

A Conversation With . . .

Long Beach Mayor Bob Foster

It says a lot about the confidence people have in their mayor when in a politically active city of nearly 500,000 residents, during very difficult economic times and with an anti-incumbency mood sweeping the country, they reward the individual with a second term – and in a landslide.

Not only did Bob Foster earn another four years from the people he serves, he drew only a 21-year-old college student as an opponent. Despite a good dozen people in Long Beach with mayoral aspirations, not one of them was willing to go up against Mayor Bob or his record.

This is a mayor who pushed for an unpopular tax and lost, who took on the largest business organization in town over the annual state of the city address and who often scolds councilmembers and the public alike for their conduct during city council meetings. He readily admits he's irritated many people and made some enemies.

But this is also a mayor who stands up for his city when it is challenged by any person or group; who defends his city manager when attacked by a local union; who, instead of heading home to relax with his wife, will sit on a restaurant patio for hours convincing East Coast meeting planners to choose Long Beach for their convention; and who without hesitation grabs a helmet and leads more than a thousand residents on a 30-plus-mile cycling tour of the city.

With Bob Foster, what you see is what you get. He'll look you in the eye and tell you exactly what he thinks, even if you don't like the answer. But, unlike many elected officials, he'll explain the reasons for his position. He doesn't see himself as pro business or pro union, he's pro Long Beach. Sometimes he supports the business point of view, other times he sides with unions. That's why both are willing financial contributors to his campaigns and to his causes.

He fully recognizes the problems government is facing in being able to deliver the necessary and expected services to constituents. "It's going to be a very slow crawl out of this recession," Foster said during a 90-minute interview on May 14 at the Long Beach Business Journal office. "That's my own opinion because I think there's going to have to be lasting changes in how America spends and saves and invests. You've seen those changes now. I think we've hopefully reached the bottom, and I think we're starting to climb back out."

Foster continued that the city is in a fortunate position in that we have the job-creating Port of Long Beach and "at least" some income from oil. He foresees the struggle to continue in the local, state and national economy over the next two to three years.

Although the local economy and city budget were dominant subjects during the interview, Foster also addressed economic development, charter reform, the environment, and his relationship with members of the city council and more. Publisher George Economides, who wrote this introduction, conducted the interview with Staff Writers Amy Dempsey and Tiffany Rider.

LBBJ: Let's start with the city's General Fund. How's it look for the next fiscal year? The last report showed about an \$18.5 million shortfall.

Foster: That's about right.

LBBJ: Discuss plans and options for cutting expenses. Are the public safety unions going to contribute more this year than they have in the past? How about pension reform?

Foster: First, a little background. If you look at last year, we had a much more daunting task – a nearly \$40 million gap to close. I don't like to say deficit because we have to make our budget balance. One way or another, we're going to make those ends meet. It could be



through draconian cuts or it could be cooperation from our employees and some enhanced revenue occasionally. So this year, while we've had four steady years of reduction, there are fewer options for cutting. But this is a manageable issue; \$18 million isn't something that should send anybody into panic mode. Over half of it is made up of contractual increases that employees are due. What we will ask and what we asked last year, is for employees to contribute to meeting that deficit. Hopefully they will cooperate again so that we can make ends meet. If that happens, it will be a very manageable hole to fill. If they don't, we only have one tool. This is not rocket science. We can't – unlike other government agencies – borrow money. We can't readily tax. I'm not saying we would do

that anyway. We have one method and that's basically to cut expenses. We seek to gain revenue wherever we can. We've done a little bit of that, and we'll do more. If we don't get cooperation, we'll just have to use program reductions and layoffs. (Note: A few days after the interview, the city announced the possibility of 100 layoffs in the new fiscal year if there are no concessions by unions.)

LBBJ: Have you seen an uptick in sales tax revenue?

