



ROSENDAHL'S BIG IDEA

Effusive City Council candidate for the 11th District says the Westside's representative needs a cit

By [Bobbi Murray](#)

The house that serves as headquarters for Los Angeles City Council candidate Bill Rosendahl feels small, the rooms a little cramped. Or that's the way it seems when Rosendahl walks through the door. Everything about the candidate - now in a runoff race to succeed termed-out Councilwoman Cindy Miscikowski - says big: He's physically imposing, filling a room with energy and a wide, bright smile. And he talks big ideas.

He goes on and on about The Big Picture, leaning forward, fingertips joined, eyes pinning the listener. There should be a regional summit on transportation, he says, to hammer out a five-year plan and a 10-year plan to bust up the city's paralyzing gridlock. He opposes LAX expansion, saying that transportation infrastructure needs to be developed to spread air traffic to Palmdale and Ontario airports. And the city should do a survey of dwellings built in the 1950s and protect them both as affordable housing and as part of L.A.'s cultural history. He frequently punctuates the discussion with an emphatic, "Why not?"

All that bigness may have been part of the reason the Los Angeles Times, in endorsing veteran community activist Flora Gil Krisiloff, referred to Rosendahl as "table-pounding" and "bombastic." (The editorial also added, for good measure, "divisive and ill-informed.") But the Rosendahl encountered at his Mar Vista headquarters on a recent afternoon doesn't quite match the Times's description. He speaks quickly and emphatically, but listens carefully to questions and frequently beams a smile.

A poster-sized photo of Robert Kennedy hangs above his desk: a three-quarter profile of the late senator, microphone in hand, hair ruffled by the wind of an airport tarmac in Indianapolis. Rosendahl ran precinct operations for RFK's presidential campaign in 1968, got to know him, and was at the Ambassador Hotel in

Los Angeles when the senator was assassinated. In 1972, the young former Army psychiatric social worker, recently discharged, was a top field operator for Democrat George McGovern, the party's anti-Vietnam War candidate. Before all this, Rosendahl got his political start as a poll watcher when Carl Stokes was elected in Cleveland as the first African-American mayor of a large U.S. city in 1967. He spent part of election night, Rosendahl recalls, in conversation with Martin Luther King Jr.

It's clear that the sweep of 1960s social movements propels his politics. But he gives props to block-level issues, as well. "First of all, we must fix the potholes, trim the trees, fix the sidewalks, get the police on time to the house, and the garbage picked up," he insists. "Basic constituent services is one of the assignments of the city council member. I take that very seriously."

The 11th District, perhaps more than any other, demands that its representative maintain a deft balance between local concerns and big-city issues. The area takes in a range of communities - the dense, renter-dominated Mar Vista, Venice, and Playa del Rey, as well as the more well-heeled neighborhoods of Pacific Palisades and Brentwood, where well-organized homeowners groups demand a high level of response to constituent concerns. (Not to suggest that the civic culture in Venice isn't capable of capturing attention.) The district also boasts world-class-city features - L.A. International Airport, for one - along with beach fronts that are not only attractive to developers, but are an international tourist attraction. Its council representative must be on top of both Neighborhood Watch issues and international politics.

Ruth Galanter knows how tricky it can be. She was the 6th District councilwoman from 1987 to 2003, and her district included areas of what is now the 11th until a contentious redistricting after the 2000 census shifted the boundaries to exclude the beaches and include more of the San Fernando Valley. Galanter is a Rosendahl endorser and was busy at his headquarters on a breezy afternoon last week, sticking stamps on a mass mailer.

The district has all the big-picture issues, Galanter says, but "there's all kinds of encouragement for parochialism and not as much for thinking beyond the district." She lived that reality from the moment she was elected. "I won from a hospital bed," she said, referring to a near-fatal stabbing she suffered just weeks before the 1987 election. During her final weeks in the hospital, "I got 300 constituent calls." When she left the hospital and arrived at City Hall, "I had 300 people mad at me that I hadn't fixed the problem."

She calls Rosendahl "a congenital optimist" who can figure out how to make it all work. "If he sees a problem, he's convinced he can find a way to fix it."

Rosendahl is committed to big-picture thinking, "because Southern California is a 15-million-populated area - our problems now are beyond our local reality." He has faith in the City Council - nine members have endorsed him, including the only Republican, Greig Smith - to make city-sized improvements in L.A. "I strongly believe that the coalition to effect social change for our city is there." Rosendahl's plan is to pull together necessary majorities to solve issues like the shortage of police officers and affordable housing and the surfeit of traffic congestion.

Even Rosendahl naysayers will allow that his 16 years as a public affairs program host and cable executive, first with Century Cable, later swallowed up by Adelphia, permitted him a long and thoughtful look at L.A. issues. But some wonder if he can translate that into effective policy. Others grouse that he campaigns as if he alone had just discovered traffic gridlock, the environment, and related issues like the massive, multibillion-dollar Playa Vista project.

His opponent, Krisiloff, has put out a mailer suggesting that he once supported the Playa Vista project and has recently flip-flopped. "I live as close to the earth as I can," Rosendahl says. "I was against Playa Vista being at that wetlands." The Ballona Wetlands is the biggest and last natural wetlands in Los Angeles County; a state land purchase saved 193 acres of a total 1,087 acres of land below the bluffs, once the largest private parcel left in the L.A. basin. He opposed the position of Councilmember Miscikowski to push for approval of phase two of the massive project near already traffic-choked Lincoln Boulevard. Phase one hasn't even been completed, he says, and traffic and environmental concerns of further expansion haven't begun to be addressed. He enjoys endorsements from the Sierra Club and League of Conservation Voters.

The Playa Vista issue is an example of the way Krisiloff's campaign has listed toward going negative, a reflection, many say, of the fighting style of Rick Taylor, her consultant. Then there has been innuendo about Krisiloff making a subtle issue of Rosendahl being gay - he has always been open about it - and her emphasis in the primary about being the only candidate to be married with children. Her campaign insinuated that Rosendahl was framing her as a gay-basher.

Rosendahl refuses to go negative in conversation or in his literature. The closest he comes is a piece that mocks his opponent's campaign for its attacks on him - a Lichtenstein-style cartoon featuring a horrified woman gazing at a mailer that proclaims "Rosendahl Kidnaps Elvis!" He did win the primary with a four-point lead over Krisiloff. He's raised over \$74,662 to her \$56,245 in the first quarter reporting period and has an impressive list of endorsements.

He ends the conversation with a cheery "God bless you!" as a visitor begins to leave, then responds to a phone call. "Great!" he tells the caller. "Great, great, great, great, great!"

Could be that one person's "bombastic" is another's "enthusiastic."

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