



Voter trends and election insight

BY MARK HEDIN

THE battle lines are becoming clear in District 6, where the haves and have-nots are circling the ring to fight for a voice on the Board of Supervisors.

The numbers could grow by election day, but as of mid-July, District 6 had 43,256 registered voters, almost 56% registered Democrats, within less than a percentage point of the citywide registration. The next biggest group is that which declines to state a party — 13,392 — followed by Republicans (3,303), Greens (975), American Independents (875), Libertarians (303), Peace and Freedoms (206) and 74 the Department of Elections calls “miscellaneous.”

The district traditionally is among the liberal voting blocs in San Francisco. Turnout, however, has consistently scraped bottom.

Jim Stearns, whose Stearns Consulting Inc. is working for candidate Debra Walker, expects about 22,000 votes to be cast in District 6. But only about 85% of those voting will bother to state a preference in the supervisorial race, he says. Under the ranked-voting system that applies here, if no one gets a majority, then only ballots naming at least one of the top three vote-getters will be considered.

“At the end of the day,” he said, it’ll take “maybe only 7,500 votes” to win.

Termed-out Supervisor Chris Daly won re-election in 2006 with 8,654 votes, 48% of the 20,204 cast in the district’s 52 precincts. In 2002, he was elected to his first full term with 6,645 votes, 51% of the vote. In 2000, in the city’s first district elections in 20 years, he won an initial two-year term with 6,023 votes, more than twice as many as either Chris Dittenhafer or Carol Ruth Silver, his two nearest rivals in the field of 15.

Daly came to the Board of Supervisors with a track record for, among other things, advocating for affordable housing in the Mission District. Not sur-

prisingly then, the north Mission has been among his strongholds. In 2000, Precinct 3706, the southwestern-most in District 6, produced 262 votes, Daly’s most in any single precinct. The north Mission has remained supportive throughout Daly’s career. In 2006, his top three precincts were all from there.

The concept of district elections has been a recurring issue in San Francisco politics since the ’70s and, as a one-election wonder, brought in Harvey Milk, elected in 1977, who served less than a year before Dan White, also elected in ’77, killed Milk and Mayor George Moscone at City Hall in November 1978.

Less than two years later, in the lowest-turnout election to date, voters decided to return to electing supervisors on an at-large, citywide basis. And so it was until 1996, when voters flip-flopped again, with the first district elections set for 2000. Enter Daly.

As part of a survey conducted in the course of adjusting district boundaries in 2002 — each of the 11 districts is supposed to be equal in total population — the city’s Elections Task Force on Redistricting asked a sample of 1,100 voters in Districts 3, 6, 8, 9 and 11 about their priorities for making such changes.

They were asked, for instance, if it was more important to keep a neighborhood within a single district or to focus on other commonalities, such as ethnicity or socioeconomic status. Across the board, respondents preferred keeping neighborhoods within a single district. When the new boundaries were drawn, District 6, which needed to shrink by about 4,500 people, on the north lost to District 3 about 18 city blocks along Sutter Street, and to the south a couple of dozen more blocks in the warehouse district along Seventh Street went to District 11, but gained about 20 blocks in a sawtooth pattern across the Mission below 17th Street between Valencia Street and Potrero Avenue.

Quintin Mecke, now an aide to Assemblyman

Tom Ammiano, was on that task force and recalls redistricting as “a grueling process” and that, based on the unanimity of displeasure it engendered, he felt it must have been even-handed. “Everyone and their mother had some sort of complaint,” he recalled. Once the results of the 2010 Census are in, the city will have to look into redrawing District 6 again.

Survey respondents also were asked what neighborhood they would prefer to either keep or drop from their district, should the need arise. In District 6, most respondents suggested voting out Treasure Island. Except South Beach, where respondents preferred to lose the ‘Loon.

And, tellingly, it’s in that gentrified South Beach neighborhood and its surroundings where voters have veered furthest from the rest of the district. In 2006, Daly’s only significant challenge came from Rob Black, who won almost 40% of the vote (Daly had 48.84%). Black beat Daly in nine precincts covering the district’s entire waterfront territory, from the Ferry Building to Mission Bay, everything east of Third Street, which now includes the new Rincon Towers and other high-end development, and throughout the SoMa area below Harrison all the way to Division Street — also home to pricier lofts and condos. Black also beat Daly in Hayes Valley.

On both sides of Sixth Street north of Harrison, though, and all through the depths of the Tenderloin, Daly was the man. Stearns, who worked for Daly in that campaign, noted that though Black had “limited success” in mobilizing upscale voters in those new apartment buildings — the actual percentage turnout could have been much higher — and Black’s success ultimately was trumped by the turnout Stearns and Daly were able to generate from the SROs.

“It’s a changing district,” Stearns said. “But translating that into the voting booth is up to the candidates.” ■

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