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Latinos pick a candidate

Maria Corralejo to seek new Assembly seat

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Amid zealous expressions of unity, Latino political leaders in the newly created 28th Assembly District yesterday endorsed Maria Corralejo of Watsonville as their candidate for office.

"I know the only way we can win is to do it together," the civic leader and current city planning commissioner told members of the Coalition for the 28th Assembly District, whose 60 representatives capped a two-hour-plus session by unanimously approving a motion to endorse her.

Latino political brass from the new district, which encompasses Watsonville, Salinas and parts of Monterey, Santa Clara and San Benito counties, make up the coalition.

The group, now evolved into the Coalition to Elect Maria Corralejo for 28th Assembly District, was formed Jan. 11 when an overflow crowd met in San Juan Bautista to explore the viability of potential candidates within their ranks.

Two finalists emerged, Corralejo, 48, and Coastal Commissioner Lily Cervantes, who, in a speech laced with lament, cited financial concerns as a primary reason for removing herself from consideration.

"I cannot run a campaign on good wishes," she said, noting that a minimum of \$150,000 is needed to have a stab at the seat. She endorsed Corralejo and later in the meeting challenged Latino men to throw in their support without reservation.

In a voice thick with emotion, Corralejo sought reassurances from her colleagues.

"I'm not ready to walk away," she said. "Either we do it or we don't do it. But I can't do it alone."

Corralejo will seek the Democratic nomination and several participants alluded to the alleged formidable financial resources of Democratic Assemblyman Rusty Areias, the 25th district representative. As a result of the new configurations, Areias decided to seek office in the 28th district as a resident of Salinas.

Cattleman Peter Frusetta of Tres Pinos has announced his intention to run on the Republican ticket.

Candidates must submit nomination papers between Feb. 10 and March 6.

In the new district, 24 percent of all registered voters are Latino and the minority group accounts for 44 percent of all registered Democrats, said attorney Jesse Sanchez, whose researchers have been collecting election statistics.

"I am of the opinion the race is winnable," Sanchez said. He said



Kurt Ellison

Maria Corralejo is congratulated by Watsonville Mayor Oscar Rios.

Corralejo outlines platform^{2/3}

Maria Corralejo ranks the state budget, education, land use and regional planning, women's issues, jobs, agriculture and racism as top issues in her platform.

Racism has to be reckoned with because it is "an underlying issue in everything that we do," Corralejo told supporters meeting in Watsonville yesterday.

Of agriculture, the Central Coast's largest industry, Corralejo said a strong agricultural base must be maintained. She said she regards Santa Cruz County's "massive" organic-farming community as a plus and cited the need to educate the many small-scale Latino farmers in Salinas and Watsonville.

"They need to know what

their rights and responsibilities are to their people," she said.

The daughter of farm workers, Corralejo was reared in Soledad. The mother of five children and grandmother of nine told members of the Coalition for the 28th Assembly District that she endured hardships as a single mother and as a married woman "when we sometimes didn't have enough to eat."

She received a bachelor of arts in community studies from UC-Santa Cruz and a master of arts in land use and regional planning from the University of Massachusetts at Amherst.

Her 25 years of community service began in the middle 1960s in Monterey County, where she helped farm worker families on health, housing, edu-

cation and labor issues.

She is on the board of Salud Para La Gente, El Pajaro CDC, Habitat for Humanity and the Watsonville Planning Commission.

Since 1991, Corralejo has been executive director of the Comité Octubre 17, 1989, a non-profit organization formed after the October 1989 earthquake. Previously, Corralejo worked for the Watsonville Area Interfaith Disaster Recovery, the ACBE Farm and Rural Development Center, the Legal Aid Society of Santa Cruz County, and the migrant unit of California Rural Legal Assistance.

She has also worked on various political campaigns and in other community activities.

—Laramie Trevino

that if a majority of the Latino vote can be captured, plus the support of one in three Anglos, "We can win."

Said Watsonville Mayor Oscar Rios, "What we are trying to do here is facilitate a voice — in this process." Rios is a co-facilitator of the Coalition for the 28th As-

sembly District.

Before the meeting broke up, commitments of money, kicked off with a \$1,000 contribution from William Melendez, state president of the League of United Latin American Citizens, and volunteers were enlisted.

Melendez's claim that Democrats have "manipulated" Latinos for years was met with hearty applause. The retired educator went on to explain how the coalition's organizing efforts can trickle down to many levels.

"This campaign can solidify the grass roots people," he said.