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# 'Mexican crab' tale so closely applies to Reyes rejection

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Every Mexican-American political or community leader is familiar with the joke about the "Mexican crabs."

A seaside visitor observed that a bucket packed with live crabs is coverless and asked a fisherman why none of the crabs escaped.

"These are Mexican crabs," said the fisherman. "As soon as one is in position to escape, the others pull him down as they try to move to the top. You never need to cover them."

**IT IS A STORY THAT** unfortunately brings sighs of resignation rather than smiles from Mexican-Americans.

For decades, politicians have exploited the weakness of some Mexican-Americans who cannot separate private personal matters from important political considerations. The weakness is most often noticeable in well-meaning persons who want the role of leader without having learned how to follow.

At times, these Mexican-Americans have hurt the Chicano community more than even the most scarlet of political "rednecks."

Nowhere was this more in evidence than in the rejection of Frumencio Reyes for substitute municipal judge last week.

Mayor Jim McConn submitted Reyes' name to the City Council primarily because the Political Association of Spanish-speaking Organizations (PASO) endorsed the Metropolitan Transit Authority in last August's election.

**THE PASO LEADERSHIP** realized the MTA was meant to serve the wealthier sections of Houston with only incidental consideration for the barrios. It withheld endorsement until McConn agreed to appoint Mexican-Americans to high-ranking positions in the city and on appointive boards and commissions as well as provide more services to the long neglected barrios.

In September, McConn named the first Mexican-American city department head and was offering a small but respectable position to Reyes.

But no sooner had Reyes' name been nominated than the Harris County Hispanic Caucus challenged the nomination, saying Reyes was unknown in the community and had no support.

In several years of covering the Mexican-American community, I have yet to see a more ill-advised and embarrassing political act perpetrated by Mexican-Americans against Mexican-Americans.

**AT A TIME WHEN** the Mexican-American community should have been drawn up in a tight battle formation, HCHC and a few community leaders left the line and set up Chicanos for an embarrassing political setback.

It gave the Houston City Council the opening it needed to avoid recognizing

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the city's strongest barrio political organization and provided the opportunity for the old political game of playing Chicanos against Chicanos.

Reyes needs no personal defense. He worked his way up from a poor migrant family to become a successful attorney and a tireless worker for Mexican-American interests. He has been a PASO leader and is an officer in the Mexican-American Bar Association. He helped litigate a deserved challenge to Houston's at-large election system which makes election of a minority member improbable if not impossible.

**IN HIS LATEST EFFORTS,** Reyes and PASO Chairman Hector Garcia led the effort to secure a federal grant to provide for impartial investigation of police brutality charges in an effort to improve barrio-police relations.

But let's leave Reyes out of the issue and look at the matter from the angle of practical politics.

PASO acquired its power by building a precinct and voter bloc over the years. If the Mexican-American community did not want PASO to have this power, it would not vote for its candidates and issues.

PASO used its power by negotiating commitments from McConn because McConn wanted PASO's endorsement.

PASO was entitled to cash in the political IOUs McConn tendered.

Among white and black political groups, it would have been understood that no one interfere with this power play lest they all be subject to being undercut whenever it came their turn for political gain.

**BUT HCHC AND A** few leaders still have yet to learn this very simple political principle.

Whether the Houston City Council likes it or not, PASO is the the strongest Mexican-American political group in Houston and it will recover easily from this setback.

This unnecessary spectacle should strengthen the resolve of responsible Mexican-American groups to stand firmly behind one another if only for respect for each other and always to show a unified front.

If Mexican-Americans are to advance, Chicanos will have to shun petty personality conflicts, grandstanding and other harmful, divisive actions. Then maybe we can all go over the top.



