



35 of 100 DOCUMENTS

Copyright 1995 The Dallas Morning News
THE DALLAS MORNING NEWS

April 27, 1995, Thursday, HOME FINAL EDITION

SECTION: NEWS; Pg. 1A

LENGTH: 1827 words

HEADLINE: One-time outsider Garcia says he's moved to center;
But critics say he's abandoning his voter base

BYLINE: Lori Stahl, Staff Writer of The Dallas Morning News

BODY:

NEWS A-1 2star

GARCIA13A.

1A.

At 37, Domingo Garcia says he has matured.

The high-profile past that gives him what he believes is the highest name identification in the Dallas mayor's race was earned long before he won a seat on the City Council in 1991.

Back then, by his own admission, he was Domingo the unwelcome outsider. He said it was the only role available to him when minorities were effectively squeezed out of City Hall by an election system weighted toward wealthy whites.

His rise from political obscurity didn't come without its lumps - sometimes literally. At one City Hall protest in 1989, then-City Council member Al Gonzalez became so enraged that he charged into the audience to punch Mr. Garcia in the gut.

Today, in his second term on the City Council, Mr. Garcia sports the honorific "mayor pro tem," a largely symbolic title that nevertheless gives him power to wield the gavel when Mayor Steve Bartlett is gone.

When Mr. Bartlett decided not to seek re-election, Mr. Garcia made it clear he wanted the gavel full time. To underscore the point that he should be Mr. Bartlett's successor, he has repeatedly called himself the "most conservative" candidate in the race.

"I've definitely moved to the center from my early and mid-20s," Mr. Garcia said recently. "I've learned I have much in common with people in the Republican Party and still have much in common with many in the Democratic Party.

"As I've matured and learned from my mistakes, people who've been traditional adversaries have come and supported my campaign," he said, citing the Dallas Police Association, Mr. Gonzalez and former City Council member Jerry Bartos.

His leading opponents, Ron Kirk and Darrell Jordan, say they've also racked up plenty of impressive endorsements.

Questioning timing

Some of Mr. Garcia's opponents question the timing and sincerity of his conservatism. They point out that Mr. Garcia shaved off his mustache as evidence that he's betraying his Hispanic heritage.

"If one looks at the list of Hispanics that are active civically and active politically, the vast majority are with other candidates," said former DART board member Jerome Garza, a Kirk backer. "I can't think of anybody in the Hispanic Chamber that's with Domingo."

But Mr. Garcia and his defenders say Hispanic support is there.

"It's pretty solid," said state Rep. Roberto Alonzo, D-Dallas.

"They see him as . . . having an opportunity to get elected."

Mr. Alonzo, a friend of Mr. Garcia's since the two were active in college campus politics in the late 1970s, noted that Mr. Garcia has done a lot of advertising in Spanish-language media.

"I'm the same individual I was four years ago, before I got elected," Mr. Garcia said. "I'm fiscally conservative, I've been strong on law and order, and I've been moderate on social issues to make sure that Dallas reflects the diversity of its people."

Endorsements from former council members Charles Tandy and Jim Buerger, he said, prove he has broad appeal.

He said those credentials, plus his tenure on the council, make him the best qualified candidate. Mr. Kirk and Mr. Jordan are making their first bids for office.

"I don't need on-the-job training," Mr. Garcia said. "We need a mayor who can make decisions and build coalitions the day after the elections."

But unlike Mr. Bartlett, who represented a heavy-voting Republican congressional district in North Dallas for almost a decade, Mr. Garcia's council district is based in relatively low-turnout areas of Oak Cliff and West Dallas.

As a lawyer, he was involved in the landmark redistricting case that increased minority representation on the City Council in 1991 from two to six new members - one of whom was Mr. Garcia.

Although he now says he has citywide support, Mr. Garcia has used a lot of his own money to keep the campaign afloat. Finance reports show he has loaned his campaign \$ 83,000.

Mr. Jordan lent his campaign \$ 15,000 - and has already repaid \$ 10,000 - while Mr. Kirk has made no transfers to his campaign.

To date, Mr. Kirk has raised \$ 416,694. Mr. Garcia has raised \$ 214,640; Mr. Jordan, \$ 163,487.

When Mr. Garcia formally launched his mayoral campaign last September, he predicted he wouldn't get a lot of "establishment support." He has described his bedrock constituents in District 1 as "working-class Josés and Marias."

Broadening the base

To Mr. Garcia, that means he needs to broaden his base. To his critics, that amounts to a political about-face.

"Obviously, Domingo is trying to position himself as the conservative candidate in this race, and to do that he's having to run as far and fast as he can from his traditional positions and his traditional constituencies," said Glenn Box, whose colleagues consider him one of the most conservative council members.

During most of the 1980s, Mr. Garcia was a self-described defender of "the little guy." He was a Jesse Jackson delegate to the Democratic National Convention in 1984.

In 1986 and 1990, he ran unsuccessful races against state Rep.

Steve Wolens, D-Dallas, during which he accused the incumbent of being a "race baiter" and in return was called a "neighborhood bully."

