

DEL REY HOMEOWNERS' & NEIGHBORS' ASSOCIATION ("DRHNA")
GENERAL MEETING
Wednesday, October 22, 2008

A candidates' forum with the two candidates for the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors Second District – State Senator Mark Ridley Thomas and Los Angeles City Councilman Bernard Parks. The seat is being vacated by Supervisor Yvonne Brathwaite Burke, who has represented the Second District since 1992.

Program Format:

Pledge of Allegiance

Introduction of board members of DRHNA

Introduction of board members of Del Rey Neighborhood Council

Announcement of DRHNA's new emphasis on disaster preparedness, promotion of Neighborhood Watch, Community Emergency Response Training (CERT) in Del Rey

7:15 p.m. Sen. Mark Ridley-Thomas

8:15 p.m. Councilman Bernard Parks

Moderator: Gary Walker, staff writer for The Argonaut. Winner of the California Newspaper Publisher's Award in 2005 for his reporting on the Metropolitan Transportation Authority's plan to bring the Expo Line into Culver City, and in 2008, winner of the John Swett Award, the highest education award given to new reporters in the state.

The moderator posed four prepared questions to each of the candidates and then took questions from the floor. As a result, there were some differences in the subjects that the candidates were asked to address. In addition, while answering questions on one subject, both candidates interjected comments on other subjects as a way of conveying their views on subjects that were not under discussion.

The candidates agree that there should be a single executive in charge of health care in Los Angeles County. Both agree that joint powers agreements should be used more extensively to manage planning issues. Both agree that careful management will be the key to the county being able to continue providing services with fewer resources.

Question 1 – Emergency Preparedness: How well is Los Angeles County prepared for a major earthquake?

Sen. Ridley-Thomas:

Few places in California are sufficiently prepared. He has experience dealing with our public works systems (e.g. sewers, fiber optics), and our infrastructure is fundamental to education, health, safety, the environment. The biggest problem is that the health care system is insufficient to sustain a crisis. He is a big proponent of CERT.

Councilman Parks:

California is the best-prepared state. In an emergency, Los Angeles County Sheriff Lee Baca reports directly to the governor. There are 89 cities in the county, and safety officials all follow a protocol and work in “task force mode.” The County Personnel Board manages volunteers. The Department of Parks and Recreation manages evacuations. Building and Safety inspects buildings. The Traffic Department inspects roads. If they do not follow the protocol, their expenditures will not be reimbursed.

Question 2 – Health Care: What can be done about our health care delivery system? How can we cut our health care expenses without cutting services? Is health care a privilege or a right?

Sen. Ridley-Thomas: The closure of Martin Luther King hospital shifted 50,000 patient visits to other facilities. The hospital is needed, but the level of care had gotten to a point where the hospital needed to be closed. Patient care must be the top priority. Health care has become a right because the lack of it affects the community as a whole. He supports a single payer health care system. We should start with school-based clinics. When students visit clinics, 40 – 60% have mental health issues.

Councilman Parks: Half the residents of the Second District do not have health insurance. Medical records need to be centralized, and treatment for various conditions should be available in a single location, e.g. addiction and mental health services. There should be mobile clinics offering preventive care. It has been 20 years since the County issued a Request for Proposal for health care providers for county employees. The City and County of Los Angeles together employ 140,000 people.

Health care is a right. We should have universal health care. However, people also owe it to themselves to take care of themselves. One fifth (20%) of the city’s employees were found to use 80 per cent of the services. The available money must be managed so the county does not run a deficit.

Question 3 – County Management: Is the size of the Board of Supervisors (five members) appropriate?

Sen. Ridley-Thomas: The county has 22 million residents, and there are too few people governing. The health care system is suffering because the County Charter did not contemplate that only five supervisors would be handling the issues. There should be a Health Inspector General in charge of implementing the 2006 Health Care Master Plan.

Councilman Parks: The issue is not how many supervisors there are; it is whether the public is getting what it deserves from the county bureaucracy. Proposition 13 and term limits were signs of voter rebellion. Health care is a county-wide issue and there should be an elected Health Director.

Question 4 – Land Use Planning: How can we ensure more open space for our communities?

Sen. Ridley-Thomas:

He knows what it means to have too few parks. Has been endorsed by the Sierra Club and the League of Conservation Voters.

