



Senator Accuses Tea Party of “Backstabbing”

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RRTP Vice-President

I sat in the room, choosing a quiet seat in the corner to avoid drawing too much attention. After all, being a Tea Party Republican in a room full of Sandoval County Republican Party leadership is like being a Corvette in a room full of Mustangs... well, maybe Pintos.

I was attending the Central Committee meeting to support my friend in his bid for Chairman against his opponent - State Senator Craig Brandt. Brandt pitched himself for the position and received rousing applause as he boasted that the Republicans finally have control of the City Council and County Commission. Woot-Woot!

While I pondered how he believes it's at all ethical for a sitting Republican Senator to control the reins and purse-strings of the Sandoval County Republican Party, the words Tea Party perked my ears. Senator Brandt began to lament on how he and his cohorts stopped working with the Tea Party because we “stabbed them in the back” so many times... wait - what? (*cont'd on pages 2-3*)

F-Bomb now acceptable at City Hall?

*Steve VanHorn,
RRTP President*

Is the new Rio Rancho Code of Conduct ordinance being used to shield City Council members from consequences of unethical behavior? Judging by the outcomes from complaints filed to-date, it sadly appears so.

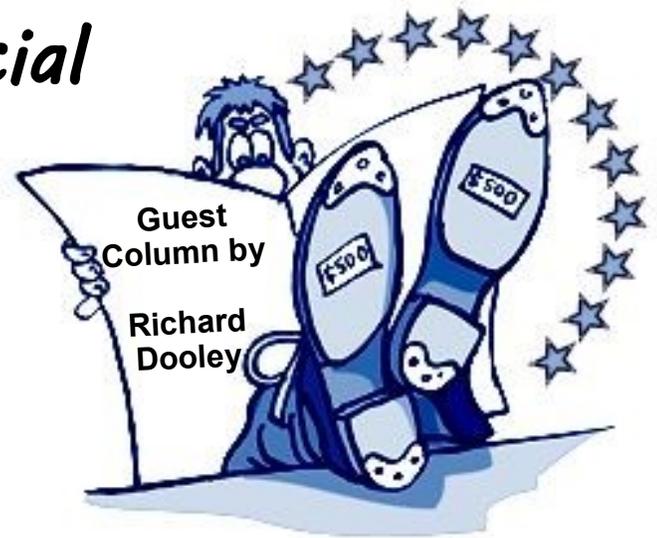
Consider first the ethics complaint filed last week against Councilor Cheryl Everett for sending the following text to Municipal Judge Cook: “F*** Judge Cook. Hope you agree :(“. No matter that the offensive text came from the Councilor's city provided cell phone. No matter that the vulgar term is not appropriate in a professional setting. According to the City's Contract Ethics Official, there's no violation of the City's ethical behaviors standards! Would this Official have made the same determination if the Judge had sent a ‘F*** Councilor Everett’ text to Councilor Everett? I doubt it.

Consider next the ethics complaint filed last year against Mayor Gregg Hull for publicly accusing former Utilities Commission Chairman Ron Hensley of stating “falsehoods” about the utilities rate increases (i.e., lies). No matter that the Mayor made the libelous assertion in an article published in the Observer. No matter that the character assassination was performed to cast doubt on Commission Hensley's whistleblowing about who actually benefitted from the last round of Utilities rate increases. Again, according to the City's Contract Ethics Officer, there was no violation of the City's ethical behaviors standards! Would this Official have made the same determination if a Utilities Commission Chairman had stated the Mayor was spewing “falsehoods” about who really benefitted from the Utilities rate increases?

Rather than holding City Council members accountable for their unethical behavior, the Code of Conduct ordinance is currently being used to shield members from the consequences of unethical behavior. Worse yet, it seems the ordinance can be used to sanction bad behavior by City Council members. Councilor Everett sponsored the new Code of Conduct ordinance and chaired the special committee that created it. The review process for ethics complaints under this ordinance is in question. All that's needed is to hire an Ethics Officer that will say the behavior in the complaint doesn't violate the minimum standard of ethical behavior in the ordinance.

Once word gets out that this is how the Code of Conduct ordinance is being misused I doubt we'll see any more complaints about City Council members. After all, what would be the point? According to the current Ethics Officer, character assignation and vulgar texting by Council members is perfectly ok! This makes me wonder about the true intent of the ordinance from its beginning. Did the Council mean to craft an ordinance that would be a quasi-legal shield from any real ethics oversight? I guess time will tell. For now the only things I can say are 1) “F***** Councilor Everett” and 2) in my opinion, Mayor Hull is prone to telling falsehoods.

