for the Valley as for the rest of the city. My emphasis has been on public safety, seeing what we can do to make the neighborhoods of the Valley safer. We're pleased that homicides year to date from last year are down over 32 percent in the Valley, and I think that indicates that we've been able to turn the corner.

Q: Yet the city council rejected your plans to hire more officers this year, largely due to budget concerns. Do you think there will be enough funding in the city's budget in 2004 to accomplish the goal?

A: I may have been a victim of my own success. Last year, for example, for the first time in five years, we actually added numbers to LAPD. Four years before I was mayor the

department had shrunk by more than 900 officers. We added over 300 officers last year. Obviously there is a cost in that, but I never heard anybody complain during that period of time as we hired more police officers than we had budgeted for that we should stop doing that. Obviously someone decided that four years before I was mayor there were other priorities more important than the police department. That money didn't stay in the police department, it went to other priorities. What I'm trying to do is get those priorities back in line. And so we are saying that number one is, we're putting enough police officers on the street to do the job. Then we'll start looking at the rest of the city and that's the message I'm going to be carrying to the city council as we start looking at the budget not only for this year but next year.

Q: Immediately after last year's vote you announced your Teamwork L.A. program which is supposed to force city departments to work more closely with one another to get things done more quickly and efficiently. Describe your view of the program's progress so far?

A: Great. I think that it's been very successful. As a result of the neighborhood service cabinets early on this year, in the Valley we went and ripped out these pay phones that had been illegally installed that a lot of drug dealers were using. Another example of that was when the DWP heard the call from LAPD about doing something about all these shoes (on telephone wires). It was an example of using a department that had never been involved in public safety work with the police department on a public safety issue. We are going to continue to do that; see how we can get this synergy between all these various departments, working to enhance the quality of life in the neighborhoods.

Q: You touted neighborhood councils as the answer to secession. Yet, across the Valley and citywide, there are frustrations with the process and criticism of the city's department overseeing their formation. What's your response to the criticism?

A: There's problems, but you know what, we expected some growing pains with this. I think it's been far more positive than negative. I think people are getting involved and they are making a difference. We've gotten into the complaints as well. But we believe that people have to be as inclusive as possible. I think there's also been some friction between some people who've said (to the councils) 'hey where were you two years ago, or four years ago.?' People think it's just homeowners, but we want renters, we want students and people who work in the community to be part of the neighborhood councils. And that's a different focus.

Q: Construction of the East-West rapid busway this year marked an important step, but many say more needs to be done to address traffic issues, and there is a renewed interest in widening the 101 Freeway. What do you think?

A: I was the only one who stood his ground on that (widening the 101) while I think a lot of the other elected officials ran for cover. Obviously someone is going to be very concerned when you are talking about taking their house. They are going to be very upset. But look, we didn't build any of the freeways we've built in Southern California without hurting some neighborhoods. I still believe we need to put more capacity on the 101.

Q: Would you support extension of the rail system across the Valley? A: I think it's an idea that we really ought to consider. Obviously people are going to say that it's very expensive. I thought the best idea would be light rail where the busway (will be), but we had a number of folks who didn't want light rail.

Q: There have been changes in your administration over the last few months that have raised some eyebrows, particularly your former Deputy Mayor for the Valley Felipe Fuentes' move to chief of staff for Council President Alex Padilla. What's going on and will the Valley get a replacement deputy mayor?

A: Felipe's job was certainly more than deputy mayor for the Valley. He was also very instrumental in making sure we got the support we needed for the neighborhood councils. We are going through a little bit of a reorganization right now in the mayor's office. I'm actually interested in slightly downsizing the office. I've been asking all the other departments to tighten their belts so I'm looking at the same thing. Certainly somebody who can have a big focus on the Valley is important, but we haven't made a final decision for a deputy mayor for the Valley. But something along those lines is what we're looking at.

Q: VICA's annual business forecast is coming up. You didn't attend last year. Will you attend this year and what can we expect to hear from you?

A: Yes. I didn't go last year because there were politics involved that I didn't want to play. I think we'll talk about a lot of the things we've talked about here in this interview: Teamwork L.A., what we've done to improve delivery of services in the Valley and the (focus) on increasing public safety.

Q: What's the status on recommendations for business tax reforms, specifically changes to the gross receipts tax structure? Will we see that eliminated in 2004?

A: The elimination, no. It's too much a part of our city budget, especially when you see that the state continues to have their greedy paws all over our local tax dollars. The Business Tax Advisory Committee started out with a mission to reform the tax, but I think the goal was to have revenue neutrality, not take money away from police and fire and libraries. I think we can extend their mission. There's still a lot more to do.

**SNAPSHOT: James K. Hahn**

Title: Mayor of Los Angeles

Age: 53

Education: B.A. in English and law degree, Pepperdine University

Career Turning Point: Serving as an intern for the Legal Aid Family Law Clinic

Most Admired Person: Father, Kenneth

Personal: Separated; two children