Foster: To my knowledge, no. I think it's clearly bottomed out. I think property tax has a little bit to go to bottom out because there was a lag in that. Oil revenue is up. That's the one good thing, because oil has bumped up to \$70-plus dollars. Our oil revenue is a benefit. In the not too distant future, we can actually count on some more oil revenue because we're going to get some enhanced recovery out of the existing oil fields. But we can't count on that yet.

LBBJ: Wasn't there a discussion of increasing the tax on that?

Foster: No. That's on Proposition H. I think the tax now is at 47 cents if I'm not mistaken. That wouldn't be general fund anyway. That's not going to close any gap. We really have to rely on being fiscally prudent and looking for increased revenue wherever we can. The city manager has a five-point program. He's got governmental reform, department reductions, employee contributions, pension reform and potential new revenue. Those are the five things that we're all trying to accomplish. Some of them you can count on: the government reform, the potential revenue and the department reductions all of those will make up about \$7.3 million. I don't have a calculation on pension reform because we don't yet know what we are going to do there, but it's pretty clear that we have to reform pensions not only in Long Beach, but all over the state. They're not sustainable presently.

LBBJ: So you're going to be asking the unions to contribute more toward pensions?

Foster: There are several things you can do. First of all, let's make it clear, you can't do anything without negotiating it. You can't take away a benefit that someone has already been granted; certainly not without negotiating that. But the kinds of things you'd like to see the state do – the state could be really helpful if you could move the retirement age up, change the formula from 2.7 percent to lower [percentage] per year of service. You can increase the contribution employees make toward their pensions. The only thing that will help in the immediate time frame are increased contributions from employees. All the other things – moving the retirement age back and changing the formula – affects the future. We are offering a two-tier system for [newly hired] miscellaneous employees.

LBBJ: Do we have any idea how many are under the new tier? Of course, there hasn't been a lot of hiring, has there?

Foster: No, probably not a whole lot. But yes, you're getting a significant amount of the workforce nearing retirement age and that's true in every business as well. This is something that has to be dealt with. The pension increases that have been going on, plus now with the reduction in income as a result of the meltdown, are going to lead to substantially more contributions starting in 2012. Not all of it comes out of the General Fund, but a significant amount does. Total, all pension contributions from all funds is around \$80 million per year. I think the General Fund portion of that is \$50 million or even \$60 million. But it's rising and it has to be dealt with. As I said, we're looking in every place we can for additional revenue. We think in the not-so-distant future we'll have some additional oil revenue because we'll be able to pull more oil out of those fields. We're working with the operators right now to do that, and to do that we need some cooperation from the State of California. Hopefully we'll get it. Hopefully sales tax and utility users tax start picking up and property tax stabilizes. It's going to be tight for several years. We're not coming out of this recession very fast.



be a very slow crawl out of this recession. That's my opinion because I think there's going to have to be lasting changes in how America spends and saves and invests. You've seen those changes now. I think we've hopefully reached the bottom, and I think we're starting to climb back out. We're fortunate here from a couple of standpoints. One, we actually have a port that generates jobs, and two, we have at least some income from oil. Without those I think we'd been in very difficult straits. [From] all indications, there are going to be improving conditions in the next two or three years.

LBBJ: Do you think the economy is ahead of the city as far as the budget goes? In other words, we'll probably see a turnaround in the economy first before the revenues come?

LBBJ: You mentioned \$7.3 million for department cuts . . .

Foster: That's a combination of some of the quick reforms we can do internally – potential new revenue and department reductions.

LBBJ: I've talked to several people in various departments in the city and they say they're down to the bone right now as far as employees and one person is doing two or three people's work. It's tough to find any more places to cut.

Foster: I don't know how to answer that. We really don't have a choice. I don't think anyone's going to go out and get a tax increase in this environment, and my own view is I don't think you can ask the voters to provide more revenue unless you reform pensions.

LBBJ: Are you willing to explore the possibility of changing the contract with the firefighters so they don't have four-man crews?

Foster: That's all negotiated. They did a little bit of that with a light force at a couple of fire stations. They will tell you and others will tell you that that is a safety issue. We've put everything on the table with the firefighters. I will tell you that they have been very cooperative in dealing with the city.

