

Watsonville's mayor says she represents Hispanics

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Watsonville Mayor Ann Soldo said yesterday she and the current City Council are responsive to the needs of the Hispanic community.

The city's New York attorney, Vincent Fontana, tried to show, through his questioning of the mayor, that she was supported by the city's Hispanics and that she is concerned with the same issues as they are.

Soldo was called to the stand in U.S. District Court in San Jose during the third day of the trial in the lawsuit filed by the Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund seeking to divide the city into districts, with each district electing one city council member.

Soldo testified that her 1979 city council campaign was "low key," yet she came in first in 10 of the city's 11 precincts. She was well-known in much of the city, including the Hispanic community, she said, even before declaring her candidacy. Soldo spent years as a schoolteacher and principal.

In 1983, when she ran for mayor, her campaign was better organized, and she came in first in every precinct, she said.

Soldo said after that election, a local Spanish language paper, *El Monitor*, ran her picture on page 1 and called her "The mayor of the Hispanics."

Issues Soldo stressed in her campaign — programs for youths and the city's housing needs — were similar to those used by Cruz Gomez, a plaintiff in the lawsuit and an unsuccessful Hispanic candidate for City Council.

Soldo said in her years working in local schools she found that Anglos and Hispanics have the same concerns, particularly when it comes to their children.

She said when she set up the first bilingual classes at Mintie White School, Hispanic parents were divided, with some indicating they wanted their children to remain in the English-only classes.

Soldo said she and the City Council have shown their concern for many issues that affect the Hispanic community. The city offers a bonus to bilingual

police officers, has given money to the Family Service Association, has appointed Hispanics to city commissions, and tries to persuade new industry to hire Watsonville residents.

MALDEF attorney Joaquin Avila questioned whether the mayor and council are receptive to the pleas of the Hispanic population. He wanted to know in particular about a council meeting almost a year ago during which the mayor told a speaker not to translate his comments into Spanish.

The mayor said the man had made his comments in English, and she saw no reason to take the time for the translation.

"He was addressing us (the council)," she said. "I asked him to continue on in English."

"Weren't there Hispanics in the audience who understood only Spanish?" Avila asked.

"I assume so," Soldo replied, and tried to elaborate but the judge told her she was to answer the question, no more. Under further questioning from Fontana later, Soldo said any time someone who doesn't speak English comes to talk to the council the person is welcome to bring an interpreter.

Soldo said she thinks it would be best for the city if there were Hispanics on the City Council, and said she encouraged at least three Hispanics to run in the past — Tony Campos, Angie Ledesma and Maria Bautista. None of those candidates was successful.

Also called to the witness stand yesterday was Ann McPike, administrative assistant to City Manager John Radin. McPike described the

city's affirmative action program, and what the city has done to promote the hiring of women and members of racial minorities.

The city's goal is for half of the new employees hired each year to be women or minority members. To reach that goal, the city helps job applicants prepare for interviews and physical agility tests, where needed, McPike said, and by extensive advertising of job openings.

REFERENCE