Councilman Parks: Green space can be a part of every discussion with a developer regarding entitlements. Community planning is the only way for the community to tell government what the community should look like. It should be mandatory to fund community plans every 10 years.

QUESTIONS FROM THE FLOOR:

- A. Given the budget crisis, what steps can be taken to reduce the impact of undocumented aliens on the Los Angeles County (estimated cost of \$3 billion per year; 95 per cent of murder warrants, according to the questioner)?**

Sen. Ridley-Thomas:

The rollback of the vehicle license tax cut the money available for public safety (\$4.1 billion when rolled back; estimated at \$6.1 billion now). Immigration is a federal issue, but local law enforcement already has the authority to recommend deportation of a detainee. It's a question of the authorities' willingness to enforce the law.

Councilman Parks: This is a federal issue, so the members of Congress are the key. Back in 1988-89, Los Angeles County Sheriff Sherman Block proposed that the legal status of all foreign-born inmates be checked, but the program was never funded. It is not fair to pick up employees for being undocumented if one is not going to arrest the employer as well. The incentives to hire undocumented workers need to be reduced. The airports and ports need to be more closely monitored. Families should not be split, putting citizen children into foster care.

- B. Marina del Rey is a cash cow for the county. *[It is also in Supervisor Don Knabe's district, not District No. 2.]* How would you regulate development to ensure that it remains a desirable place for people to visit?**

Sen. Ridley-Thomas: He is an advocate of planned development and has received an award from the American Planning Association. Developers need to know that the community's opinion does matter with him. He wants to know what the stakeholders have to say about the quality of life in the area where they have invested.

Councilman Bernard Parks: There should be a joint powers agreement between the city and county. Marina del Rey needs to be made available to everyone.

C. How will you help the people impacted by transportation projects in the county, e.g. the widening of the 405 freeway, extension of the Expo Line to the Westside?

Sen. Ridley-Thomas: As a former schoolteacher, he knows how to listen and how to lead. He is willing to work. He is returning to work in local government because he is a facilitator. He was the “architect of the Empowerment Congress” [which led to establishment of the Neighborhood Council system]. He would be willing to see what can be done to accelerate things. During 2008, his Senate Bill 1422 became law. [It will enable the Metropolitan Transit Authority (MTA) to tap into \$210 million of federal funds for the Fastlane project on portions of the 110 and 10 freeways.]

Councilman Bernard Parks: Major traffic projects are going cause disruption. There needs to be a coherent transportation system that works. There must be a greater good that will be achieved from the expansion. If the public transit system does not work, people will not leave their cars. Phase I of the Expo line cost \$800 million. Phase II is estimated to cost \$1.2 - \$1.3 billion.

D. What action will you take to reduce gang violence in the Second District?

Sen. Ridley-Thomas: We need more officers, more after school programs. The interracial component of gang violence needs to be taken seriously. We need to invest more in prevention because the recidivism rate is 75 per cent for gang members. The prisons and jails spend huge dollars and give bad results. He is supported by Los Angeles County Sheriff Lee Baca and Los Angeles Police Department Chief William Brattan.

E. Do you see a solution to Del Rey’s need for more parks?

Sen. Ridley-Thomas: Yes. There should be more joint powers agreements between the city and county. It is not the role of leaders to whine. The goal is to figure it out and build confidence in public servants. We need to set our priorities and decide if our money should go for parks or for prisons.

F. Archstone wants to build a 218 unit apartment building in the county section of Del Rey (5550 Grosvenor Ave.). Would you consult with community groups before approving any rezoning of the property?

Councilman Parks: The county must determine if there is adequate infrastructure to service the additional population. He would never allow building without taking the infrastructure needs into account. If any entitlements are given up, it should be considered what local benefits will result. Parking is a long-standing zoning issue.

G. What is your stand on term limits?

Councilman Parks: The best way to limit politicians' terms is to vote them out of office if they are failing. Term limits has created a merry-go-round of people always looking for the next job, and vacancies create a need for special elections. With term limits, the State of California has gone from having a \$20 billion surplus to a \$30 billion deficit.

H. What can cities do to prevent developments like the Entrada project, a 12 story building in Culver City that is across the street from Los Angeles?

Councilman Parks: Local governments need to enter into joint powers agreements and do regional planning.