LBBJ: But the county uses three-man crews.

Foster: I know.

LBBJ: What about a trying it in part of the city where they don't have as many calls for service . . .

Foster: Really, on those kinds of things that are collectively bargained I'm going to leave to the table.

LBBJ: Do you as mayor get involved in that or is that strictly staff?

Foster: I get involved in collective bargaining when it's appropriate. I think you saw that with the police contract.

LBBJ: How has President Obama's stimulus package helped the city? Can you talk about some of the key projects?

Foster: It provided over \$118 million for everything in the city. That includes the transit operation. It includes the water department. It includes infrastructure and all the job training. About 43 percent of that money has gone to infrastructure. My own view is that most of it should have gone to infrastructure. But I didn't write the American Recovery Act. I think that's where the greatest need is, and I think that's where you get a really significant multiplier effect from the investment.

LBBJ: So that's about \$50 million.

Foster: It is. You can see we've done street work that we didn't anticipate. We've put a lot of it into arterial streets . . . We still have a lot of work to do on all kinds of infrastructure. We could have used three or four times that kind of money and put it to very good use. We have job-training programs. The first one was the Neighborhood Stabilization Fund, which tries to help people not get foreclosed on. About \$22 million went into that. A significant amount went into job training and about 1,000 jobs – some part-time, some full-time – for youth was put in there. Overall it's about \$118 million. I think everyone ought to expect that money is going to decline rapidly in the future. The president, before he took office, when we met with him in Chicago he was pretty clear about this and said, "Use these stimulus funds effectively and quickly. Don't count on them. You ought to use them as much as you can for one-time expenses because the spigot is going to be turned off. The federal government is going to have to cut back spending. That's no great secret there. I look at this pretty much as one-time money. I've tried to put it to good use and quick use as much as we can. So we had projects ready to go. We've been very efficient. . .

LBBJ: Do you feel we're beginning to see a turnaround in the local economy?

Foster: I think we've bottomed out. The initial signs were from the port, which is a pretty good barometer. The port was down, depending on what figure you use, 25 to 30 percent from 2009 over 2008. It's up now 16 percent in imports and 15 percent on exports. You should hopefully start seeing some job growth as a result of that, but it will lag. I think you're starting to see some revitalizations. You know, I think if you study severe downturns that have occurred in the past, there have been dips in the overall recovery on those. I expect you'll have a couple of those yet in this recovery. It's going to

certainly property tax will lag. The biggest wildcard in this whole scheme is the State of California.

LBBJ: So we still have at least another year or two years of tough budgets ahead?

Foster: I think three years.

LBBJ: Three years? OK.

Foster: I don't know what the State of California is going to do. If the past is any indication, they will not act responsibly and they will seek and take funds from whomever they can. They're facing a serious situation in which they need to curtail their spending. So far they have not been demonstrating the will to do so. Just look at what they've done. Look, I'm not criticizing from the standpoint; it's a very difficult situation they're in. By and large, our representatives have done as much as they can to try and help. But if you look at where they are, they've depleted every emergency fund they've had. There's IOUs in the fiscal emergency fund. There's IOUs in the physical emergency fund – if we have an earthquake or a flood or whatever. There's nothing left. They took \$31 million out of our redevelopment agency last year. They took another \$10 million from the city; I forget where that came from. All indications are that they will continue to try to take money from whatever source they can. Yet, to my knowledge, not one state employee was laid off last year. I'm not looking for somebody to lose their job, but we laid off people. Almost every other local government laid off people. . . . I think they're going to try to come down and take additional funds.

LBBJ: Do you think we're going to see any change with a new governor, or are the governor's hands tied because of the legislature?

Foster: This budget cycle is going to be with this governor and this legislature. I'm hopeful that they make some real structural changes, but if the past is any indication, they're going to seek to try to take money wherever they can find it.

