

'Politicians Should Step Aside . . . Families Will Lead'

Another Way

■ Grass-roots, family-based organizations are the most effective political bodies in the city. By joining forces, they can bend the political process to their will.

By LOUIS R. NEGRETE

Candidates for public office now ask us to trust our future to them, saying they can cure the civic failures that culminated in last spring's civil unrest. But we have learned from years of experience to expect grandstanding, especially in an election year, with too few results.

Instead, we need ordinary citizens and taxpayers to assume leadership to make the city whole again.

If we don't succeed, government will go back to unacceptable denials of the deep-seated social causes of civil disorder. We can't afford to lose yet another generation of urban youth.

Frustrated parents watch what are supposed to be childhood joys of the first days of school turn into a deep sense of hopelessness in their children. If these children graduate from high school, they join older family members in unemployment and welfare lines. Or they show up in jails as alienated youth who can no longer tell right from wrong.

We must also help the thousands of families in Los Angeles that cannot find or afford a decent place to live.

Our streets are cluttered with pious but empty campaign promises. Citizens, how-

resources. Now we have a responsibility to come forward with our own best thinking and regional strategies to rebuild Los Angeles. We must join business leaders who are willing to reinvest in areas that need it.

Community organizations like those tied to the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF) are trained to confront community problems. Four IAF organizations in Los Angeles represent cultural and regional diversity: the United Neighborhoods Organization (UNO) in East L.A., Hollywood, Echo Park and Huntington Park; the Southern California Organizing Committee (SCOC) in South-Central Los Angeles and Compton; East Valleys Organization (EVO) in the San Gabriel Valley, and Valley Organized in Community Efforts (VOICE) in the San Fernando Valley.

These groups are moving beyond old-style single-neighborhood approaches to urban problems to long-term citywide strategies. Labor unions primarily organize workers; we organize families for power. Organized and trained families affiliated with these groups fight to participate in self-governance and are the city's most important resource.

Their strength comes from African-American, Latino and Anglo families as well as Catholics, Protestants and Jews

Point

It was politicians who tolerated and encouraged the conditions that led to the uprisings of last spring. No matter what they tell us now, the political system is too broke to fix. The only bearable option is repudiation of the system.

Counterpoint

Dropping out of the political system is pure admission of failure. We pay elected officials from our tax money and we don't have alternatives. We have to stay in the system and trust the people we elect to be our advocates.

can provide vision and bases of power for self-reliance and community-based problem-solving. They trust themselves more than they trust the puffed-up rhetoric from post-riot talk-show circuses. And they demand meaningful citizen roles in designing and implementing strategies to rebuild Los Angeles. Politicians and media-created personalities have a penchant for assuming that they speak for everyone. In this case, we must speak for ourselves.

Our communities look forward to help from city officials in breaking the bureaucratic swamp holding us back from building the Nehemiah West project, affordable homes for low-income families in Los Angeles. The "Kids First" campaign aims to empower parents to restructure the Los Angeles Unified School District, giving us better schools. Again, the bureaucrats and

grams for voter registration, family outreach and primary education, strengthening families and making a difference in reducing gang membership. Otherwise, Los Angeles will cement its decline into Third World status.

If given sufficient and long-overdue support, families will lead the fight against the crisis of hopelessness and despair among our youth. New monies coming into Los Angeles in the rebuilding process must be used to strengthen families, the true grass roots of our communities. For their part, broad-based community organizations need to have both plans for rebuilding and a voice in how new capital is utilized.

Investing in human capital is just as important as rebuilding physical structures. In the long term, families are more important than buildings. The family can