



KEN LUBAS / Los Angeles Times

Local government leaders at conference of the League of California Cities in Los Angeles.

Leaders Focus on Community Links

■ **Conference:** League of Cities speakers suggest neighborhood-based governing as a way to reduce alienation of the electorate.

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Gathering in downtown Los Angeles on Tuesday for a League of California Cities conference, more than 2,200 local government leaders from across the state focused on improving their relationships with communities and listened to pleas to aid businesses.

During a workshop aimed at empowering neighborhoods—community-based governing—several mayors, city council members and municipal administrators said that they now recognize that from-the-top-down decision-making may no longer be sufficient in their increasingly diverse and sometimes alienated communities.

Daniel K. Tabor, a veteran Inglewood city councilman and one of the workshop's speakers, said elected officials must take the initiative in showing people how they can become involved in the political process.

"City bureaucracies are not set up to involve the everyday citizen," Tabor said. "They could be, however, if we let them in."



Gov. Pete Wilson urges community leaders at meeting to streamline bureaucracies.

Attendees from nearly every one of the state's 468 cities were on hand for the third day of the 94th annual conference of the League, held at the Convention Center.

The day opened with a speech by Gov. Pete Wilson, who called on municipalities to streamline their bureaucracies and make it easier for businesses to operate. Despite Wilson's recent slashes in aid to California's cities and counties, the audience of public officials seemed to embrace the governor's ideas.

After the speech, the conference broke into smaller sessions, using the workshops to discuss such issues as youth crime, budget reduction and homeless-

ness.

At the neighborhood empowerment workshop, moderated by Mary Herron, mayor of Coronado, officials talked about how to combat constituent cynicism toward government and promote a sense of ownership in communities.

Tabor told of a new program in Inglewood in which department heads are required to "adopt" two neighborhoods, then take their staffs on tours of the areas for a look at specific problems—anything from tree-trimming problems to crime and urban blight.

At the same time, he said, citizens are encouraged to complain to those department heads and work with officials to problem solve.

"We don't assume we know everything," he said. "We ask to be taught."

That approach, said workshop attendees, has gained currency over the last 18 months—in which the police beating of Rodney G. King highlighted the need for community-based policing and the Los Angeles riots exposed what many officials believe are deep-seated frustrations with their agencies.

"It's something in the past that we haven't done in a particularly systematic way," said Deborah Chankin, a transportation planning officer for Long Beach.

The conference ends today.