LBBJ: Are there any brainstorming sessions that have been going on with staff or elected officials to talk about how to spur the local economy?

Foster: I don't know about brainstorming sessions. We talk all the time about it. My job continually is to try to lure business to the City of Long Beach. I do that in a variety of ways. I go out and meet with almost every group that wants to bring a conference or a convention here. I've been very successful in helping bring those conferences or conventions. Hopefully there are a couple of announcements coming up in the month of June, which will bear even more fruit to that.

I try to meet with businesses that are seeking to locate here. I met with one a couple of weeks ago. We have a small business incentive program where we work [with] small businesses. . . . to get into the city bidding process. That has been relatively successful. [There is] a preference for Long Beach businesses, [and] in the last year it has led to several businesses getting awards from the City of Long Beach. I think that makes sense. So we try to do whatever we can to encourage business activity here. The truth is, we don't have the tools that the federal government has. I can't go out and put a little stimulus package together. I would love to do that, but I can't do that. So we're left with our enterprise zone, which has been very useful and by the way is apparently one of the targets the state is looking at in terms of limiting. . .

LBBJ: That doesn't make sense. Why would they want to . . .

Foster: I wish I could answer that question. I honestly don't know. Sometimes you wonder if there's any understanding of economic development anywhere. But why you would eliminate one of the few incentives we have, one of the few tools we have to keep business in your city or to keep it from going to another state, one of the only tools we have to attract anybody, is beyond me. I don't understand.

LBBJ: Do our representatives understand this?

Foster: Yes. Our representatives by and large have been very helpful. They understand this. You're dealing with a culture in Sacramento that for decades – not that these are the people who started this – that has been really to hand the problem off to someone else down the road; the famous road to kick the can down. Well, there's no more road to kick the can down. I empathize with what they're facing because they didn't create this. The members there today really didn't create this situation. Now they're the recipient of years and years of inattention and complacency and of putting things off for tomorrow. Now they're going to have to deal with this. This is going to be very unpleasant. Had it been dealt with 20 years ago in a rational way, putting money aside for when we have dips in our income – which was substantial in California because we rely on the income tax so heavily without a capital gains tax at all, everything is treated as ordinary income – you're going to have

very mercurial income fluctuations. So they're going to have to deal with this. There are very few places in which you can grab money any longer.

LBBJ: Do you meet at all with the business community to talk about ideas?

Foster: Yes. I met with the new head of the [Long Beach] Chamber, the outgoing and incoming presidents. I meet with the Los Angeles County Economic Development Corporation frequently. We talk about ways in which we can incent business conduct. There was a study that just came out . . . that [ranks] California just below Washington, D.C., as the least business friendly location in the country. I believe for years we've been abusing our businesses in California, somehow believing that we can treat people in a less than equitable fashion and that they will continue to keep coming back to California.

I'm not so much worried about people moving as I'm worried about not getting new business. Most business people I talk to only come to California because they have to. That's not a good situation to be in.

LBBJ: The unemployment rate in the city and the state and throughout the county is still really high. Do you think the Obama administration should make employment its top priority?

Foster: You know, they say they are. I think you have to be candid about these things. If you were the president of the United States, what would you do? How are you going to create a job? . . . That's why I think putting money into infrastructure was really where you should center it because now, those jobs tend to last a longer time because construction projects take time to get done. Secondly, they have spin-off effects to collateral industry. What you want to do in this environment is have more velocity of money to create more employment. . . . What I would hope is that every bit of the stimulus money that has not been spent goes into infrastructure. First, the country needs it. Secondly, it has an economic effect that I think is second to none. I hope that's what happens.

LBBJ: I wonder why he hasn't done that. I mean, that's what he said he was going to do.