In 1988, he and Dallas County Commissioner John Wiley Price threatened to challenge renewal of Federal Communication Commission broadcast licenses for three Dallas-area television stations because of what they called unfair portrayals of minorities.

Mr. Garcia, who at the time was president of Chicanos Actively United for Social Advancement, cited a TV series on police as "a racist propaganda tool" for the Dallas Police Association and said it stereotyped minorities as criminals.

While critics may balk at his conservative credentials, others seem convinced that a significant transformation has taken place.

"In 1988, looking at the one-dimensional Domingo Garcia, no one would have predicted that he'd grow as much as he's grown," said former police association president Monica Smith, who clashed with Mr. Garcia over everything from police shootings to affirmative action.

The police association endorsement, which was followed by a \$ 5,000 campaign contribution, was a significant gesture after years of clashes between Mr. Garcia and the police.

During the mid- to late-1980s, Mr. Garcia was one of three chairmen of the Unified Coalition for Police Reforms, a citizens group that was enraged by a series of police shootings. The group pressed hard for change - and got it.

In 1987, U.S. Rep. John Conyers Jr., D-Detroit, held a congressional field hearing on police abuse in Dallas. Over the objections of some rank-and-file officers, the Police Department tightened up its deadly-force policy. Later, the City Council approved a five-year plan dramatically stepping up the Police Department's affirmative action efforts.

While on the council in May 1992, Mr. Garcia continued his campaign for police reform. He tried, as he had for years, to get the council to approve an ordinance strengthening the powers of a civilian police review board.

When a Mexican citizen was killed by a Dallas officer in 1993, Mr. Garcia called for a U.S. Justice Department investigation.

"Dallas' history is littered with literally hundreds of police abuse incidents and many elements in the Police Department today are very reactionary in nature," Mr. Garcia said in 1992.

Remarks like that bolster critics who suspect that the police association endorsement was a political payback for Mr. Garcia's recent help getting his council colleagues to approve a multiyear pay raise for police officers and firefighters.

"As any of us on the council knows, the DPA endorsement is made up a lot of factors, more of which are related to pay and labor issues than to crime," said Mr. Box, who is chairman of the public safety committee. "The pay raise issue was a major part of the (endorsement) decision, absolutely."

Both the DPA and Mr. Garcia denied any quid pro quo.

Luis Sepulveda, one of Mr. Garcia's rivals in the mayor's race, says Mr. Garcia is paying too high a price for the endorsement.

"He looks like he's just abandoning the whole minority community and is playing a beautiful violin music to white North Dallas," he said.

"He's seeing that the Hispanic community is not going to go vote," Mr. Sepulveda said, referring to traditionally low voter turnout among Hispanics. "He knows he's not going to get the African-American community because Rev. Zan Holmes, (Dallas County Commissioner) John Wiley Price - his friends - are going to Kirk."

Mr. Garcia endorsed Mr. Price in his 1992 re-election bid and nominated former City Council member Diane Ragsdale for a city board in September 1993. She is now supporting Mr. Kirk.

Watching the votes

Some council colleagues say that Mr. Garcia's votes at City Hall sometimes conflict with his promises on the mayoral campaign trail.

For example, he led an effort to ban gun shows at city-owned facilities such as the Dallas Convention Center. "The city of Dallas has to take a moral and symbolic stand in terms of dealing with the proliferation of guns in our society and our city," he said in June 1994.

The proposal drew harsh opposition from gun owners.

As a mayoral candidate, he was recently asked whether he favors a bill to permit Texans to carry concealed weapons. He told a Republican audience, "At this point, I would probably support it."

The measure is backed by GOP Gov. George W. Bush.

Mr. Garcia said he changed his mind because his house has been shot at by gang members.

He has also changed his mind on public funding for the arts.

During his first council term in 1992, he proposed increasing arts funding for minority groups from 14.3 percent to 52 percent.

The goal, he said, was to reach "parity" for minority artists because minority groups make up more than 50 percent of the city's population. "This was an affirmative action program for the the arts," he said at the time.

The council later agreed to a compromise, raising minority arts funding to 25 percent of the city arts budget.

Mr. Garcia later said that he believes the 25 percent amount is fair and that he only used the 52 percent request as an attention-getter to "shake up the system."

Mr. Garcia has tried to stake out a populist approach in the debate over whether to build a new sports arena. Alone among the major candidates, he maintains that voters should decide the issue by referendum.

"We are at war with our suburban communities," he said in a June 1994 interview with The Bond Buyer, a trade publication. "They are our economic adversaries."

But even old adversaries sometimes become allies. That includes Mr. Gonzalez, the former council member who said he punched Mr. Garcia in 1989 because Mr. Garcia called him a coward.

"Domingo Garcia is not the same person he was before he served on the council," Mr. Gonzalez said. "We're not the same folks we were back then."

GRAPHIC: CHART(S): (DMN) The Candidate: Domingo Garcia. PHOTO(S): Domingo Garcia.

LOAD-DATE: May 9, 1995