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## 'I Don't Consider Myself an Oaf'

By [Scott Lewis](#)

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**Thursday, Sept. 6, 2007** | When Jerry Sanders ran for mayor, he trumpeted a new, appealing vision for the post. He asked San Diegans to imagine a senior statesman jetting to Sacramento and D.C. and coming home with rewards and agreements.

He was invoking that feeling many of us may have perceived -- that there was something peculiarly provincial about San Diego's leadership. Few City Hall types exuded the kind of gravitas and charisma that inspire big change.



He claimed he would do that. That would be his full-time job, in fact. Behind him, running the day-to-day operations of the city, his longtime friend Ronne Froman and other managers with experience in the business world would lend their particular expertise to the unenviable task of reforming city government department by department.

But Ronne Froman left months ago, claiming her job there was done. Jim Waring -- tasked with streamlining the city's construction permitting process that, as a candidate, Sanders had declared was an "obstacle" to solving the affordable housing crisis -- is also gone.

Sanders admits Waring did not succeed in that task and that he underestimated how difficult an undertaking it was. An intense search to replace Froman has not produced anyone in the three months since she resigned. Much of the managing of the city's day-to-day operations has fallen on the shoulders of Jay Goldstone, who as acting chief operating officer also is the city's chief financial officer and auditor.

In my latest [conversation with the mayor](#), I asked him what had happened to the idea of the senior statesman. I mean, it looks like it just dissolved.

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[Check in with the Scott Lewis on Politics Blog today for more quotes from the mayor including a spontaneous reflection on the massacre at a San Ysidro McDonalds in 1984](#)

Sanders said.

"I think what you said is a valid criticism," Sanders said.

And then he said something very interesting: This idea he had, that government could be run by people who gained their experience in the private sector or in other pursuits was just not working, Sanders said.

"I think that what we learned is that government, especially city government, is very different than business, and it's very different than the military,"

#### This Just In

**Frye to Support Same-Sex Brief:** The councilwoman says she will change her vote because the public will have had enough time to weigh in.  
**Thursday, September 6 -- 10:00 am**

**Mart's In:** After much speculation, the Troubleshooter calls to say the forms for her District 7 City Council run are in the mail.  
**Wednesday, September 5 -- 1:07 pm**

**Ruminating About NAFTA:** The connection between the free trade agreement and an infamous environmental cleanup.  
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The answer for his administration -- the antidote that would allow him to become the senior statesman he dreams about -- is to recruit to government executives from other agencies and cities. Businesspeople can apply elsewhere.

"I think if you brought in, perhaps, people who have been in municipal government or county government before, they understand the pacing a little more. They understand the processes a little more. I think I underestimated them. And so, as we're retrenching, we're looking for a lot of those things," he said.

Even the name of the post -- COO -- might have been a mistake. And this explains his overture to Maureen Stapleton, the general manager of the San Diego County Water Authority for the "day-to-day manager" post at City Hall.

Sanders said he's hoping to have a new team in place by the end of the year. Until then, he said, he's found himself involved in the city's operations and he'd like to get away from that.

"I would like to go back to providing the leadership of the senior statesman," Sanders said.

But how involved has he been? Sanders has endured some stinging criticism recently. His handling of the [Sunroad](#) controversy has come under intense scrutiny and he's anxious to put it behind him. But one particular question about the mess has endured. At one point, during the height of the tension, Sanders and his staff denied that they had borrowed an official from the [airport](#) authority to help them negotiate something with the Federal Aviation Administration that would preserve [Sunroad](#) Enterprises' tower in Kearny Mesa that had been declared a hazard.

Yet it wasn't long before a letter surfaced showing that, in fact, Sanders had personally asked for the [airport](#) authority official to do just that. It was an amazing contradiction. Either Sanders had lied or he didn't know he signed the letter. Either way he looked terrible. He was blasted on the radio, on the Internet, and in the paper.

I grabbed a copy of a [recent column](#) by Gerry Braun in the *Union-Tribune* and read it to the mayor. (Sanders said he doesn't read Braun's columns "very often.")

SPONSORED BY Braun implied that if you accept the mayor at his word, you'd conclude he was an "oaf who signs things he doesn't understand and is clueless about what's going on in his own office."

I asked the mayor if he was an oaf.

Sanders said it's perfectly plausible that someone (he hinted that it was Waring) put the letter in front of him to sign and he didn't know what it was about, yet he signed it.