Foster: Well, I think when it gets to Congress is when things go awry for maybe some very good and legitimate reasons. You have a lot of pressures; you might pressure him for infrastructure or I might. Somebody else is telling him that he has to save teachers, he has to save cops, he has to save firefighters – those are all legitimate positions. That's not something you would look at and say, "That doesn't make any sense." But you'd step back and say, "Look. For the good of the country, we're going to have to take a little pain in the short run in order to get this economy rolling again. The way to do that is to invest in capital items." That's what I believe, but there's significant political pressure from legitimate sources saying, "Hey, I don't want to lose my teachers, I don't want to lose my cops." I think in the face of that – and look, there's some pork in there too. Don't get me wrong. Congress will tend to put pork in any of those proposals. So it starts out a horse in the beginning and what it looks like at the end of the process is something else.

LBBJ: Let's move on to the city council. How would you characterize your relationship with the current city council?

Foster: I think I have a pretty good relationship with most of the city council. I think I've managed to work well with everybody. There are times when I have difficulties with one or more of them, but that's just human conduct. People talk about that a lot, and then there are times I would like to have the council act sometimes differently than it does. But put yourself in their position as well. They have a lot of pressure and demands on them. Politics is never always all rational; it's a passionate business. People get passionate about things and they act on that. What happens is you wind up having that played out in the only arena that they can talk to one another in a group. Remember that. You can't get together with five of them and have a conversation. So the only time they can actually talk as a group is in those council meetings. Sometimes they get pretty passionate. I try to treat everyone, even people I seriously disagree with, with respect. I try to keep decorum at a high level at council meetings. I don't let people catcall from the audience. I don't let members snipe at one another. I cut it off when I can. I've actually used the button to shut off all the microphones but mine on a couple of occasions.

LBBJ: It's good to have that button.

Foster: Yes. Pre-empt button is what it's called. With all the hours they put into those council meetings, by and large they conduct themselves I think in a civil fashion. Think of your own family. Think about all the times you've gotten into a heated argument with your family over something. Why would they be any different? You have to at least acknowledge that. My job is to try to keep things as civil as I possibly can, and I try to do that. I think on the whole, if you look at all the hours of the council meetings, most of them are actually fairly decent.

LBBJ: Two years ago, voters approved several changes to the city charter, including giving you a stronger veto.

Foster: Yes they did.

LBBJ: What changes would you like to see examined further, and do you have any plans for proposals on the November ballot?

Foster: I don't. There are some members who are talking about potential charter change. They revolve around stuff like the port. Some potentially with structure changes between the mayor and council. To be candid, I think the changes that were made were necessary



and beneficial. I don't think I need anything to govern any more than I have. I think there will be discussion to a number of potential changes to the charter.

LBBJ: Do you feel that nine councilmember districts is the best system or should that be looked at?

Foster: You're asking someone who is elected citywide. Let me just say this. I think at times the natural human tendency when you are elected from a district is to be focused parochially on the district. I think that there are times when there is not enough focus on the city as a whole. I try to preach that. I try to continue to talk about the city as a whole, and I would like to see more citywide focus.

LBBJ: Are you pleased with the port and other groups cleaning up the environment?

Foster: Yes. I think the port has made remarkable progress and we're two years ahead of schedule on the

Clean Air Action Plan. The initial measures we had for the ships are not covered by the air resources board, so they're switching fuel and slowing down the ships 40 miles out – not 20 – for most of them. All the leases are requiring cold ironing and new electronic equipment. The Middle Harbor project is all going to be more on-dock rail, more electronic dock handling equipment, cold ironing ships. I think they've done a remarkable job. I don't think people really understand how difficult this was. You took a 9,000- or 10,000-truck fleet and turned it over in basically two years. You've gone from dirty trucks in that group to now there are over 7,500 [trucks] 2007 or cleaner trucks. That's remarkable. Just think of the dollars involved in doing that. We thought we would meet that goal by the end of 2012. By the end of this year we'll probably reduce pollution from trucks by 80 percent at the port. It's been a remarkable program and I think they deserve a lot of credit for it. I also think they deserve credit for not succumbing to the politics that occurred in Los Angeles, which is to introduce a labor provision, having virtually nothing to do with cleaning the air and potentially putting risk on the environmental program over a provision that really didn't belong in this program. That's how it played out in the courts. If it weren't for Long Beach that whole program would probably stop right now. So I give them a lot of credit for that. It's something I worked pretty hard on.