Holding our Judicial Branch Hostage



Another week means new intrigue coming to light at city hall. This time it's about an ethics complaint against Councilor Everett. The complaint was filed by Judge Cook after Everett sent him a text fit for a sailor. It hints at underlying issues that seem to plague this governing body.

The Judge contacted Everett to ask for her help getting the replacement appointment of the alternate municipal judge on the governing body agenda. The fact that Councilor Everett thought she was texting someone else about the Judge creates more questions than answers, and reveals her true colors. Either way, it probably wasn't what the Judge expected from someone who should have been a professional peer.

Judge Cook runs the judicial branch of our city government. He is an elected official in his own right and is not generally subject to the governing body, city manager or mayor's control. They do control the municipal court's yearly budget & confirmations, causing the Judge to hit a brick wall even getting the matter to be considered or discussed at a city council meeting. It wasn't until some of us started making information requests at the city, that the tone changed and the Judge was finally able to get his item on the agenda.

I'd like to believe that our city leaders are more professional than to hold our court system hostage over petty grievances, but we've seen it before and I expect it will continue until the next election. Just like the decree that prevented the utilities commission from getting items on the governing body agenda, there's a persistent pattern of behavior with this governing body. They attack anyone who challenges their policies and if that doesn't crush the resistance, they change the laws or rules to fit their schemes. Councilor Everett's pseudo-apology had tones of "it's his own fault" and "he made me do it".

It might be the Judge's recent decision to implement DWI ankle bracelets and reinstate the boot program (instead of using the city's cash cows to punish offenders) has ruffled some feathers at city hall. If that is the case, can we expect this to escalate into the familiar cycle that has become second nature to those in control of this governing body and city administration?

(cont'd) Senator Accuses Tea Party of "Backstabbing"

I wondered which knife Senator Brandt was referring to. It might be the knife when the Tea Party pressured state Republicans Brandt, Harper and Lewis to produce an itemized list of where they spent their discretionary funds totaling millions of dollars... which they initially refused to divulge. Or maybe it was the knife we had to dig in when the Republican majority City Council voted to give the Mayor a juicy pay raise three months after voters said no. Of course, it could also be the fight we put up when our Republican City Council initiated an illegal Civil Asset Forfeiture program they lost \$800,000 on, before deciding to put it out to pasture. Or maybe it was our criticism of the five consecutive water rate increases, three pending new taxes or their disgraceful dismantling of the citizens' Utilities Commission that was the last line of defense against bureaucratic spending sprees.

I'm sorry; did I say I was at a Republican Party Central Committee meeting? This doesn't sound fiscally conservative. It sure doesn't sound like limited government. I sat in stunned silence as one Central Committee member asked my

(cont'd) "Backstabbing"

friend if he felt guilty about the Rio Rancho Tea Party's successful campaign to end the hospital tax.

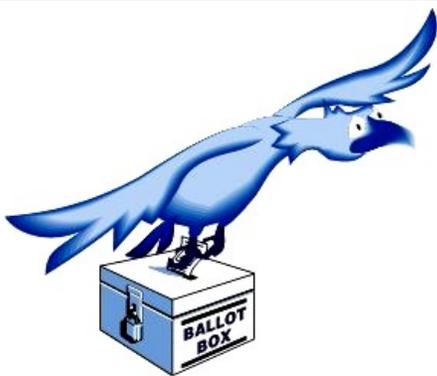
Well, if the current Republican leadership is ok with corporate welfare for life, then perhaps Brandt is the right man for the job. According to the Rio Grande Foundation's Freedom Index, Brandt's total score was a 30 in 2015; 21 in 2016; and 57 in 2017. In my gradebook, those would all be F's. Maybe the Senator is hoping he gets graded on a curve? Strangely, Democrat John Sapien scored higher than Brandt in 2016. How appropriate that Brandt found his courage in a year when the Democrats control the State Legislature, ensuring that many of the votes won't matter.

Brandt's assertion that the Tea Party somehow betrayed the Republican Party's local elected officials by holding them accountable is ridiculous. We would argue that the local Republican leadership has betrayed the citizens of Rio Rancho.

Want to find out how all our State Legislators rank on the Freedom Index?

Visit

riograndefoundation.org



Candidate filing date for the Rio Rancho city election is January 9

(less than three months away!)

ELECTION MARCH 6TH!

If you have thought about serving as our Mayor or as a City Councilor for district 2, 3 or 5, we encourage you to get started now. Contact Steve VanHorn at 355-8230 for information on how to become a candidate!