

# City tries to show prejudice played no part in election loss

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Watsonville's attorney tried to show yesterday there's a lot more to Cruz Gomez's loss in the 1983 Watsonville City Council election than prejudiced voting.

Gomez is a plaintiff in the lawsuit filed by the Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund seeking to divide the city into districts for the purpose of electing City Council members.

MALDEF's lead attorney, Joaquin Avila, called Gomez to the witness stand in the second day of the trial in U.S. District Court in San Jose.

Gomez said she believes almost all the Hispanics who voted in the May 1983 election voted for her. She determined this when she analyzed the vote two years later while helping Maria Bautista prepare for her own campaign for City Council.

The city's lead attorney, Vincent Fontana, questioned Gomez' claim. Gomez told him she came in as high as fourth in two of the city's most heavily Hispanic precincts, and came in lower in the rest of the city.

"So even in heavily Hispanic precincts, you ran out of the money, as they say," Fontana responded.

Fontana also pursued two other points he believed were pertinent to Gomez' loss — that she moved into the city just before filing her nomination papers and that she chose not to

seek the support of the Anglo leaders in the city.

Gomez said she moved from her home on Mann Avenue off Amesti Road into the city in February of 1983, when she decided to run for council. She said she did not know if that was a factor in her defeat.

She also said she sought the advice and support of two former Hispanic council candidates, Angie Ledesma and Mario Carabarin, both of whom were unsuccessful.

Gomez told Fontana she decided to run her campaign differently than Ledesma had run hers.

"She wanted to make contact with Anglo leaders in the community," Gomez said of Ledesma. "I felt that I had to be independent of the Anglo leadership.

"I did not want to go to them for support because of possible strings later," she said. Ledesma told Gomez that it would help her chances if she had the support of Anglo leaders, and that it may even be necessary to do so if a Hispanic was to have any chance at a seat on the council.

Gomez said the same issue arose in 1985, when she worked on Bautista's campaign. "She felt she also needed to emphasize her contacts and activity in the Anglo community," Gomez said. Gomez suggested Bautista also cultivate her contacts in the Hispanic community.

Fontana also asked Gomez several questions about her selection of Alex Maler as one of her campaign managers instead of a longtime Watsonville resident.

Maler lived in San Diego at the time.

Although Fontana asked if these things impeded her chance of winning a council seat, Gomez said she believed her campaign was effective and that she felt did fairly well. The fact that she got more votes than any previous Hispanic candidate shows her campaign was effective, Gomez said.

While questioning Gomez, Fontana tried to introduce as evidence an article from the San Francisco Chronicle in which Watsonville planning commissioner and local real estate agent Tony Campos is quoted as saying district elections might "do more harm than good." In response to Fontana's questions, Gomez said she believes Campos — who also made an unsuccessful bid for the City Council — is a leader in the Hispanic community.

Attorney Avila quickly objected to admitting the newspaper story as evidence, and Judge William Ingram agreed.

Ingram said as evidence in court newspaper articles "have no probity of value. They don't mean anything."

While questioning all three of MALDEF's witnesses, Fontana has tried to show that the His-

panic community in Watsonville is diverse. This is an effort to refute MALDEF's contention that the community is "politically cohesive" — a required factor to show a violation of the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

Fontana is expected to call to the witness stand several local Hispanics who may have differing views from those presented by Gomez and Ernesto Lopez, who also was called by the plaintiffs. MALDEF also used a statistical analysis of voting in Watsonville as an indicator of the cohesiveness of the Hispanic community.

MALDEF plans to finish presentation of its case today with the completion of testimony by UC-Irvine political science professor Bernard Grofman, an expert on voting patterns. Grofman testified all day Tuesday, but had to return to Irvine to teach class yesterday. Once Fontana and Avila finish questioning him, Fontana will begin presentation of the city's case.

Fontana indicated he will call Mayor Ann Soldo as his first witness. Among other witnesses expected to be called by the defense are city planning director Bud Carney; the city manager's assistant, Ann McPike; Chico Castro, a Watsonville businessman; Socorro Paz, former aide to former Supervisor E. Wayne Moore Jr.; and Maria Bautista, an unsuccessful candidate in the 1985 City Council election.