Congratulations Antonio

The election is over; the voters have spoken.

Congratulations, Mayor-elect Antonio Villaraigosa.

After a long and hard-fought election campaign, the voters of Los Angeles have chosen a new direction. That is, at least, what the media and the pundits have been saying. Yes, they have chosen a new Mayor. It is certain that Mayor Villaraigosa will bring to his office a different style of leadership than his predecessor, Mayor Jim Hahn. Villaraigosa, undeniably, has a level of energy and enthusiasm that will propel him into not only a local leader, but one looked at around the state and the country as well.

That bodes well for Los Angeles because, as I have written in this column many times, we have not done as well as we should in fighting for our needs in Sacramento and Washington. Just look at the battle to keep our transportation funds local and to get our fair share from Washington. Mayor Villaraigosa will be an undeniable ally and a tireless worker to make sure Los Angeles gets its fair share.

But let's get back to local matters.

I, for one, do not believe that we are witnessing a change in direction as much as a change in leadership and style.

The challenges facing Los Angeles, from our perspective, include the following:

- Improving our transportation and infrastructure system to move people and goods more efficiently
- Reducing crime and making our city the safest big city in America
- Improving the business climate in Los Angeles to create economic activity and jobs
- Improving the educational outcomes for our children
- Reforming our health care system increasing access to care
- Create more affordable housing close to jobs
- Reform the ethics system at City Hall
- Engage as a regional partner with other cities and counties in our region.

While Villaraigosa and Hahn engaged in a tough campaign, there was not much substantive difference between their desires on these priorities. While there may have been nuanced differences, they did not disagree much on the importance of facing these challenges—and I doubt that we will see massive departures from the direction of the polities at City Hall.

There are two areas where we may see some change: crime and education.

With regard to increasing the number of police officers in L.A., the two disagreed on how to take the next step. Mayor Hahn wanted a city tax to fund new officers; Villaraigosa preferred another countycide effort. With an unexpected infusion of property tax revenues, we urge Mayor-elect Villaraigosa to move forward as a first priority in this area so that we can get more officers in the streets of L.A. as soon as possible.

Perhaps the most significant evolution in the campaign was in education. Mayors have little, if any, power over school districts, except the bully pulpit. And early in the campaign, neither candidate spoke much about this important issue. By the end of the campaign, it almost certainly was issue number one. In a city like Los Angeles, unique among most others, the active engagement of the mayor as an advocate for education and a partner to improve it can only help us improve the quality and delivery of this critical public service.

All of this is not to say that Jim Hahn does not leave office in several weeks without major accomplishments. His success in keeping Los Angeles together through a hard-fought secession battle; recruiting a nationally recognized police chief with a great record of accomplishment; developing new affordable housing; finalizing a plan for LAX; and many other areas will ensure a positive legacy. These decisions were not popular, but they were necessary.

Mayor-elect Villaraigosa comes to office with great skills that will help him face these issues head-on. As speaker of the assembly he established a record as a consensus-builder. His ability to bring various groups together is well recognized. I know that he will bring those skills to his new duties.
Although we did not endorse his candidacy for mayor, we know that Antonio Villaraigosa will be good for L.A. He will be a good advocate. He will be a good cheerleader. He will be a good coalition builder. He will be a good mayor. And we pledge to him, from the very first day, that we will be a good partner—as we have been in moving Los Angeles forward over the last 118 years.

The election is over; it's time to govern. Mayor-elect Villaraigosa can be confident that the business community will be right by his side as we work together to make Los Angeles the greatest city in America.

And that's The Business Perspective.

Russell J. Hammer
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