

Los Angeles election results in May runoff between pro-business candidates

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The city of Los Angeles held its mayoral election to weeks ago. None of the mayoral candidates won more than fifty percent of the vote, resulting in the calling of a runoff election in May, between Councilman Eric Garcetti or City Controller Wendy Greuel.

Seats on the Los Angeles School District Board were also on the ballot, as were several city council positions and two ballot measures. Ballot Measure A, which was rejected, would have resulted in a half cent increase in the city sales tax.

The city faces a budgetary shortfall of nearly \$210 million. Current Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa is required to release the next city budget by April 20th and there is every indication that the budget will involve massive attacks against the working class and city workers in particular. Regardless of which candidate wins the May election, whether Garcetti or Wendy Greuel, each will have an instrumental hand in crafting the next austerity budget.

In a candidate debate last January, both Garcetti and Greuel touted their credentials in working with city unions to cut pensions and benefits. Greuel said, "If we don't have a viable pension system in the city of Los Angeles, they [city workers] won't have one later on." Garcetti bragged that he had saved the city millions of dollars by working with unions to make cutbacks against city workers. "You need the next mayor to have those qualities he said," after Republican candidate Kevin James insisted that he wouldn't be beholden to unions during pension talks.

The election, while being the most expensive in the city's history, with more than \$5 million spent on the school district candidates alone, also had the lowest turnout. Only 18 percent, less than 1 of 5 registered voters, cast a ballot—a fact which expresses the widespread disillusionment of the population towards

city politics.

Villaraigosa, a Democrat, has relentlessly pursued attacks on working people during his eight years in office. Under his administration, the Los Angeles School District contains more charter schools than any other in the nation, he has ruthlessly suppressed free speech by using the police department to shut down Occupy Los Angeles and other political protests and launched a massive attack on the pensions and living standards of city workers.

The former union organizer and Chairman of the 2012 Democratic National Convention, Villaraigosa has lent his support to every reactionary measure placed before him. Most recently, he congratulated billionaire New York City mayor Michael Bloomberg's victory over city bus drivers by calling him "the most important voice for education reform in this country."

Whether Garcetti or Greuel win the May 21 runoff election, however, either outcome will be a boon for big business. Both candidates see large reductions in social spending as necessary to close the budget deficit.

"We are going to have to make difficult choices with respect to our pension and health care systems," said Greuel, "and both business and labor want a mayor who they can trust to sit at the table with them and together bring about change which is fair and that works for everyone."

Garcetti has promised to extract an additional \$50 million from workers to offset the city's health care costs.

Both candidates are aggressively seeking the support of the unions, with Garcetti securing the teachers' union and the Teamsters, and Greuel the SEIU. The SEIU, for its part rated both candidates as pro-labor in internal polling. Each achieved an average score of 4 out of 5.

Proposition A, as was the case with the state's recently-passed Proposition 30 which also raised sales tax on California residents, was merely a means to blackmail the populace into either taxing themselves or accepting more cuts. After the proposition's non-passage, City Administrative Officer Miguel Santana virtually guaranteed that new cuts will be forthcoming. "Everything has to be put back on the table, from the size of the police force to the restoration of fire services to the paving of our streets," he said. The state's proposition 30 had already increased the sales tax to 9 percent in an effort to impose the cost of the crisis on workers, and Prop A would have increased this regressive tax to 9.5 percent.

Mayor Villaraigosa, for his part, has pledged to use his remaining time in office to advance the assault on the working class "We're going to have to tighten our belt again," the mayor said Wednesday. "I've said that I'm willing to do it. This job isn't a popularity contest so we're going to make the tough calls and we will balance this budget.



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