Conservatives drub progressives in city elections

BY JACK LAUFENBERG

San Diego progressives took a thrashing in yesterday's primary election as few liberals survived the balloting and the progressive opinion on each of the four propositions went down to defeat.

The most telling loss was in the Mayoralty race. Incumbent Pete Wilson soundly defeated challenger Si Casady's attempts to force a November run-off election as he swept into a third term in office with 61% of the votes.

In the City Council races, only incumbent Leon Williams — an easy winner in District 4, and LAFCO head Mike Gotch — who ran strongly in District 6, managed to convert theirprogressive backing into enough votes to make the runoff. Williams will face Norma Freeman while Gotch will take on Steve Wittman on November 6. In District 2, conservative businessman Bill Cleator will do battle with arch-conservative also-ran Lou Ridgeway while District 8 incumbent Lucy Killea will be challenged by Jose "Joe" Diaz.

Among the several proposition measures, Prop. B, whichpermitted sale of the Pueblo lands to finance construction of police substations, was approved by about 56%; Prop. C, the referendum to allocate more sales tax money to cities, was approved by a hefty 73% of those voting; and Prop. D, the controversial Balboa Park land swap deal, was just shy of the necessary two-thirds majority. Prop. A, the "labor peace" initiative to permit two year contracts for city employees, was defeated, with about 65% of the voters opposed.

Only in the lesser races for the School Board seats did progressive hopefuls fair better. Incumbent John Witt was slightly behind conservative Robert Bacon in the District A race but will have another chance in the runoff. Bob Filner, who waged an aggressive, issue-oriented campaign, polled better than 40% to set up a one-on-one battle with District D incumbent Dorothea Edmiston. In District E, political novice Maurice

(Continued on page 5)

September 19 - 25, 1979

elections...

(Continued from page 1)

Littlejohn pulled off a surpising and decisive first place finish in the race to succeed retiring Rev. George Walker Smith. Former NAACP head Tom Johnson held a 20-vote lead over Mario Palomino for the other runoff spot.

Casady, the city's liberal long shot, had hoped to force Mayor Wilson into a November runoff by keeping him from obtaining the 50 percent plus one needed for reelection. Although Casady's showing was respectable with 32%, it simply was not enough to muscle the powerful Wilson from the Mayor's office. Even from the very start, the earliest returns showed Wilson with well over the 50% plus one mark.

The fact that Casady's run for the Mayor's office wasn't even a dog race, however, didn't detract from his pride in the accomplishments of his campaign.

"It was an attempt to clean up the situation that had been developing over an eight year period," Casady said. "People in the camp feel we uncovered things the general public didn't know. The morale at city hall and the land deals. I think it will have an effect."

If indeed it does, it was not readily apparent from Wilson's victory speech. In addressing his supporters, the Mayor alluded to his long-term support for downtown redevelopment. The proposed plans in that area have been highly criticized as being a subsidy for the rich developers and special interests.

However, in espousing his philosophy that "economic health and environmental health are compatible", Wilson said "we are going to grow wisely and manage (city) growth."

As for the rest of the election, it seems the city powers will continue to have their way.

Prop. D, the Balboa Park land swap proposal — denpite failing to muster the necessary two-thirds majority required by the charter to permit the city to consumate the deal — is in no way settled. Since some 60.8 percent of the voters approved the swap it only gives the Navy that much more incentive to seek condemnation of the land and go ahead and build their hospital anyway. Only with a majority rejecting the proposal could there have been any glimmer of hope that Florida Canyon would be saved.

With the passage of Prop. B, the city will finally be able to construct the police substations it has wanted so badly for so long — at the expense of relinquishing more city owned land.

And with the defeat of Prop. A the city employees were reassured of the fact that they are little more than second class citizens at the mercy of city hall.

It was the second straight local election defeat for left-of-center forces, leaving pro-business interests with a long lease on city hall.

In none of the races did issues like rent control, downtown redevelopment, or north city west seem to be decisive. Instead, well-financed candidates — most of whom ran on their personalities — managed to take the lead early and hold on. This, despite an unusual amount of press attention for a local election. Even so, voter turnout was very low — less than 40 per cent.

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