

## **OPINION: Villaraigosa still haunted by role as 2012 DNC chair**

Despite endorsements from Luis Alejo, Simón Salinas, and other leading Monterey County Democrats, gubernatorial candidate Antonio Villaraigosa has been struggling to gain traction statewide.

His poor fourth-place showing in February's state Democratic convention and his difficulty closing the gap with frontrunner Gavin Newsom underscores his serious credibility problem among party activists, in part from a highly-visible incident on a national stage six years ago which would have boosted his political fortunes.

For many California Democrats who did not live in Los Angeles area when he was mayor or closely followed state politics when he served as a progressive leader in the State Assembly, Villaraigosa is mostly remembered from his role as chair of the 2012 Democratic National Convention, particularly an unscripted incident which took place on the second day of the proceedings.

That morning in Charlotte, Villaraigosa called a motion to the assembled delegates to adopt two amendments to the party platform—one which inserted the phrase “God-given” in reference to human potential and another recognizing Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. Since the platform had already been formally adopted the previous day, he noted that party rules required a two-thirds majority for the motion to pass.

The amendments were highly controversial, which is presumably why they weren't included in the original platform. Even among Democrats of religious faith, many argued that the question as to whether our potential is part of our innate being or “God-given” should be a matter of individual conscience, not one that should be declared in the platform.

Similarly, even among Democratic supporters of Israel, many opposed unilaterally declaring Jerusalem the undivided capital of Israel with no mention of the Palestinians' insistence on the largely-Palestinian eastern half of the city (currently under Israeli military occupation) serving as their capital as well.

Opponents observed how such an action—which Trump implemented in a controversial move this past December—could jeopardize hopes for Israel-Palestinian peace and thereby set back Israelis' longstanding desire for security. Polls at that time showed that Democrats by a 3:1 margin believed Jerusalem should be shared by both Israelis and Palestinians, and not be the exclusive capital of Israel.

When Villaraigosa called the question on a voice vote, it fell well short of the two-thirds majority and probably didn't even receive a simple majority. Rather than declare the motion as failed, he called the question again, also resulting in a virtual tie. He then tried a third time with the same outcome, but then shocked the convention by declaring that it had actually passed with the requisite two-thirds majority. Ignoring the angry point of order calls from the assembled delegates, he moved on to the next agenda item.

As Soviet dictator Josef Stalin purportedly observed, “It's not people who vote that count, it's people who count votes.”

Villaraigosa quickly became the butt of jokes by late-night comedians as a result of his actions, with Jon Stewart referring to it as the “Democratic voter fraud Republicans are always talking about.”

Regardless of one's view on whether the party platform should reference God or whether greater Jerusalem should exclusively belong to Israelis, many Californians are seriously concerned about electing a governor with such apparent contempt for the rules and for democratic procedure.

One of the most important advantages Democrats have over Republicans is our better grasp on reality. We cannot afford to have a governor of the country's largest and most important state who, in front of millions of viewers, could insist on a totally different outcome of a vote than what everyone else could see and hear. Even Donald Trump would have a hard time topping Villaraigosa's performance in terms of asserting an alternate reality. California deserves better.