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IDA JO CARGO

Voice of Mexican-Americans

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The Los Angeles Times

IDA Jo Wife of New Mexico governor David Cargo, is tall, dark-haired, attractive and very outspoken — as President Nixon himself once learned.

It was at the Republican governors' conference in Palm Springs, Calif., last December that Mrs. Cargo took the then president-elect aside and lectured him sharply on the problems of the Mexican-American minority in the Southwest.

Mr. Nixon listened attentively as Mrs. Cargo ran down a catalog of grievances. When it was all over, he promised her something would be done.

Now he is faced with fulfilling that promise and winning the respect and attention of the 10-million-strong Mexican-American minority in the United States just as he is trying to win the respect of the nation's larger, more vocal black minority.

The president's problems with the Mexican-Americans are at least as difficult to solve—perhaps even more so—than those with the blacks. Leaders of the minority say too few officials in Washington, too few members of the so-called establishment, realize the plight of the Mexican-Americans.

To address himself to that problem, Mr. Nixon has stepped in where former President Johnson feared to tread. He has given an order to his assistants to begin planning a White House conference on Mexican-American affairs that would once and for all bring the minority's grievances out in the open for

the template in Washington

He has also set his talent hunters to work looking for Mexican-Americans he can appoint to high places in the administration. The search has not been easy. It has been complicated in part by the fragmentation of the Mexican-American community which means that some 200 organizations exist and all of them cannot be pleased at once.

It is complicated also by the fact that the vast majority of Mexican-American voters are Democrats and the Nixon administration wants to be careful not to reward unnecessarily those who turned out anti-Republican votes in last November's election.

Considering all this, even Mr. Nixon's critics are impressed by the opportunities facing the administration to at once do something about problems that are begging for solution; and at the same time score important political points.

"He wouldn't have to do much to outdo the Johnson administration," one former functionary of the New Frontier and Great Society said. "He has a great opportunity but the only problem is that if he listens to the Republican politicians of the Southwest — except for Gov. Cargo and Rep. George Bush—he'll blow it." Bush is the Republican congressman from Houston, Texas, who has spent long hours cultivating Mexican-American support for the Republican Party.

For years, the Mexican-Americans in the Southwest have been known as the "silent minority" or the "forgotten minority" but, with the growth of black militancy, the Mexican-Americans have

been growing increasingly volatile.

In Washington, there has been increasing pressure for the appointment of Mexican-Americans to policy-making positions.

Controversy, for example, surrounded the question of who would be appointed director of the Small Business Administration. Hilary J. Sandoval Jr., a Mexican-American businessman of El Paso, was so certain he would get the job that, amidst great publicity, he dropped out of the race for mayor of that city—an election he had some chance of winning.

But afterward the administration got trapped in a patronage battle when Robert Podesta, a Chicago Republican with the backing of Sen. Everett McKinley Dirksen (R-Ill.), also made a pitch for the job. The problem was resolved by giving the SBA post to Sandoval, and making Podesta an assistant secretary of commerce for economic development.

A much knottier problem revolves around the fate of Dr. Hector Garcia of Corpus Christi, Texas, the physician-politician who was closely allied to President Johnson.

Garcia had been appointed by Johnson to the Civil Rights Commission but Nixon withdrew the appointment along with a number of others by Johnson, ostensibly so he can review them.

Now if Nixon does not again submit Garcia's nomination—or that of some other Mexican-American—he will run the danger of being accused of taking away gains the Mexican-Americans had already made. On the other hand, if he does appoint Garcia, he will be naming a man whose political machine delivered an estimated 100,000 of the vote in his constituency

Nixon's opponent last November, Hubert H. Humphrey. Some say it was the Mexican-American vote that tipped Texas to Humphrey.

Despite this political embarrassment, indications are that Garcia's appointment is not yet dead. The commission by law must be politically balanced among Republicans and Democrats.

These two jobs in themselves, however, will not be enough to satisfy "the community," as Mexican-American leaders have begun calling their constituency.

The question of how to deal with various segments of the community has also come up in the preliminary work on the White House conference. Charles H. (Bud) Wilkinson, Nixon's special consultant on various matters, has been given responsibility for organizing the conference and he in turn has put a deputy, James Atwater, a former magazine writer, to work.

"We've made great inroads," Gov. Cargo told a Los Angeles Times reporter recently, "but I seemed to sense during the election that there wasn't any great enthusiasm for the president. I don't think there was any upsurge for Humphrey either. They leaned very definitely toward a Kennedy or a Rockefeller . . . (The late Sen. Robert F. Kennedy was well-known as a champion of Mexican-Americans.)

"We've just about been conferred out. . . . In northern New Mexico, they couldn't care less about a conference . . . They want people to be employed locally."

The Cargo lecture goes on in this vein, making a plea to the Agriculture Department to let contracts on government land locally to individuals rather than



DAVID CARGO

AP Photo

to huge out-of-state companies, to build roads so that children can get to school from isolated villages rather than spreading poverty money around, to clear up welfare problems.

"I've tried to convince them (the bureaucrats) that they (the Mexican-Americans) need very simple, direct things. It doesn't have to be sophisticated, doesn't have to be involved but they have got to have things they can see, they can feel, they can understand."

Cargo talks like a politician as well as a humanitarian.

"We can pick up a tremendous amount of strength from the Spanish-speaking people and we displayed that." He then goes on to recite how he has gained strength among Spanish-speaking voters and has taken great pains to appoint representatives of the minority to various state commissions and boards, including the Board of Regents of the University of New Mexico.

There is no doubt that Nixon would have listened intently to such a story.

Transferred to the national stage, Cargo's success story represents the kind of program that could bring Nixon great dividends, not only among the silent minority of the Mexican-Americans but perhaps among the more vocal blacks as well.



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