

# Matt Gonzales goes to City Hall for District 5

## An interview with the new Supervisor-Elect

BY KIM CORSARO

December 12 was a fateful day for the United States. The Supreme Court issued their infamous and wrong decision that stopped all vote counting in Florida, giving the office of the presidency to George W. Bush. As the country took a hard turn to the right, voters in San Francisco went to the polls to finalize the vote in district elections. We went our own way as usual, defying national trends, and elected the most left-leaning Board of Supervisors this city has ever seen.

In District 5, the runoff pitted former School Board president Juanita Owens against public defender Matt Gonzales. In last year's election, Gonzales ran for District Attorney to the left of Terence Hallinan, forcing him into a runoff. This year, Gonzales won his own runoff, by over 60 percent of the vote.

The Observer sat down with



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Gonzales a couple of weeks after his victory to talk about the dynamics of the election, politics in San Francisco, and his plans for representing District 5.

*(San Francisco Observer) So you are part of the "progressive sweep" that's taken over the Board of Supervisors.*

(Matt Gonzales) I'm finding it amusing that the press can't decide which story to run with. On the one hand there's the story they want to put out there that it's going to be amateur night on the Board of Supervisors. And the other story seems to be that the Marxists have taken over City Hall. I think I like the latter story more.

But I don't think either quite captures what happened. I think it's the repudiation of the way we've been enforcing Prop M, the measure that limited office development, since 1986. People want a stop to office development, they want to see more housing built, and they want to have a chance of living in the city if they don't make \$50,000 a year.

*So how do you see that playing out, realistically? What can the supervisors do? What can you do in the district?*

Immediately we can legislate on a couple of things that were in Prop L that there's overwhelming support for. One is making it clear that dot.com space is office space and doing away with this whole fiction the Planning Commission has employed, coming up with terms like "Research and Development" to allow the development to exceed the Prop M limits. We can clearly define lofts as residential so we can get some payments going into education and affordable housing.

This Board of Supervisors is going to want greater accountability for things like non-profit housing. It's troubling that to build one unit of affordable housing in San Francisco you end up somehow paying as much as to a regular unit. There's a problem with that. I think people want to know why.

For District 5, I'd like to see us move away from the housing development model that subsidizes people's rents, and try to go into the co-op model, where we help folks become owners by helping to subsidize mortgages. People end up having a greater interest in the community they're in, in terms



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for long-time customer Etsukohei who operated the famous

many years as a customer.

"It's a friendly atmosphere. I've been sitting next to him [Clarke] for 20 years," Kleinzahler said.

And when asked how he learned to mix drinks, Clarke, a former psychiatric technician at St. Mary's Hospital said, "Just watching Bruno for 22 years — and lots of trials and lots of errors."

*Persian Aub Zam Zam, 1633 Haight St., 861-2545. Open seven days a week from 5 p.m. to 2 a.m.*



# Supervisor-to-be discusses plans for a progressive take-over



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of how they take care of property, how they respond to crime in the neighborhood, and it makes it much less likely that you can displace an entire community, like what's happening with the African American commu-

nity in the Western Edition.

*There was some controversy during the election cycle that you were part of the revolving door at the Hall of Justice in "turning criminals and drug dealers loose on the street" routinely. That's campaign rhetoric, but how does this play out for the real lives of people who live in more crime-ridden neighborhoods?*

Juanita Owens brought that up in the run-off campaign in District 5. I don't think she was successful in making it a big issue, because it's such a progressive district, that I don't think reminding people that I've been a public defender for nearly a decade is likely to get them angry with me. I probably won votes that way.

I don't think that the problem of crime can be fixed without looking at both what

the police and District Attorney do. There's consensus that we need community policing. There's consensus that, notwithstanding what anybody says, there's obviously something not working if kids are getting

who are supporting their own drug addiction. And then there are the dealers.

I can tell you that the vast majority are the first two, and that we have a District Attorney who is trying to balance giving people a second chance to keep them out of the criminal justice system, with the reality that you have to punish folks when they don't take advantage of the overtures you make to them.

*In terms of development in the district, there's a desire for movement on the Fillmore Jazz District. There's also the renovation of Divisadero corridor. Unfortunately, some of the specific things under discussion are the Car Wash at Oak and Divisadero and a Burger King on Fell and Divisadero..*

There's overwhelming opposition to both of those things. I don't think the neighborhood feels they need a Burger King to replace an historic building. And the car wash—I think anybody that goes by it can see it's a gigantic space. At some point it doesn't



killed just a couple of blocks away from the police station.

There's a lot of dispute about what should happen to folks who are selling drugs in the district. Once you arrest the folks, what do you do with them? What do you want the District Attorney to do with them?