"I think you can sign things, and I sign a lot of things. That doesn't necessarily mean you're an oaf," he said.

"When whoever put that letter in front of me -- and I'm not positive it was Jim or whoever -- I literally wasn't paying that much attention to it," he said. "I obviously was not as careful as I should have been. I don't know, but I don't consider myself an oaf."

He said if he were lying about it, he'd make up a better story.

Someone with more experience in city governments might just have been able to give him one.

## 6. More Motivated Sellers, After All

SURVIVAL IN SAN DIEGO

### Report: SD Minorities Pay More for Home Loans :

Group finds disproportionate high-cost loans among region's Latinos and blacks.

Wednesday, September 5 -- 12:42 pm

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Correct in Her

**Vote:** What is clear, is that Councilwoman Atkins docketed this very serious item right before the weekend AND a Monday holiday when nearly everyone in San Diego would be distracted and unfocused.

Wednesday, September 5 -- 8:06 pm

CAFÉ SAN DIEGO

### For the Civic-Minded:



The early stages of planning for a new City Hall are just beginning. What

do you think should happen?

Wednesday, September 5 -- 9:13 pm

COMMENTARY: SLOP

### Melee Reaction:

A 'complicated' issue becomes simple for a city councilman and the county pension system recommits to its hedge fund plan.

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COMMENTARY: RICH TOSCANO

### More Motivated Sellers, After All :

The theory of double-counted defaults is put to rest.

Wednesday, September 5 -- 8:25 am

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Comments so far on this story:

**La Playa Heritage** wrote on **September 5, 2007 8:55 PM:**

"Mr. Sanders. If you succeed, then San Diego succeeds. Here are three tips you can think about to gain credibility. First, show up to the City Council meetings during Tuesday morning's public comment so you can hear directly from the citizens you represent. There is no way for any private citizen to get direct access to you. Previously, the City Manger under the Mayor's control was required at the meetings. Now, no one from your office is at the dais. Please make your COO or Mr. Goldstone stay for the remainder of the public City Council meetings on Monday and Tuesday. Second, please require a fault investigation for the Navy Broadway Complex. In this past week there have been 18 earthquakes off of Mission Beach, the largest being a 4.0. [link](#) Third, please just pass the State Density Bonus law without ministerial approval of incentives, which depletes the General Fund."

**Ronald Truman** wrote on **September 5, 2007 8:59 PM:**

"Mayor Sanders is a good man, who has given his life to our city for the past 30 years. He was and is well qualified to lead our city, and deserves our support and help, and a real chance to succeed at the hardest job in the County. What have the critics done to help the city? Most of us in the city want him to succeed, and see that he is being worked against, not helped, by those who would like to see him fail to help them in their own political pursuits."

**ian** wrote on **September 5, 2007 9:14 PM:**

"so Sanders is saying be prepared, I'm hiring a bunch of over-paid "professional" staffers from other incompetent agencies? they always tell you what they're doing...be prepared for well-connected dealmakers with connections to the same establishment. These people work every government entity imaginable...water boards, school districts, non-profit...I hear the former 'land use czar," Damon Shamu, for the San Diego Community College District is looking for a job..."

**Francine Foraday** wrote on **September 5, 2007 9:22 PM:**

"As Strong Mayor, Sanders wants to provide the "leadership of a senior statesman?" And then he says, presumably with a straight face, "I am not an oaf?" We know from the old joke that Denial is not just a river in Egypt. And If we didn't know it before this damning interview, we know it now: we desperately need a new

team at City Hall -- again."

**Ronald Truman** wrote on **September 5, 2007 9:46 PM:**

"Francine Foraday, thanks for making my point. What have you done to help the city. Tell me again?"

**Jeffrey Davis** wrote on **September 5, 2007 11:40 PM:**

"Municipal government is harder than it looks? Well sure. And?... It does give one a bit more appreciation for the mayors who really do lead their cities successfully. I guess there's a positive tone in there too. He's not blaming other people for the general failure so far, and I take that as a good thing. It sounds like he's humbled and ready to make another go at figuring out this tricky business. I wish him luck. I'd suggest he start with the overdue task of bringing the city (lowercase) around to the idea of paying its debts."

