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Published on August 30, 2007

More Power to Him? Ya Gotta Be Kidding

By Don Bauder

Strong mayor? Amid the strong odor? There are two things wrong with the administration of Mayor Jerry Sanders:

(1) It can't grasp the big picture because it is in the pockets of real estate developers, and (2) The public has become accustomed to malodorous untruths and spin emanating from city hall: Sunroad. The Sunroad cover-up. The police chief's refusal to carry out a Sunroad search warrant. Ronne Froman's, Jim Waring's, and Marcela Escobar-Eck's abrupt departures. Unwarranted pension optimism. The list is endless.

Despite all this, Sanders's handpicked establishment lackeys continue to push for City charter changes that would concentrate more power in this mayor's hands. Sanders appointed 15 people to his Charter Review Committee. A majority are establishment lawyers, lobbyists, and downtown string-pullers who are maneuvering to give the mayor expanded power over financial and audit functions and land-use decisions. What's needed is just the opposite: independent auditors and financial officials and community input into land use.

Groups such as the League of Women Voters are pushing for a charter review committee whose representatives are elected. Norma Damashek, league activist, points out that Proposition F gave the public five years to evaluate the strong-mayor concept and the mayor is trying to seize autocratic power after only a year and a half.

By stacking his Charter Review Committee with developers' well-paid servants, Sanders is pushing the City further in the wrong direction. New housing and commercial structures shoot up while the underlying infrastructure decays and civic services deteriorate. Sanders disingenuously claims the pension crisis is under control, but by giving a raise to the police, he increased the pension system's long-term problems.

Political scandals come and go -- mostly go. The media uncover them, the public yawns, and they die. But Sunroad quickly took hold for two reasons: (1) It symbolized San Diego's corruption, and (2) Sanders and his minions kept bungling the cover-up, as each whopper heightened the public's thirst for the next juicy installment.

Sunroad Enterprises, owned by a Sanders friend and donor, defied federal and state aviation safety laws by building a too-tall high-rise near Montgomery Field. The City knew about the defiance in spring of 2006 but gave its okay. The city attorney demanded the issuance of a stop-work order, but Sanders and his real estate czar, Jim Waring, after huddling with Sunroad's owner, arranged a "winterizing" order that permitted the company to finish the building -- illegally, as the state pointed out. Along the line, the police chief refused to carry out a search warrant of Sunroad. The warrant's contents were leaked to the mayor's office, the *Union-Tribune*, and Sunroad -- more illegalities. Sanders got City bureaucrats to see if federal aviation officials would agree to reroute traffic so the building could stay at its illegal height. When the news got out, Sanders lied.

Sanders appointed his key aide, retired admiral Ronne Froman, to investigate the matter -- a dubious arrangement. When Sanders ran

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for mayor, Froman was so popular that she was effectively his running mate. When she resigned abruptly, the explanation was that she never intended to stay long. Did voters know that?

The investigation was turned over to another aide, Jo Anne SawyerKnoll, who is in charge of ethics. She turned out a report that cleared the Sanders crew of illegalities, unethical acts, conspiracies, corruption, influence peddling -- everything except incompetence. The so-called investigation was a joke. This month, I asked for a copy of a draft of the report. I wanted to learn what had been edited out for the final version. The deletions are eye-opening. They reveal that as the city attorney's office pushed to get construction of the Sunroad building stopped, Waring and Marcela Escobar-Eck, director of the Development Services Department, tried to get Sunroad off the hook by finding a solution that did not involve a stop-work order. In October, the city attorney's office insisted on such an order; it took days of "prodding" from that office to get the Sanders crew to issue one, and then it promptly evaded the order by permitting Sunroad to complete the building under the guise of "winterizing." Waring is supposed to be a skilled lawyer. The deletions raise doubt about that. He kept insisting that the City might have liability to Sunroad but never quantified such liability. And late in the game, he kept saying that the Federal Aviation Administration and California Department of Transportation should halt the construction, when there was no question that it was the City's responsibility. Deleted, too, was this advice to the Sanders crew when it was arguing that air traffic could be rerouted over neighborhoods that would certainly scream: "If you find you are riding a dead horse, the first thing you do is get off."

Waring and Escobar-Eck recently departed with the mayor's footprint on their backsides. But both had only been doing Sanders's dirty work. Waring said the mayor had asked him to resign. The vacationing Sanders said, "I'm laying here on a beach in Hawaii and this is coming as a big surprise to me." Grammatically, he was *lying*, or reclining, not laying. But he may have been *lying* in another sense -- telling still another fib.

His administration is *laying* an egg. It hardly deserves more power.

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Comments

Posted by **Ian Trowbridge** on 08/29/07 @ 2:39 pm

Don: I guess we agree. It is unfortunate that the San Diego public are like the sheep in George Orwell's Animal Farm while downtown interests, developers, failed entrepreneurs and other business riffraff that congregate in the Chamber of Commerce play the role of the pigs. How else could two disasters like Murphy and Sanders be elected as mayor of the largest small town in the USA?

Reply by **Don Bauder**

Dare I say that the San Diego citizens are sheep, and the real estate developers are all wearing hip boots? Best, Don Bauder

Posted by **Billy! Bob!! Henry!!!** on 08/30/07 @ 8:13 am

I do NOT think the Citizens/tax payers are sheep. I think the citizens have been bamboozled by dirty politicians, similar to how Randall "Duke" Cunningham bamboozled his constituents. The same nonsense goes on with the Congress; the citizens can only do so much. Fact of the matter, it can take millions to run for even a local office, and that leaves citizens and taxpayers with many bad choices too often. But, sooner or later, someone will come around and fix things. Has not happened yet in San Diego, but

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who knows, our next Mayor could be the one (Sanders is finished in San Diego). As long as there are people speaking up, there will always be change waiting around the corner.

Reply by **Don Bauder**

The citizens of San Diego have been bamboozled by crooked pols, establishment money, and the mainstream media that push their own economic interests (such as subsidized sports facilities). San Diegans will still not admit the City is broke, despite the economic facts that have been made public, but played down. Ultimately, it seems to me, communities get the pols they deserve. I think we are talking about the same thing: crooked pols and real estate developers take advantage of a soporific public. Best, Don Bauder

Posted by **Paul** on 08/30/07 @ 11:44 am

"If voting changed anything, they'd make it illegal." -Unknown (but often attributed to leftist Emma Goldman) BBH, when is the last time an incumbent mayor lost in San Diego? Hedgecock won while under indictment. Murphy lost but still won. I believe it is well over 30 years since it happened, and that was also due to legal issues.

Reply by **Don Bauder**

Murphy lost to Donna Frye's write-ins, but the court stole it from Donna, as we suspected it would do. The courts are supporters of the plutocracy that runs San Diego. Reform must start with the courts and selection of judges. You make an excellent point. Let's ponder another: how many incumbent councilmembers or county supervisors ever lose? The voters keep voting for people who work hard to keep the corruption in place. Best, Don Bauder

Sound Off

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