

Hueso Sweeps District 8 San Diego City Council Seat In Runoff Election Faulconer Beats Out Gonzalez in the District 2 Fight

by Wendi Whitmore, Editor

After six months without City Council members, Districts 2 and 8 elected Kevin Faulconer and Ben Hueso, respectively, on Tuesday to fill the empty seats left open when Michael Zucchet and Ralph Inzunza vacated them under the “stripper-gate” scandal.

The Division 8 winner, Hueso, a businessman and a member of the Police Chief Advisory Board, took the race against for Luis Acle, the President of the Board of Education, in a landslide victory. Hueso took 71 percent of the vote in the district to Acle’s 29 percent.

Hueso stated that although people were saying this was the worst time to come into politics, amid city-wide corruption and on the heels of “stripper-gate,” he believed it created an opportunity. “I can’t remember when in the city’s history it was a worse time in our city’s history to come into politics. But, for me, personally, I think this is the best time. This is the best opportunity to make a lasting impact on our city. It’s a great opportunity to turn our city around, and it’s a great opportunity to demonstrate the kind of leadership that I think I’m able to provide.”

Acle, obviously disappointed with the results stated, “I would like to restore a sense of respectability to this office. That hasn’t been the case in the past. The reality is that our representation in District 8 has been more a source of embarrassment than anything else, and not just for District 8 but for the whole city.”

This is not the first time the two opponents have run against each other for office. Acle and Hueso ran against each other for the San Diego Unified District School board of trustee in 2004, however, Acle came out the victor in that race.

It is a closer call in District 2, where Kevin Faulconer, a businessman with heavy endorsements by the San Diego Fire Department as well as Sheriff Bill Kolender, squeaked by Lorena Gonzalez with just a 51 to 49 percent vote. Although it looks like Faulconer may have pulled off the win as of press time of the Journal, there are still 2500 absentee ballots to be counted and it may take up to a week to certify who actually won the election.

Lorena Gonzalez, an environmental attorney on the State Lands Commission, and a neighborhood sweetheart with well over 100 volunteers out “knocking and dragging” (a term used for poll watching) at the 97 poll sites in the district to keep the word flowing up until the last minute.

“The outpouring of support for Lorena has been unbelievable,” said Mathew Kostrinsky, campaign manager for Gonzalez. “People believe she is the right person to make the reform needed. It’s really time for a change, and they believe Lorena should be the next Councilwoman.”

If Gonzalez wasn’t able to pull off the win, it won’t be for lack of trying. “I have absolutely no regrets,” she said. “I’m very proud of the very positive campaign we ran with a very shoestring budget, and just local volunteers.”

Faulconer was geared up and ready to attack the most commonly talked about problems about of the campaign, “My number one, two and three priority is to get is to get the city’s financial house in order because it effects everything that we do. From our park, our street repair, cops and fire...we have to do that as a city.”

The newly elected City Council officials are facing some ominous challenges including the Chargers battling for new digs, somewhere in the neighborhood of a \$2 billion pension system, and the lingering “stripper-gate” stench.

The nationally infamous case against the original two City Councilman, Inzunza and Zucchet, now known as “stripper-gate” began when it was alleged that the two men knowingly accepted money to repeal a “no-touching” law a strip club belonging to an acquaintance.

Both were convicted July 18, 2005, of federal corruption charges including conspiracy and extortion. They were immediately suspended from their positions in City Council and told they would have to resign when sentenced.

However, they were acting City Council during the trial and Zucchet was Acting Mayor the weekend prior to his conviction. This was considered the political corruption case in San Diego for 30 years. Zucchet and Inzunza are currently out on bail pending appeal.

Additionally, The winners of both district elections, who will be sworn in January 23, face big challenges, the most obvious being that the positions are short-lived and campaigning for a full term may need to begin right away.

The next election for City Council June 6 and candidates can start taking out nomination papers on February 9. For now, District 2 and 8 are finally free to make fresh start with City Councilmen Faulconer and Hueso.