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BRIAN CHASNOFF

# Paranoia is powerful political tool

By **Brian Chasnoff** | January 14, 2015 | Updated: January 14, 2015 11:00pm



Today, I awoke with the same unwavering thought as every morning: How best can I afflict Bexar County District Attorney Nico LaHood and help City Manager Sheryl Sculley?

That's a joke. Also, it isn't true.

I'm sorry I have to point that out. If I didn't, certain parties might cite it as proof of a media conspiracy, maybe cut and paste it into an advertisement in the San Antonio Express-News.

Why do I say that?

Let's start with what other people say.

"People say things," LaHood said.

He said that last month at a meeting with the San Antonio Express-News Editorial

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Board shortly before he was sworn in as district attorney.

“Can I ask you guys a question? I want to bring something up,” he told a table full of journalists. “I want to bring something up that was brought to my attention — and you know how people are, people say things — it has been brought to my attention that there is an agenda against me or the administration.”

Cue the journalists insisting there is no agenda against LaHood or his administration.

“I just want to bring it up because I’m big on transparency,” LaHood continued, “and a relationship will either flourish or not flourish on consistency, transparency and truth. And I’m a truth seeker.”

Chris Steele says things, too, often in the Grapevine, the newsletter of the San Antonio Professional Firefighters Association. In the December edition, the fire union president declared “war” on Sculley, who wants police and firefighters to pay more for their health care.

“When I talk to members at the stations, I always try to remind them that in this ‘game’ of politics, it is chess (and war), not checkers,” Steele wrote. “You read an article from Sculley’s ‘squeeze’ Chasnoff and you think we took a hit. The City files a lawsuit against us and you gasp.

“While you are pulling your hair out about this, understand that we are inflicting our ‘damage’ on the enemy as well,” he continued. “Her ‘squeeze’ rights (sic) an editorial, we speak on the Trey Ware radio show.”

Greg Brockhouse says things. He says them on behalf of his client, the San Antonio Police Officers Association, sometimes on Facebook, where he recently called the Express-News

“the City Manager’s newspaper.”

On Wednesday, I called Brockhouse and asked if he really believed that.

“Yes,” he said. “The newspaper is a mouthpiece for the city administration. And that’s just the bottom line. ... (Reporters) don’t report news. They tend to make it up. ... The paper certainly has a knack for never pointing the finger at the city administration.”

LaHood, Steele, Brockhouse — all seem to fear a newspaper conspiring against them to propagate lies.

Or do they?

Paranoia of the media is a powerful political tool. It allows one to herd professional truth seekers into the “enemy” camp, to use Steele’s term. By discrediting journalists, one may discount the facts.

Here’s the truth: Journalists like things that smell funny.

I liked it when former Deputy City Manager Pat DiGiovanni helped steer a high-dollar contract toward Zachry Corp. while negotiating a new job with the company’s president in 2012. I liked the smell of that not because of the possible abuse of taxpayer dollars but because it gave me an opportunity to do my job. An Ethics Review Board inquiry resulted in a written rebuke for DiGiovanni. (So much for “never pointing the finger at the city administration.”)

That job is to serve as an independent voice — something that tends to rankle those with agendas.

In the same meeting that LaHood declared himself a “truth seeker,” he failed to answer honestly if he had sought to reduce a charge against a client from a felony to a misdemeanor. (“I asked for a dismissal,” he said.) Later, he acknowledged seeking the plea deal. I asked the question not because I had an agenda but because something smelled funny.

On that topic, my “squeeze,” who supervised DiGiovanni, has something to say.

“In my experience, journalists are interested in reporting facts rather than taking sides,” Sculley said in a statement. “The facts happen to be on the City’s side. Given that, the real question should be how much money have the unions spent buying media advertisements to obscure the facts? The City has not spent a dime buying media.”

*bchasnoff@express-news.net*

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