LBBJ: Would you consider this maybe your number-one achievement in the first four years?

Foster: Environmentally, certainly. I think that imposing a real sense of fiscal discipline on the city has also been important because we've gotten through these budget turmoils with very little dissention and they have been remarkably rational discussions. Look at last year. When you have a nearly \$40 million, 10 percent hit to the General Fund, we were able to deal with that in a very civil fashion. People were on the same page for the most part.

I think something you can't really assess is the cultural change that's taken place in the city in terms of the workforce. When I came in office, the number-one complaint was that this place was really not business friendly. Anybody trying to get a permit got run through the hoops. Very disjointed. Now, it's not perfect, but I now get more compliments on planning and building processes than I get complaints. We try to improve it every day. [I stress] that you have to be customer focused. You're job is to try to get the "yes." You have to abide by all the regulations, but your job is to facilitate somebody getting what they want done and facilitate them achieving that and do it with all the requirements we have to impose. By and large I think that has worked.

LBBJ: Last year at this time, there were a lot of vacancies on city commissions. How are we doing now?

Foster: We filled a lot of them. We have about 40-odd vacancies, I think it's 42 or 43.

LBBJ: Wow, that many?

Foster: Yeah, on everything, but some of them are district specific. I can't make an appointment unless somebody gives me a recommendation. It would have to come from that councilmember or come from that district. Also, we take our time in making appointments. I said I was going to have a real emphasis on certainly geographic diversity in this city, and we've done that. To my knowledge, there is no commission or board that is in jeopardy of not conducting its business. We have sped up the appointments and in a couple cases we have moved faster. I don't deny that, but I'm not going to trade speed over quality. I'm not going to do that.

LBBJ: Is there a plan to maybe combine some commissions?

Foster: We already have a study group that we had recommend reducing them and combining them. That is still ongoing. I think we've done all the combining we're going to do. There is still some we may want to look at eliminating, but we've reduced a number of seats on a number of boards and commissions. They were too big, and I think we've done a reasonable job.

LBBJ: Do you have enough candidates applying?

Foster: That is one of the problems. . . . Sometimes you get very few people applying, and sometimes you get people who don't have the kind of experience you would like. It is very difficult. People are busy feeding their families, and working. It's really hard for someone to go on a board or commission.

LBBJ: But overall, we're in better shape this year.

Foster: I don't think we were ever in a position where business wasn't being conducted.

LBBJ: What happened to your idea of the civil service department with the human resources department?

Foster: It's still alive, and we're going to probably look at that in this budget cycle.

LBBJ: Is that a money saver?

Foster: It will save some money, streamline things too.

LBBJ: How is the new police chief doing?

Foster: He's doing great. . . . The man's credentials are impeccable and . . . He's been at almost every event to introduce himself. And when he does, he does a good job.

LBBJ: Is another police recruitment class on the horizon?

Foster: We're going to look at laterals and I think we're likely to have an academy sometime – potentially this year, probably next year.

LBBJ: This budget year, or next budget year? Or both?

Foster: Next budget year.

LBBJ: So what are we looking at, 50 people? We need to replace 50 people for retirement?

Foster: I don't know the number yet, but given the fact that we're already down 20-some-odd, I think the force is getting older. We need to make plans to refill their ranks.

LBBJ: Are you happy with the work of the city manager?

Foster: I think he has the hardest job in the city, and I think he's done a very good job. I'll give him credit in a couple places. One, I think where he's made mistakes, he's corrected them. The police chief was one, where at significant turmoil to him, he started out saying it was going to be an internal search. I think he realized that would not bring the best crop of candidates, and that there were other candidates out there that we should look at. I think he was willing to put his job on the line for it, and I think that's rare. I think he's done a really good job, he's done an excellent job in terms of trying to turn around the attitude of the work force in the city. I think his leadership has been pretty remarkable in most areas. And it's a tough job, you've got nine councilmembers that you've got to at least keep reasonably happy, and they all have different views and different requirements. And that's very hard to do, and I think he's done a really good job.

