

Ruiz picked District Attorney as DA

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SANTA CRUZ — The Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors — with Supervisor Tony Campos casting a critical vote — picked outsider Ron Ruiz to be the new district attorney.

Ruiz, who has lived in the county for 22 years, has been a practicing defense attorney in Santa Clara County, defending among others the notorious Hispanic gang, Nuestra Familia.

Campos joined Supervisors Mardi Wormhoudt and Jeff Almquist in the selection, which came as a major disappointment to some in the district attorney's office and police agencies, most of whom wanted the new district attorney to be a seasoned prosecutor.

See RUIZ, page 6

Page 6 - REGISTER-PAJARONIAN, Friday, February 12, 1999

RUIZ

From page 1

Acting District Attorney Kate Canlis said she will resign from the office after a brief transition period.

Campos came to the final day with his mind made up, and read a prepared statement prior to letting a packed house at the supervisors' chambers know his choice.

He said he wanted someone who would bring truth and honesty to the job, and have an "open door policy... someone who is not afraid to speak the truth." His choice got clearer as he discussed the needs of the fourth district and its growing Hispanic population.

He said he met with all of the candidates and was most impressed with Ruiz, and denied choosing the candidate because he is Hispanic.

"I don't want him to fail," Campos continued. "He's better than good. He's the right choice. He will set an example."

It was Chairman Jeff Almquist who put the final vote in Ruiz's favor. "I'm concerned about law enforcement's reaction to Ruiz," he

said. "Ruiz can deal with them... He will be a victim's advocate."

Almquist called the selection process a "therapeutic experience."

The 62-year-old defense attorney was backed by a dozen judges from Santa Clara County. The only other candidates to receive support were prosecutors Ariadne Symons and Christine McGuire.

Wormhoudt said in her opening statements that Ruiz was her preferred choice. "I'm not worried about experience," she said, "you all will hire managers (to run the business end)... None of you, with the exception perhaps of Ms. Canlis, supports the status quo."

During the public session of the final day of the selection process, Watsonville Mayor Oscar Rios threw his support behind Ruiz.

A former prosecutor hired by Peter Chang, Dale Dawson, came forward and also supported Ruiz. "Law enforcement must understand the district attorney represents the people," he said. "Sometimes you have to say no." Dawson is also a former county supervisor.

Assistant district attorney Dennis Wong told the board that 19 attorneys inside the office had signed

a card supporting Canlis, and that no other district attorney in the office had the support of the staff. He told the supervisors Canlis asked him not to come, "but I came in support of justice... and Kate Canlis will bring that about." Wong and other members of the district attorney's gang task force challenged Ruiz's stature as the front running candidate prior to the selection, claiming getting gang members to talk to them will be much more difficult because of Ruiz's defense of Nuestra Familia in Santa Clara County.

Following his selection, Ruiz walked over and shook Wong's hand.

During presentations to the board, Jon Hopkins told the supervisors he would rebuild the team effort and put together an effective budget. "(I have) the strength of character to do it right," he said. Hopkins was the chief deputy to Danner, but was fired as one of Danner's last acts as district attorney. He said he may ask Ruiz for a job.

Canlis told Ruiz she will submit her resignation, but will help him make sure the "transition goes smoothly."