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Arab candidate loses in Anaheim race marred by accusations

Associated Press

ANAHEIM, Calif. - A Syrian immigrant lost a bid for a seat on Anaheim's City Council in a race that made national news last month when a powerful GOP operative accused the candidate of supporting Islamic extremists.

Belal "Bill" Dalati garnered nearly 11 percent of the vote, putting him fourth place. With 100 percent of the precincts reporting, Attorney Lucille Kring and Councilman Bob Hernandez led the field of seven candidates to fill two seats.

An insurance agent making his first run at elected office, Dalati was criticized in a letter last month by former state Republican Party chair Shawn Steel. The letter accused Dalati of helping sponsor an anti-Israel rally and associating with "zany left wing groups." It was posted on a politically conservative Web site by a consultant for one of Dalati's opponents.

Dalati said early Wednesday the accusations hurt his chances.

"Islam phobia definitely contributed to my loss. I'm sure it hurt me," he said.

He said he believed his last-minute party switch from Republican to Democrat also contributed to his lag in the polls.

"I knew most citizens of Anaheim are Republican, I knew it was going to hurt me. But this whole campaign was about doing the right thing," he said.

Even though the council race was nonpartisan, Dalati switched his party affiliation last week and became a registered Democrat. He said he had been a Republican since becoming a U.S. citizen 19 years ago, but made the change after receiving no support from the GOP after the letter surfaced.

Dalati, 41, said the rally mentioned in the letter was an anti-war protest and denied ties to

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