LBBJ: Can you talk about your relationship with the Long Beach Chamber of Commerce? Has it been improving?

Foster: I don't think it's ever been bad. I mean, I have a lot of great relationships with members of the chamber. I go to their events, you know, I think it's a decent relationship. I don't think there's any difficulty with it. I'm not sure what it would need to improve from.

LBBJ: Do you get any input from them? Do you talk to them about business issues?

Foster: I talk to, I mean it depends; I talk to Blake Christian quite a bit. Blake particularly with the Enterprise Zone has been really helpful and knows a great deal about that. I talk to him quite frequently. The new chair, Jim Eaton, really wants to have a closer relationship. I have met with him, and he would like to work closer together, and on anything that would enhance business activity in this city, I'd be happy to help.

LBBJ: Have you met with Steve Neal, the new 9th District councilmember?

Foster: I have not met with him. I talked to him after his election, congratulated him. He appears to be a person of decent character, a guy that really wants to do a good job. [Chief of Staff] Becky [Ames] has had a longer conversation with him about a whole number of things. I'm going to meet with him before he takes office.

LBBJ: We interviewed him for the primary and he came across pretty well. A lot better than what we were told.

Foster: Well, you know, generally my view of things like this is things are never as good as you hope, or as bad as you fear. And whatever position you're at, people will always characterize someone else in a more extreme position from what position they hold. That is human nature. I don't know him but I will tell you what he did that I think speaks well for him in terms of his character. I called him up because at the last minute I was able to get, with my own funds, a box at the Grand Prix. I called him up and said 'Hey, I have an extra ticket, I'd like for you to go.' He said, 'Well, you know, I'm probably not going to go to this. A couple other people have invited me.' And I said, 'Well, you're more than welcome, love to have you.' And he says, 'This is Val's [Councilman Val Lerch, who Neal beat] last Grand Prix as councilmember, and I think he ought to enjoy that, and I shouldn't be a distraction.' And I thought that was a remarkably gracious thing to do, and I actually felt the same way when I was taking office and there were all these goodbye parties for Beverly, I didn't go to a lot of them because I thought the same thing. You know, it was her time and her event to enjoy. I thought that was a very gracious thing on his part. I don't know any more than that, but at least he was thinking beyond himself.

LBBJ: What do you think are the major accomplishments of your first term? And have you outlined any priorities for your second term?

Foster: I think we've talked about some of the accomplishments. The port and the environmental work out there, I think really imposing some real fiscal discipline. One thing I failed to mention, last year we not only bridged a nearly \$40 million gap, but we also put a \$9 million budget reserve together, which is something the rating agencies really have looked at with a great deal of favorability. They think it's terrific. I think that, and the Ace Program out at Jordan High School, where we have the first graduating class of 255 students in that program. I think something that is harder to get a handle on is the cultural changes that take place in the city and its workforce. I think it is much more a facilitator than a regulator than it used to be. I would throw charter reform in there. I think charter reform has been really important. It certainly came in, I think, really handy in terms of things like the police contract



and what I think was an attempt to dismiss Pat West, or get Pat West some serious difficulty. I think having a stronger mayor made a big difference there. So I think that charter change is important. Prop H, I got Prop H passed. I put that entire campaign together. We have 14 motorcycles that are out there on the streets, which not only had a remarkable effect on traffic but have had a remarkable effect on crime.

LBBJ: And with fewer police officers, correct?

