

Bossy, Bitchy, Bully: Union Targets City Manager With the B-Words

Robert Rivard on 10 March, 2014 at 05:01



When men lead confidently, they are described as strong, decisive, and change agents. When women lead confidently, too often they are branded as bossy, bitches or bullies. When was the last time you read of a (male) mayor, county judge or CEO being described as bossy or a bully?

That's the reality still in the American workplace, where women leaders still badly trail men, especially when they hold executive positions supervising traditionally male-driven organizations. Women like City Manager Sheryl Sculley who, as the city's chief executive, is responsible for the city budget and how it is allocated to pay for police and firefighters, the city's civilian employees, and all the services they deliver.

When women like Sculley do excel, it's not uncommon to see them targeted as intimidating or tagged with one or more of the B-words: Bossy, Bitchy, Bully. It's an effective way to change the subject when change is the real issue or the status quo is being challenged.

LEAN IN AT YOUR OWN RISK

Facebook COO [Sheryl Sandberg](#) and [Anna Maria Chavéz](#), CEO of [Girl Scouts of the USA](#) and the former head of Girl Scouts of Southwest Texas, had [an interesting conversation](#) on the subject published Friday in the Wall Street Journal. They've teamed together to form [Ban Bossy](#), a national initiative that aims to close the "confidence gap" instilled into every young girl who asserts herself in the classroom, on the playground, or in the neighborhood.

It's a timely undertaking if you live in San Antonio, where Sculley has arguably taken on the biggest reform of her eight-year tenure as the city's chief executive.

For some years now, Sculley has warned a succession of City Councils that the overly generous contract awarded the city's police and firefighter unions during the 1980s has been building into a perfect financial storm with each passing year.

The city spends \$19,000 annually on benefits for uniformed personnel, compared to \$7,000 for each civilian employee. There's no equality in the system, nor is it sustainable.

No other major Texas city spends anywhere near the same sum on benefits for its police and firefighters. PFM, an Austin consulting firm hired by the city's [Healthcare & Retirement Benefits Task Force](#) to compare public safety compensation (salary plus benefits) in Texas cities, ranked San Antonio's firefighters tied for first with Austin, and ranked San Antonio's police as second only to Austin. San Antonio's public safety employees are better paid than their counterparts in Houston, Dallas and Fort Worth. And they get a benefits package unequaled elsewhere in the state.

Readers who want to review the city budget and its pension and health care costs can click [here](#) to access the same presentation made by city officials to the task force last October.

I'm all for our city's finest and their leadership, [San Antonio Police Chief William McManus](#) and [San Antonio Fire Chief Charles Hood](#). Anyone who tracks public safety practices and crime trends has to feel good about the progress we have made in San Antonio over the last decade or more.

But that doesn't mean uniformed personnel deserve special treatment. It's incredible, actually, that they make zero contributions



San Antonio City Manager Sheryl

Sculley

to their own health care plan for themselves or their dependents, while every city employee who doesn't wear a uniform, does have to pay in for themselves and their dependents. For anyone who opposes social inequality, it's hard to justify the free ride the cops and firefighters enjoy.



San Antonio Police Chief William
McManus

Public safety costs now account for two-thirds of the city budget, and Sculley has warned that those costs could take up 100 percent of the budget by 2031. She doesn't have to be exactly right in the percentage and the year for such a trend to set off alarms. Those runaway health care costs for the city's uniformed personnel are at the heart of Sculley's efforts to negotiate a more realistic contract with the union as the old one expires.

I'm bothered more by the union's name calling and its fear-mongering campaign than its challenge to the numbers. The real problem, they want taxpayers to think, is the female city manager, who they say is a bully resorting to intimidation. That makes for more sensational, page-one headlines than budget projections that many people simply do not understand. Of course, that's why we hire smart managers. They do understand the numbers and where those numbers are taking us as a city.

No one would pick a fight with the police or firefighters union without good reason. The counter-attack inevitably is going to question the challenger's respect and appreciation for men and women in uniform on the front lines of public safety.

Sculley has received measured public support from Mayor Julián Castro, but he has not forcefully confronted the union leadership on their name calling in the mainstream media, tactics that seek to demonize Sculley. McManus and Hood have been quiet on the subject, too. Yes, they have to lead the police and fire departments when the dispute is put to rest, but they are leaders and managers and thus have some obligation to speak up for their boss and the validity of her fiscal arguments.

City Council members have the same obligation. Some might say openly opposing the unions is political suicide, but at least four of the current council members can remind unions officials that they won elective office without union support, thank you. Elected officials can cite their responsibilities to *all taxpayers* as a legitimate reason for supporting a renegotiated benefits plan. Those with higher political ambitions might find that a record that reflects political courage stands the test of time better than one that seeks accommodation.



San Antonio Fire Chief Charles Hood

The task force, led by former Councilman Reed Williams, will deliver its findings at the Wednesday, March 19 B Session. Mayor Castro has invited the union-led minority on the task force to present its report, too.

That probably isn't going to happen. Mike Helle, the president of the San Antonio Police Officers Association, and Jerry Cortes, representing the firefighters, have lamely asserted that they fear retaliation by Sculley. It's a genuine spectacle to see grown men surrounded by guys in uniform wearing service sidearms, stun guns and handcuffs expressing fear of a woman executive.

The sideshow, of course, is meant to distract from the real debate and to turn Sculley into a villain. It's also meant to make city council members think twice about their own uninsured political futures.

It's possible, of course, for Mayor Castro and members of the city council to ignore the posturing and name calling. They can start by saying they will not tolerate union leaders playing the B-card against Sculley or any other woman in public life in San Antonio. Let them know such mud-slinging might make headlines, but it no longer plays in a City on the Rise.

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Robert Rivard

Robert Rivard is director of the Rivard Report.

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