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Sanders' scenarios on Sunroad just don't fly

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Mayor Jerry Sanders says he accepts "full responsibility" for the Sunroad building fiasco and for the trail of bureaucratic blundering spelled out last week in the special investigation he commissioned.

But the investigation provided Sanders an escape on a critical issue – his credibility – with a hole wide enough for even a full-responsibility mayor to slip through.

At issue is how Sanders explains his role in obtaining the services of Ted Sexton, a veteran airport official, to engineer a compromise that would allow the nearly completed building near Montgomery Field to exceed federal height limits. Sexton developed a pitch and flew to Texas earlier this year to lobby the Federal Aviation Administration. He was unsuccessful.

Yet in a radio interview at that time, Sanders flatly denied that Sexton was working on the Sunroad issue. A similar denial was contained in a "Fact Sheet" issued by his office.

The investigation by the Mayor's Office of Ethics and Integrity determined that his comments and the Fact Sheet were inaccurate. "Unintentionally inaccurate."

How did the mayor's ethics police know the mayor's intentions? The question was asked when the report was issued last week. The answer: That's what the mayor said, and they believe him.

Hmmmmm.

To believe the mayor, you have to believe that a number of truly remarkable events – logic-defying stuff – occurred in the mayor's office at that time.

The first Remarkable Event was when Sanders signed, but did not read, the letter that led the Airport Authority to lend Sexton to City Hall.

Sanders told investigators he did not recall the letter, which contains the word "Sunroad" in its first line and seeks help in determining whether changes in Montgomery Field operations could lift the building's hazard designation.

The report states: "Although he recognized his signature on the letter, he did not recall reading its contents at the time he signed, or understanding that the letter specifically asked for assistance with the Sunroad issue only."

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Hmmmmmm.

The second Remarkable Event occurred nine weeks after Sexton arrived. Sanders appeared on the Roger Hedgecock Show utterly unaware that Sexton had been diligently trying to extricate him from the Sunroad quagmire.

Hedgecock asked the mayor if it was true that Sexton was looking into a compromise that would remove the FAA's hazard designation from the Sunroad building. Sanders said, "No." He claimed Sexton was working on a general review of airport operations, though there is no evidence of that.

The mayor's investigators determined that Sanders was completely in the dark, that "at the time . . . he did not know that Sexton was working on Sunroad issues . . ." That's what the mayor said, and they believe him.

Hmmmmmmmm.

The third Remarkable Event occurred when mayoral spokesman Fred Sainz, a canny operator devoted to Sanders and to knowing everything that happens at City Hall, issued the Fact Sheet while similarly oblivious to what Sexton was up to.

Sainz told reporters he got bum information from Ronne Froman, the now-departed chief operating officer. This suggests that Froman, a widely admired former admiral, orchestrated the deception, blindsided the mayor's inner circle and, presumably, tricked Sanders into signing that letter.

Are you buying any of this?

Me neither.

Let me propose an alternative scenario in the spirit of Occam's Razor, which holds that the simplest explanation is usually the correct one.

The mayor was looking for a win-win solution, one that would ensure aviation safety while accommodating Sunroad. Asking the FAA to compromise was the equivalent of a Hail Mary pass to the end zone. The last thing he needed was the media, or the city attorney, getting in the way.

So Sexton was brought on board with a ready-made cover story that he was working on unrelated aviation issues. For nine weeks, no one was the wiser. When news of his activities leaked out, the cover story was floated, but nobody bought it.

By then, the mayor had decided the building had to go, and he no longer wanted to be associated with any scheme to aid Sunroad. There was no sense disputing what Sexton had been up to, but he could plausibly deny knowing about it. He did, and he does to this day.

This version is more consistent with what we know about Sanders' character. He's a nice guy who wants to be a hero and avoid making enemies, not some oaf who signs things he doesn't understand and is clueless about what's going on in his own office.

But he's also willing to shortchange the truth, intentionally, when it suits his purposes.

That's my read of the situation, and I take full responsibility for it.

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By BlueIsland on 07/25/2007

Listening to yesterday's Senate testimony by Atty General Alberto Gonzalez, I was struck by the similarity between Gonzalez and Sanders. Their blank faces and pleading, earnest declarations of "acceptance of responsibility" for corruption and abuse of office, coupled with denial that they knew what was happening or who was doing it, the claims that their intentions were good....

The most eerie defense by Gonzalez, repeated several times, was that "there are no rules" saying that what was done couldn't be done.

That is exactly the response proffered by Sanders/Waring/Anderson's planning department soldiers as they abuse and ignore the citizens of San Diego. Welcome to Sanders' business model, formerly know as San Diego, now a fine example of Wal-Mart China LLC.

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By Kakona on 07/25/2007

Gerry, you are my new hero. I especially like the way you finished this column. Keep fighting!

Anyone up for a recall?

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By ducraker on 07/25/2007

The more I read about our Mayor and the DA's "Truth and Virtue" investigative unit, the more I'm beginning to realize three errors in judgement I made when voting in our last local election:

1. I voted for the wrong Mayoral candidate.
2. I voted for the wrong candidate for SD County District Attorney.
3. I voted for them for all the wrong reasons.

I accept responsibility for #3, as for #1 and #2, I believed what they said and was suckered in.

What is it about the inner workings of our City's government that appears to turn seemingly decent people running for office into elected officials who discard their moral and ethical compasses at the door?

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By BigDog on 07/25/2007

money + power - moral fiber - backbone = Axis of Virtue

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