**Dale Peterson** wrote on **September 6, 2007 7:09 AM:**

"There is an "oaf factor." The worst of Jerry's administrative/PR hires are still there. A senior statesman EARNs that designation. It comes from demonstrating an extended period of leadership and integrity. It doesn't come from half-truths and manipulation. When you have to have your PR guy manipulate and direct applause during your State of the City speech, you aren't being a statesman. You are being the oaf of spin. He can hire all the seasoned gov't administrators that he wants. It won't change the reality that he has surrounded himself with a pack of political, special favor dispensing hacks. Barney Fife got himself elected mayor. He's empowered Goober, Gomer, Otis, Aunt Bee, and Floyd to run San Diego. It isn't working. Now, is the time to give the mayoral gun, WITH A BULLET, to someone who will truly represent all of Mayberry."

**RW** wrote on **September 6, 2007 7:40 AM:**

"I suppose for Sanders Sake, it would be less harmful for him to say he did not read what he signed thus stating he blundered with minimal damage to his re-election bid. I say Scott Lewis, you gave him an opportunity to bail out with the least amount of damage to his political career, and he took advantage of it! If that was your intent Scott, I don't know, but His mission was accomplished"

**Norman** wrote on **September 6, 2007 7:40 AM:**

"Yeah...We're finally talking about Sanders! Check out the voice today for this statement "I think you can sign things, and I sign a lot of things. That doesn't necessarily mean you're an oaf," Get that one! Sanders doesn't read what he signs. Now that is truly sinfull. Being dumb or ignorant is worse than lying! At least with a lie you can say I am sorry and I won't do it again. Being dumb or just not giving a damn is going to get us in alot more trouble. Once an oaf, always an oaf. Who could have confidence in a Mayor like this? Jerry, Jerry, Jerry what would your mama say?"

**Duh!** wrote on **September 6, 2007 8:10 AM:**

"It is quite refreshing to hear that the Mayor has realized that running the city is a little more difficult than what he thought. The city is a muti-Billion dollar organization with 10,000 employees, in a diversified market providing public safety, social programs, utilities etc. Who in the private sector has that experience? There are just as many colleges offering public administration/publi policy degrees as there are colleges offering business degrees.

There is a difference! Why are more cities in this nation run by professional city managers? Duh! The city is not a business, it is a CITY! We need a professional public administrator experienced in CITY operations, not playing military games, not running a small factory, not running a real estate empire, not running an HR company...a real administrator, then the Mayor can become the statesman he's always dreamed of becoming."

**Nina** wrote on **September 6, 2007 8:35 AM:**

"Sanders wants to be the 'Senior Statesman'??? What a crock and waht a "cop out" (pun intended). We have a powerful mayor not a council/manager form of government in San Diego. We need a Mayor who can effectively make tough choice and successfully implement those policies and a vision for our city. We don't have that kind of mayor now. What we have is a mayor who is run by a poltiical consultant who is cashing in on his association with the mayor. I'm getting tired of the Mayor's candor for his failures. Candor and honesty can't coverup incompetence forever."

**Here's a Thought** wrote on **September 6, 2007 8:37 AM:**

"Do you think that Sanders is changing his position on hiring people from private sector backgrounds to get ready for a face-off with businessman Steve Francis? This is politics and every move is calculated to get reelected. I am sure Sanders and Tom Shepard are outlining their strategy in preparation of Francis running. I have to say that if a CEO of a company made a 40 million dollar mistake, he would be fired. I do not think that Mayor Sanders intentionally caused the Sunroad debacle, but it still happened and the taxpayers are facing a 40 million dollar mistake."

**Point Loman** wrote on **September 6, 2007 9:17 AM:**

"In NYC Rudy Guilianni was known as a Tyrant, disliked by just about everyone. But his record on cleaning up the city, reducing crime, etc, was outstanding. In the end, he did what was right for the city. NYC is a better place today because Guilianni had Gravitas and running for higher office was a distant second. (All bets were off after 9/11 and now he is a typical candidate). But Jerry needs to get away from his "handlers" and just lead. If he does what he thinks is the right thing for the city, then if it works or not, he has to be respected for sticking to his convictions. Right now he's just a candidate doing what his handlers tell him."

**Robert E. Lee** wrote on **September 6, 2007 9:25 AM:**

"Oh, Scott, you didn't really, literally ask the Mayor if he's an oaf, did you??? lol!!! Please tell me it 'ain't' so... Hehehehehe..."

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