

Knight urges candidates to address issues, not personalities

By Ivan Crosbie
Staff writer

LYNWOOD — Her voice cut through the air in the room at Lynwood's Bateman Hall, echoing with a sound of authority but fully charged with concern. The audience, predominantly women, sat as if glued to the seats, eyes riveted on the speaker.

As she continued to speak, injecting humor here and there, the capacity audience reacted gleefully. The speaker was Dr. Charlie M. Knight, superintendent of Lynwood Unified School District.

She was participating as guest speaker at a Saturday morning breakfast and voters' kick-off drive sponsored by the National Black Women Voters League.

During her address, the superintendent urged several candidates seeking election to both the city council and the district's board of education to "tune on the issues, not on personalities."

"He who runs the fastest," she told them, "will win."

Knight, one of three black female superintendents of schools in California, takes exception to the notion that "education and politics don't mix."

In a demonstration of her belief, the superintendent announced her intent to seek election to Compton Community College Board of Trustees.

The announcement came as a surprise to part of the audience which

welcomed her decision enthusiastically.

If elected to the board, she would become possibly the only female superintendent in California to hold those two positions at the same time.

Knight, 50, took over the superintendency of LUSD more than two years ago. She became the first woman and black to achieve that post.

At the time, LUSD was faced with expanding minority population, declining student academic achievements, curriculum and administrative problems.

After assessing and re-evaluating the condition, goals and objectives of the district, the superintendent concluded that changes had to be made and fast.

Her major priority, she said, was to "provide an environment of safety in the schools."

This effort was geared to encourage parents, who had taken their children out of the district due to gang violence and other reasons, to return them.

But the urgency and pace with which the superintendent wanted to make these changes stirred reactions from some community groups and, at one time, factionalized the board of trustees.

Knight recalled this as being one of her most trying periods as superintendent.

"It was difficult at times, because some people didn't understand what we were doing," she said.



Dr. Charlie M. Knight (right) stands next to Georgia Senator Julian Bond at Lynwood High School graduation ceremonies held earlier this year. At that time, Bond announced he would not be running for president. Knight has just announced her candidacy for the Compton Community College Board of Trustees.

Despite opposition, the superintendent continued her push for academic excellence in her schools. Today, things are different in LUSD.

Under Knight's leadership, the district is on an upward swing. New programs have been implemented to enhance the quality of student education, administration and teachers' efficiency.

Among the district's future objectives are plans to construct a new senior high school and a continuation school.

An estimated \$35 million will be expended for the high school's construction. The continuation school will cost approximately \$3.6 million. The high school proposal will be given a hearing Oct. 26 by the state.

The superintendent and members of LUSD board of trustees plan to attend the hearing.

In addition to new schools, several of the recently-implemented academic programs are continuing successfully.

They include: upgrading of Lynwood High curriculum; enhancing safety environment; eliminating split reading programs; eliminating student workers in school cafeterias; implementation of district-wide science programs; and implementation of character education.

Some of these programs have been implemented either earlier this year or in 1982.

Currently, with visible proof of her leadership and capability, most of her critics have either switched over

to her side, or no longer label her a "radical, controversial" administrator.

An example of her growing popularity in the city, district and surrounding area was illustrated Friday night in Bateman Hall, when a significant number of friends and well-wishers turned out for a "salute" in her honor.

The program, sponsored by the Lynwood Network Committee, recognized the superintendent for her "profound leadership in the quest for excellence in education and its impact on the surrounding community."

Carlie Greene, chairperson of the network, said Knight has given "insightful leadership to the district" since assuming that post in 1981.

Greene said, "The affair is strictly from the community, from people who want to say 'We're with you.'"

Members of the committee include: Assembly Speaker Willie Brown, Congressman Mervyn Dymally, Councilman Robert Farrell, Rev. Charles Floyd, Rev. E.V. Hill, Assemblywoman Theresa Hughes, Rev. Thomas Kilgore, Lynwood Mayor Louis Thompson, Compton Mayor Walter Tucker, and Sen. Diane Watson.

Knight came to the district in June 1981 after serving as associate superintendent of California Department of Public Education.

In that position, she served for three years. She began with the department as a manager of the division of elementary and secondary education.

Elegant Ladies

The 13-mile event drew politicians and local officials from all over the area with special guest speaker U.S. Rep. Mervyn Dymally.

The team is trained by Kathy Munns, who joined the organization 8 1/2 months ago.

Munns, who has had extensive experience in working with youths within this age category, is a nononsense type of coach.

Johnson sees Munns as the savior of the team.

"She sweats with them," Johnson explained. "She just doesn't just tell them what to do. She does it with them."

Johnson said she is "proud of the team." She thinks "it's going places."

Washington, however, wants unlimited success for her Elegant Ladies.

She wants the team to become the "biggest and best in the business."

Voters reject one, set runoff June 7

Despite the efforts of one candidate, who filed suit against two of his opponents over charges that they lied about their qualifications, Compton voters rejected him and forced a runoff between his two opponents.

In the April 19 municipal election, voters rejected Saul E. Lankster, while setting a runoff between incumbent Councilwoman Jane Robbins and Patricia Moore.

However, the voters overwhelmingly re-elected incumbent Councilman Marcy Flier, who was opposed by Edward S. Loney and Clifton Bostic Jr.

Flier, who had served six years previously in the First District, garnered 70.5 percent of the votes, equivalent to 3,086 of the total votes cast.

Loney, a first-time contender, collected 807 votes, while Bostic, an educator, received 467. Bostic had tried to withdraw from the race earlier, but was not allowed to do so on the basis that it "was too late."

The Fourth District race, which was the most controversial, pitted Robbins, who had served six years previously, against Moore and Lankster.

In that race, Robbins collected 45.8 percent of the votes, 2,012 of the total votes cast. This was less than the majority vote she needed to regain her seat.

Moore, on the other hand, pulled a close 31.4 percent, equivalent to 1,363 votes, which qualifies her for the runoff during the general elections scheduled for June 7.

Lankster, a former Compton police officer, who previously ran for a variety of seats both local and statewide, garnered 22.9 percent of the votes, equivalent to 1,006 of the total votes cast.

From the 30,680 eligible voters who were officially registered for the election, only 14.9 percent turned out.