



MY BEST SHOT

by Lisa Ross

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HERSHELL-GATE

San Diego has had its share of media induced “Silly-Gates,” like Potty-Gate, the \$5 million lawsuit against the city filed by political consultant Bob Glaser several years ago after a number of women, tired of waiting in their own line, swarmed the Qualcomm Stadium men’s room temporarily inhabited by a red-faced Mr. Glaser.

Now, add Hershell-Gate—the earth-shaking revelation in last weeks San Diego Union Tribune that Del Mar citizen-about-town Hershell Price not only is County Supervisor Pam Slater’s significant other but that he has served on a half dozen voluntary county boards and committees over the past decade, sometimes as her appointee.

That Hershell Price spends a considerable amount of energy on public issues is well known in Del Mar and Carmel Valley, and as it turns out, the tabloid details of his personal life with Slater promised by the sordid UT headline turned out to be a screaming bore, especially in comparison to the real-life Hershell Price, a guy famous for intensity of purpose and manner.

And, just as the very real and serious intent of the Glaser lawsuit, which sought to get more women’s rest rooms built at city owned facilities, was distorted by snickering scatological media coverage, so were the intentions of Hershell, a guy who devotes a great deal of free time (meaning time without compensation) to his community.

Hershell talked with me about the story over his cellular phone while on route to a meeting with North County Transit District officials to discuss railroad double tracking. He currently serves as the Chair of the Del Mar Railroad Advisory Board, working over the past several years to prevent high speed rail plans from wiping out the town of Del Mar.

He said that so far, reactions to the story were of the head-scratching sort. The fact that after he helped Slater win election in 1992 she nominated him for various voluntary advisory boards disturbed no one I talked with, either. One Del Mar Councilman said that after reading the article, he thought no could conclude that anyone was more suited than Hershell Price to serve on these committees.

Others pointed to far stranger appointments of political pals in the City of San Diego to far more influential commissions and committees, like the Port Commission appointment of Murphy fundraiser John Carlson (later rescinded over allegations of sexist remarks and alcohol abuse), or the “clubby” new closed committee of environmental advisors to the Mayor, three of whose members are on the Sierra Club political committee that delivered him the Club’s endorsement during the campaign.

But, unlike the newly created San Diego Mayoral advisory committees whose members need not pass any public review smell test, Hershell’s appointments were approved by the other Supervisors who seemed to agree at the time that he was well qualified for each of the five committees he served on openly and by all accounts competently throughout the past eight years.

The disagreeable implication that political pillow talk produced undo influence must come from people who don’t know Hershell Price, a man of independent means and very independent views which are as hard to read as those giant billboards at the I-5/805 merge.

Hershell follows in a growing line of media battered political spouses and significant others who choose public service in spite of who they live with.

Perhaps Hershell should serve tea and cookies to the next reporter who calls.