

Rios gets second mayor's term

Watsonville council vote falls along ideological lines

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The City Council's ideological split was evident in last night's vote for mayor and vice mayor.

On a 4-3 vote, the council's liberal majority returned the one-year mayor's office to Oscar Rios and the vice mayorship to Lowell Hurst.

Before the voting began, Rios, in reference to a news story that appeared in the Register-Pajaronian Saturday, told the council the decision had not been made and that he wanted "people to feel free to nominate who they want to be mayor." In Saturday's story, four council members said they would support Rios' re-election.

When district elections were instituted in 1989, the mayorship was changed to a one-year term

rotated among council members. The mayor has no more power than the other members but is responsible for a host of ceremonial and civic duties.

Councilman Todd McFarren, who has held the post twice, nominated Rios, saying one year is about how long it takes to get used to the job. He also said he thinks Rios has done well.

"Frankly, I think our mayor has done an excellent job in terms of bringing a new segment of the community into City Hall," he said. Rios speaks Spanish, and he has the confidence of the other council members that he is working to carry out their mandates, McFarren said.

Councilman Al Alcalá thanked Rios for "an excellent job," but he said he thought a two-year term

was part of "the old thinking." After district elections were put in place, he said, he thought "we were going to do things differently."

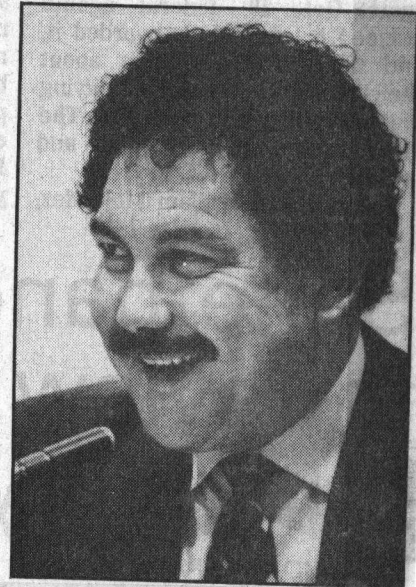
Alcalá said he thought the mayorship should have gone to Hurst, but since the vice mayor has said he has little time for the job, Alcalá nominated Tony Campos.

That motion was seconded by Betty Bobeda, who pointed out that Campos also speaks Spanish.

"He will (also) do a good job bringing people to City Hall," she said.

Hurst threw his support to Rios, saying it would be "unkind or unfair to short-circuit the progress he has made at this time."

The vote for Rios was 4-3, with Hurst, McFarren, Eves and Rios



Kurt Ellison

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casting yes votes. Campos, Bobeda and Alcala, generally considered to be more conservative than their colleagues, voted no.

Rios gave a short acceptance speech, saying that there was a lot of work to be done in Watsonville and linking the movement of liberals into Watsonville city offices to the movement of the Democrats into the White House.

Then the council opened nominations for vice mayor.

Bobeda, pointing out that Hurst said he didn't have the time to be mayor and "might not have time next year" either, nominated Campos.

Eves nominated Hurst.

"He's performed very ably, and I think he deserves the right to be vice mayor again," Eves said.

The voting went the same way.

There was applause from the audience, which had filled the council chambers, on both votes.

Afterwards, Alcala said the vote went "the way I thought it would."

"I don't call that a discussion," he said. "It's what we've been saying all along: It's 3 to 4. They do what they want."

Alcala said he thought there'd be more power-sharing after district elections. Alcala, incidentally, did not support the change from the at-large system to the district system.

Campos also said he wanted more discussion and that "more courtesy could have been extended" in the process. Despite what Rios said at the beginning of the meeting, Campos said he felt the decision had been a done deal.

Dick Bernard, a local community activist, said the vote on measures C and D, which were opposed by members of the city's "old guard," was a mandate to the new regime that voter support was behind them.

The measures, which were on the Nov. 5 ballot, consolidated the city's elections with the general elections and as a result extended by a year the terms of current City Council members. The measures passed overwhelmingly.