

Veto provides lesson in partisan politics

<http://www.utsandiego.com/news/2013/jan/23/veto-filner-port/>

By **Scott Sherman**

On Friday afternoon, the San Diego City Council got a lesson in bureaucratic delay tactics. Just as most city offices were winding down for the extended holiday weekend, Mayor Bob Filner released a memo vetoing our two highly qualified Port Commission nominees: Rafael Castellanos and Marshall Merrifield.

As a businessman, I approached the nomination process as an executive-level hiring decision and went through all of the steps one would typically take – from interviewing the candidates to reviewing résumés and checking references. Which is why it was striking to me that the mayor’s veto message never once mentioned Messrs. Merrifield or Castellanos by name, the merits of their candidacies – or in the case of a veto – the lack thereof. The fact that both individuals were nominated and supported by Republicans and Democrats was also left out.

There are two possible reasons for this omission of information. Either Mr. Filner realized that picking apart their résumés and political backgrounds is a losing argument because both are centrists and uniquely qualified to serve as port commissioners; or Mr. Filner saw this as an opportunity to create division among the council with the purpose of lessening its collective strength.

Which could explain why instead of trying to work with the council, Mayor Filner chose to use the first veto of his term to raise questions about the integrity of our policies and procedures, critique the city attorney and essentially “filibuster” our appointments until the political makeup of the council becomes more partisan.

Further, the mayor’s assertion that the residents of District 4 were unrepresented and unable to participate in the process is disingenuous at best. Before leaving office, Councilman Tony Young nominated one of the six candidates. That nominee, Reese Jarrett, spoke at council, met with multiple council members and received support during the nomination process. The fact that he was not selected should not be seen as a snub to District 4 residents. The majority of the council simply decided that Merrifield and Castellanos were better suited to represent the city’s needs on the port.

Moreover, if Mayor Filner wanted to alter the review process, then he should have made his stance known sooner. The council has never had a workshop before and has appointed many nominees to dozens of boards and commissions. That is not to say that it’s not a reasonable suggestion. However, that approach was not put on the table by the mayor’s office until the veto, which makes it difficult to understand why it’s being used as a justification to delay the appointments now. Mr. Filner knew for several weeks that this decision was coming down yet chose to stay on the sidelines until after the nomination and appointment processes were complete. The more productive approach would have been to communicate with the council and various stakeholders before the vote took place.

Additionally, there may not be a council member elected until late summer for District 4. The council cannot be expected to halt all business until that time. The city of San Diego has gone through the routine process of working through vacancies multiple times in the past, as recently as 2004. And although they're unfortunate, vacancies in government are common place. When Mayor-elect Filner vacated his congressional seat and left the residents of the 51st District unrepresented, the House of Representatives continued as normal. Notably Mayor Filner did not demand that Congress halt decision-making as he is doing now.

Similarly, if the City Council fails to override this veto and leaves two-thirds of our seats on the Port Commission unfilled, decisions impacting thousands of jobs of thousands will still be made. The repercussions of allowing potentially competing interests to make key financial, environmental and planning decisions on our city's behalf could prove to be devastating to the long-term viability of our port and waterfront. For instance, early this year, the port will take the proposed Convention Center expansion before the California Coastal Commission. It is paramount that the city be fully represented as this issue moves forward and not allow politics to thwart the progress that has been made.

The City Council must come together and override Mayor Filner's divisive veto. Because ultimately the Port of San Diego is too important to our regional economy to be held up by partisan, Washington-style political games.

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