Foster: I will tell you very candidly, I've tried to do everything I said I was going to do and I think I've fulfilled everything that I claimed I would do. The one exception is I did indicate that I would try to add 100 police officers, and we're just not going to do that. We can't do it. But I've also learned things since I said that and it's not just numbers. It will take technology; it's how you deploy people. Motors are a good example. I will bet you it would take more than the 14 officers riding their motorcycles to achieve the same result that they had just by being out there on their bikes. . . . technology

has advanced and there is a whole number of things that I think we can do without just putting bodies out there. Bodies are important, don't get me wrong. But it's not just a numbers game. And that is what's frustrating. You get into these debates in the council, where, 'We've got to have so much per thousand,' well, where did that come from? The idea is to have adequate public safety at a level where you're providing a safe city for our people. By any measure, we've done that. I mean crime has gone down in this city every year for five or six years, major crime not just small crime, and we watch it very carefully. The force is remarkably effective; they really do pride themselves on the crime stats and how they've gone down every year. And even in a very difficult economy, they've been able to do that. . . .

I applaud the job that the police force here has done under difficult circumstances. They've done more with less. We have asked everybody to do that. Anyway, the point is that's something I'm not going to be able to do, and I think what we've tried to do is achieve the same result by being smarter with how we deal with crime.

LBBJ: We also didn't have a recession four years ago.

Foster: I know. Look, I'm not making excuses either. You know, it's something I can't achieve, but I will tell you that if you look at the safety of the city now and four years ago, it's safer today. And that's our goal, that's our job. It's not certainly numbers. It's how safe are you? And you're right. Every time you get a high visibility, serious crime, someone says, 'Why is that happening here?' It happens everywhere.

LBBJ: Is there anything we haven't brought up that you want to talk about?

Foster: You know, I don't think so. I guess let me just say this. People ask me a lot of times, 'Why are you doing this?' And you know, I don't have to do this. And there are days when I ask myself that question. I guess the principle I try to follow is, and I've been giving this some thought because of what's lacking in probably both Sacramento and Washington, and why things are so contentious and so divided. We really have a Legislature and Congress that have become fissiparous bodies. Really divided. We used to have people that really cared about solving problems. I saw that, I worked in that institution in Sacramento when people did care about solving problems. I think the principle I try to follow is I try to govern how I would like to be governed and I think sometimes you have to give up some self-interest and do something that is for a longer term and greater good. It may have some short-term pain associated with it, but it will have long-term rewards. I just think that's missing so I'm trying to do by example what I hope others do.

I'm not perfect, I make mistakes. I know all that, but I really do try to govern in a manner that I would like to be governed myself. I'm very candid with people. I have a very strong internal moral compass that I follow. It frustrates people at times. I mean, you look around the city [and] at various times, I've irritated everyone in some way, but I do it out of a spirit of trying to help the city.

Just to give you an example, I have a great regard and affection for the police officers in this city and even for the police officers association. I didn't like coming out and saying 'I'm going to have to veto this contract,' but it was important to do. It was the right thing to do because we couldn't afford it. And I have to tell you, they deserve a lot of credit. They sat down at the table and crafted an agreement that I don't think anyone thought was possible when we started that conversation. And they deserve a lot of credit for having at least the interest of the city at heart in putting a deal together that we could afford.

The issue with Pat West – I'm not going to allow any special interest to sit there and tell us who is going to be our chief operating officer and who isn't. Even the issue with the chamber – that we don't do the state of the city any more. I know that irritated them. I know that it was a big fundraiser for them, but it wasn't against the chamber. To me, it was a public speech and it needs to be done free of charge and on a public basis. It shouldn't be a commercial event. It wouldn't matter who it was for.

There have been a variety of those things all through here, but I've tried to do it in a fashion that, if I were following someone else, how would I want them to conduct themselves? And let the chips fall where they may. And I'm gratified that despite the fact that the rule in politics is it's a calculation, don't irritate this group, don't irritate that group. The truth is, and I hope and I'm gratified that the electorate returned me to office overwhelmingly because there's usually a 25 or 30 percent protest vote, and I think they responded to that whether you disagree with me, you respond to the fact that I'm governing in a way that I'm actually looking at the long-term interest of the city. And I think that has been rewarding. ■