

BRIAN CHASNOFF

City and police union still sparring

By Brian Chasnoff | July 20, 2015 | Updated: July 20, 2015 7:40pm

2

What does one-half million dollars buy you?

The answer is nothing, or at least not common ground between the San Antonio Police Officers Association and the city.

In the last city election cycle, the political action committee of the police union spent nearly \$470,000 to support its chosen candidates, more than the previous four cycles combined. Greg Brockhouse, a former council aide who serves as a public relations and political consultant to the union, raked in nearly half of that sum: about \$215,000.

With the union locked in tense collective bargaining negotiations with

LOCAL



Blue Bell's listeria outbreak exposes public health flaw



Man shot dead at home



Hurd outpaces re-election foe in District 23



DA cites 'murder investigation' in jail hanging



Downtown visitors write wishes on public chalkboard

the city, many hoped the election would relieve some political pressure and clear a path to resolution.



Absent for weeks, Edgewood ISD trustee won't say if he'll be

The council, however, proved impervious. The incumbents won. Nothing changed.



Even in a bilingual city, bilingual teachers in short supply

The SAPOA PAC spent about half of its funds supporting former state Sen. Leticia Van de Putte, who lost in a runoff to Mayor Ivy Taylor. Meanwhile, voters re-elected union allies, including Councilwoman Rebecca Viagran and Councilman Cris Medina, both of whom won competitive races with union support.

“Ivy’s win wasn’t a mandate,” Brockhouse said. “It got us right back to where we were before.”

The hostile landscape certainly appears intact.

On Monday, Helle **sent a letter to council members** that remains mired in his toxic relationship with City Manager Sheryl Sculley.

Helle was responding to statements made by Sculley after a tense meeting on Friday, when the union’s team walked away from the table with no plans to return for the rest of the month. After the meeting, the union released a spreadsheet to illustrate that its proposal keeps public-safety spending at 66 percent of the general fund, but it did not include the costs of an eventual contract with the firefighters union.

The “SAPOA proposal attempts to take all of the 66% public safety budget capacity over the next five years, leaving zero for City firefighters,” Sculley said.

In his letter, Helle responded, “The City Negotiating Team’s own cost analysis of the SAPOA proposal disproves Sheryl’s outrageous accusation. The City Manager is

attempting to split first responders and pit police officers against firefighters. In doing so, she lied to you and the public.”

After Friday’s meeting, Sculley also hammered the union for its campaign-related spending.

“The unions spent more money during the 2015 election trying to defeat Mayor Taylor and City Council members than they are willing to spend on healthcare premiums,” she said.

(The PAC of the firefighters union spent nearly as much as the SAPOA PAC in the last election cycle: about \$435,000. Through paycheck deductions, the unions also raised more than \$4 million collectively in 2014 to finance political and legal activities.)

Helle’s response: “SAPOA offered to pay a minimum of \$7 million in healthcare premiums. We don’t know what election Sheryl Sculley is referring to, but it wasn’t City elections. Again, this is an attempt to dredge up the past and divide the City Council from police officers. In doing so, she lied to you and the public.”

The city manager as bald-faced liar? I suspect the problem lies elsewhere: with her pugnaciousness. She’s righteously angry because the unions have provoked her relentlessly with personal attacks. But every punch Sculley throws only prolongs the fight.

“This thing has gotten so personal, it’s almost like you can’t see the forest through the trees,” Helle told me. “We would have gone through Friday with no problem if (Sculley) hadn’t made the comments she made.”

Late Monday, Sculley released another statement, this one in response to Helle's response.

“The Helle letter is just one more distraction,” she said. “The Police Union needs to bargain in good faith and settle the contract for the men and women of the police force. I’m confident that if the SAPOA were serious about settling this contract, we could finish the negotiations next week.”

Public relations is a rough sport, and a lucrative one, considering Brockhouse's paycheck. But after 18 months of hostilities capped by a bruising city election, taxpayers are sick of this endless bout and are unlikely to be swayed by scathing public statements, sharp ripostes or even buckets of cash.

At this late stage, there's only one way to win public support: Make a deal already.

bchasnoff@express-news.net



Brian Chasnoff

Metro Columnist | San
Antonio Express-

News

HEARST *newspapers*

© 2015 Hearst Communications Inc.