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POLITICAL LUNACY The downtown crowd has the city attorney surrounded

by Carl Luna

It's true, all that stuff they say about Mike Aguirre. He's about as warm and cuddly as a wolverine. When he was 6 he sued Santa Claus for breach of contract for not bringing him a pony. If his dry cleaning is late, he announces there's a conspiracy against him by the petrochemical industry. If he has a choice of walking through a door or blowing a hole in the wall, well—kaboom.

So what.

Aguirre may be abrasive, self-righteous, paranoid and whatever other epitaph you might want to hang him with. But he's still popular with the public because he's still the lone voice in the municipal wilderness, shouting that things still reek in the city of San Diego. And that fact chafes his legions of downtown detractors to no end. Especially with his possible reelection in 2008 looming.

It amazes me how much time the powers that be—the City Council, the Union-Tribune and the other nattering nabobs of San Diego insider negativity—spend bashing Aguirre, demonizing Aguirre and all but gathering up the bramble and bracken to make a bonfire and burn Aguirre at the municipal stake. (And, if the spate of anti-Aguirre articles in the news and blog pages of the U-T is any indication, they have started gathering the kindling.) And how little time they spend actually dealing with the messy, smelly, oozy, oh-god-look-what-was-under-that-municipal-rock issues that Aguirre—and only, most of the time, Aguirre—talks about.

Take the current Sunroad flap. Isn't it interesting that the U-T and powers that be, from the council to the mayor to even the police chief, are jumping all over Mike for asking (albeit in his usual shotgun-to-the-face style) the teensily-weensily uncomfortable question: How did a business that just hired the former mayor's former chief-of-staff get the city to approve a building that violated FAA regulations and should not have been approved? The real story in this story is named Tom, not Mike. But it's Mikey the downtown crew wants to play piñata with.

The downtown lunch-at-the-Westgate insiders pooh-pooh the oft-repeated Aguirre corruption rant. But the public, poor misinformed saps that they are (count me as one of them), looks at Aguirre and has to say either he's right and that crowd downtown is crooked as a \$3 bill or they must be a bunch of incompetent jerks.

How else do you explain the unbroken string of incompetent moves the city has made? Charger stadium renovation and ticket guarantee flop. Pension-fund fiasco. SEC investigation and San Diego being drummed out of the bond market. Indictments by the fist-loads. Losing money on Liberty Station.

Cripes! How do you lose money when you're handed some of the most valuable real estate on the West Coast by the Navy? Oh, that's right. If you're the city of San Diego, you negotiate a sweetheart deal with a local, well-connected developer, giving him the profits



and you the costs. Duh.

And now our Sunroad to perdition. The Sunroad case represents everything that has been wrong in this city for the last 50 years. The same crowd of bankers, developers and little-league politicians that used to sit around swilling martinis over lunch at old Lubach's restaurant while making imperial decisions to do things like gut downtown and move the entire retail center of the city out to the cow pastures of Mission Valley are still doing their backroom, old-pal-network deals. And this crowd of white, conservative, churchgoing cronies still bristles at the slightest suggestion that there might be the merest whiff of impropriety—much less the foul reek of corrupt conspiracy—in anything they deem to do.

So they beat up on Mikey instead.

Speculation has it that termed-out Council President Scott Peters is an insider favorite knight in shining armor to defeat and de-seat Monster Mike in '08. Supported by the triad of downtown pols, municipal labor unions and the U-T, Peters has everything he needs to win—except the trust and support of the public. Mike's still got that. And that, the downtown crowd knows, has got to end.

If the recent barrage of anti-Mike propaganda is any indication, the race to replace Aguirre will be an epic of mud and blood slinging all aimed at showing the ignorant masses what a mean, miserable little creature Mike is for not playing well with his colleagues downtown. Though maybe the anti-Mike crowd is too anxious and nervous to wait that long. Already the "R" word—recall—is being bandied about (in the hypothetical tense, of course). Mike seems to have touched an ultra-sensitive nerve in pulling on the threads of the Sunroad saga. Maybe those at the other end of those threads would just as soon be rid of meddlesome Mike sooner than later?

I wrote years ago when Aguirre ran for City Attorney that he would become the Savonarola of San Diego, burned at the stake for his accurate heresies. Sunroad may be the spark that lights the fire.

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