The drug arrests generally fall into a few categories. They're either really young kids, who are doing it for money because they don't have opportunities. We also have folks

seem terribly fair to make a neighborhood sustain such a large operation.

This is when district elections are really going to favor neighborhood preservationists who have been ignored by the Planning Department and Commission. Even supervisors who may disagree ideologically are going to defer to the district supervisor on these kind of issues. If Tony Hall has a problem in his district, and he's trying to stop a development, I'm going to be inclined to vote in his favor, and I think he would do the same for me, regardless of whether or not we agree on rent control or belong to the same political party, although I think we're the only two non-Democrats on the Board.

How do  
you  
spell  
orgasm?

High academic standards



*Did you get any real heat at all for joining the Green party in November?*

I think my feet were over the fire for about a week. There were some folks who thought it was a pretty crazy thing to do.

In this case, the district, which is overwhelmingly Democratic, nevertheless did not hold me responsible for Ralph Nader and everything that happened in Florida. That's either because the electorate's memory is short or they genuinely didn't think I was responsible for it, and I'll take either one.

*The majority of the Western Addition voted for Juanita Owens...*

In the general election, we got about 2,000 votes in the Western Addition. She got about 2,200-2,300, and the rest went to other candidates, so this is not by any stretch a real commanding defeat in the Western Addition.

*I experienced a great deal of support for Owens in the African American community. People identified with her, although she's not directly of African descent.*

I agree with that. I do think she had more support in that area than elsewhere, but we had support there as well.

There were a couple of things that happened that were a little bit odd. I had one exchange with an African American gentleman who told me that when he was out in the community trying to win me votes, he encountered African Americans who would be less likely to vote for Juanita if they knew I was straight. Because of the religious presence in the district, they thought that was something I might get a boost from. I found that really disturbing. I said, "Look, we don't want to win votes that way at all."

*One of things that's happened in this elec-*  
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tion is — whether you call it a bunch of wackos or a bunch of Marxists—is that the left-leaning shift on the Board of Supervisors is dominated by white men. We have 10 out of 11 men on the Board, seven of them are white—and the lone female, Sophie Maxwell, who is African American, has to cover a lot of ground herself.

This is a concern of mine, that “progressive” gets defined along “white” lines frequently. There’s this kind of white, liberal, sensibility that somehow does not often include people of color. If you look at a lot of the “progressive” campaigns in this city over the last couple of decades, they’ve been dominated white people—for the most part. When I go into—pick a candidate—Nancy Pelosi, John Burton, Willie Brown, campaign

headquarters, I see the Rainbow Coalition—people of color dominate the mix, which includes plenty of gays and lesbians as well. When I go into, say, Tom Ammiano’s campaign headquarters, I see mostly white people, by a long shot.

Let me just say a couple of things. I think the most unfortunate aspect of this election is that only one woman is going to be on the Board of Supervisors, and I do think that’s not a good thing. But the discussion about the “lack of diversity” misses some very major things. For instance, there are two Latinos on the Board of Supervisors. This may have only happened once before for a very short period of time, but let me tell you, there has never been a single progressive Latino on the Board of Supervisors, not a real

progressive.

So to me, electing two Latinos, this is a great accomplishment. If the most progressive voices out there championing the rights of minority people are white, then I’d rather have the white person then, say, a Clarence Thomas, in my own view.

The other story that I think is being put out there to undermine district elections is this argument that somehow low voter turnout hurt the Mayor’s candidates.

Listen, low turnout only means the progressive candidates did not win by a greater margin! Look at any of the races—take District 1. Yes, it’s true, Michael Yaki came in first place in the general election, but he was nowhere near 50 percent. So the real issue is, how many people were not voting for him? I don’t

think it’s a surprise that in the runoff, all the folks that did not vote for him in the general election turned to another candidate, and that was mirrored in the outcome.

*And one of the things that happened is that the Mayor’s candidates relied almost entirely on direct mail, and the progressives don’t have that much soft money to do that, so you have people meeting people in the progressive campaigns and getting out the vote going door to door. And that’s traditionally how campaigns at the local level are won. You don’t do it just by sending people a bunch of letters.*

Look at District 6, where Chris Dittenhoffer only got 1,800 votes in the runoff. The voters that didn’t vote for Dittenhoffer in

the general election all got together and voted for Chris Daly, and that was that. I don’t think there has ever been a candidate in San Francisco win by numbers like the 81 percent Daly won against a real opponent, I mean, someone supported by the City mayor. If anyone is going to City Hall with any kind of mandate it’s Chris Daly.

*This brings up another issue. There’s the public perception that the Mayor has been substantially weakened by this, and there’s sort of like a “battle lines have been drawn” mentality, and the group of new supervisors is going to go in and get all this work done no matter what the Mayor says. How are you going to work with City Hall? How are you going to get along with the Mayor?*

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