

Antonio, ex-mayors tackle issues

By Rick Orlov, Staff Writer
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The complexities of Los Angeles - from traffic and housing to race relations and education - offer no easy solution or quick fixes, the three men who have had to run the city over the past 12 years agreed on Wednesday.

Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa and his two predecessors, James Hahn and Richard Riordan, concluded the city faces dramatic challenges, and changes will not be easy to institute in a city continuing to grow and with competing interests seeking their share.

"One of the things I had hoped for was with neighborhood councils that we would bring people from different parts of the city to see what they had in common with other areas," Hahn said. "That is still just beginning and has a long way to go."

The three men addressed an audience of 200 people at the California Science Center as part of the 10th anniversary of the Days of Dialogue program, born out of concerns of violence from the O.J. Simpson murder trial and the riots that had erupted after the acquittal of officers in the Rodney King case.

"We are looking to do all we can, but the truth is that it is going to take time to deal with all the problems we are facing," Villaraigosa said. "We stopped construction on streets during rush hours, but the fact is we have rush hour 24 hours a day. It is going to be up to all of us to solve these problems."

Riordan said the one thing he learned during his two terms as mayor is that a city as complex as Los Angeles has to be able to adapt and change to meet the challenges of the future, economically and politically.

"We are way ahead of every other city in the country, but it is a very complicated future we face," Riordan said. "We have issues in housing, jobs and education that are not going to be simple to solve."

While all three mayors have had their political differences in the past - Hahn and Villaraigosa ran against each other twice and Riordan clashed with Hahn when Hahn was city attorney - they all agreed Los Angeles was a city of promise and problems.

In education, Riordan decried the lack of change since he was mayor when children - particularly minority youths - continue to have such a high dropout rate.

Villaraigosa, who like Hahn called for a greater policy role for the mayor in governing

schools, said he has been shocked by some of what he has seen on high school campuses.

"It has been like a scene out of "The Blackboard Jungle," Villaraigosa said at one point of a day at Jefferson High School. "What I saw was shocking. You saw despair there. Overcrowding and a lack of hope."

While he said he believes some of the racial problems have been overplayed by the media, he said much still needs to be done if the city is going to thrive and develop a work force to fill the jobs that will be needed to make the city successful.