

Gary Budway speaks out with rebuttal:

A guest column by John Patten on 12/18/2010 made many comments and accusations about me and the Venice Taxpayers' League. Mr. Patten's well-known rants are often lacking factual support, and can be characterized as figments of imagination from someone whose actions, as listed below, could be charitably described as eccentric, to say the least:

- Threatening political candidates while chasing them down the street
- Arguing with sign crews placing signs for candidates he deems unworthy
- Holding shoving matches in Council chambers
- Intimidating photographers with threats
- Issuing bellicose "kick ass" challenges to persons at meetings with whom he does not agree
- Banging his head on the table when speaking to Council during the 5-minute Audience Participation allowed each citizen (He should start wearing his scooter helmet at all times to prevent brain damage)
- Refusing to stand for the Pledge of Allegiance or the Lord's Prayer
- Being so confrontational at political meetings that several candidates and one campaign manager who had signed up for the VTL Candidates' Forum asked that Security be provided to prevent disruption at the Forum (The presence of a policeman ensured a peaceful meeting and we were thanked afterwards)
- And last, but hardly least, posting on his web site a full-front, nude photograph of himself at our local controversial beach. (We know the Emperor Has No Clothes, but John surely could use some!).

During the years I knew Herb Levine, we held many conversations on City topics. Herb had an encyclopedic memory of controversies in Venice, and could tell many good stories and jokes. He was committed to what he believed to be right for the City. I had great respect for him, and was honored to be asked to join the Venice Taxpayers' League, then become a Director, and finally to be asked to be his successor. At that time, I discussed Patten's behavior at length, as well as his tendency to speak on behalf of the VTL although he was not a dues paying member. Herb and John had a reciprocal arrangement whereby the VTL's Newsletter was posted on John's web site and periodically Herb would contribute towards Patton's expenses.

I warned Herb that I understood his long, mutually beneficial political relationship with Patten, but that, when I became President, Patten had to become less confrontational, as I considered his actions to be an embarrassment to the VTL and would not tolerate them. Herb had no problem with this. His attitude was, "You gotta do what you gotta do." He also understood that I could not be a one-man band operation following in his footsteps: writing, editing, printing, sorting, labeling envelopes, and mailing Newsletters and fund-raising letters with only the help of his wife stuffing and sealing envelopes. My own view of a watchdog citizens' organization has always been that such a group should be non-political and made up of active committees sharing the work.

As the months of my VTL tenure went by, it became increasingly obvious that Patten was going to continue to speak as he wished on behalf of the VTL. We finally had words at a Council meeting. He asked me if I was telling him he could not speak on behalf of the VTL? and I replied "Yes." He threatened to resign, although, as I have mentioned before, he was only a member in his own mind and had never paid dues. (At least to

me.) I told him to go ahead and send in a letter of resignation. He did, and the Board, which included Herb, voted unanimously to accept the resignation.

Patten and his friends soon became busy with the fruitless task of electing Happer, Lang, and Zavodnyik. Now and then, several of them would drop in on the monthly VTL meetings. One of them objected to the two Young Professionals who were sitting in on meetings to become acquainted with VTL. Another, a member of the Chamber, accused the Young Professionals of being spies for the Chamber! It became obvious that they were restive and spoiling for action in future. By the end of the November elections, they approached Herb, who had stopped attending either VTL or Council meetings, and was looking dragged out and drained. Nevertheless, they approached him with the idea of taking over the VTL, or, if that were not possible, forming a new organization. And this they eventually managed to do.

Now that John has achieved his ambition of taking over a VTL of sorts, he has accused Rosemary (the VTL Secretary) and me of stealing \$500 from VTL funds. This is ludicrous. During the 2009 Council elections, we each donated money to the VTL/PAC to pay for ads in favor of Bennett and Koszarski, as there was little in the PAC. A few of the ads were not run in the proper order, and the Herald Tribune refunded \$500 of what we had paid in. Later, we shut down the PAC and left the money in the VTL bank account for future use. No ads were run in 2010, as by then the VTL was non-political, no dues were coming in, and it was obvious that the VTL was a dead duck. I took my \$250 and gave it to the Salvation Army for Thanksgiving dinners for Venice residents, and delivered the receipt to Sun Newspapers. After some thought, Rosemary has decided to donate her \$250 to Our Mothers House, a charity sponsored by the Archdiocese of Venice.

If Mr. Patten still believes me guilty of a felony and can talk some law enforcement agency into coming to my home to take me away, I would remind him that I retired from the Michigan Department of Corrections as Corrections Supervisor, still have my own handcuffs, and officers won't have to bring any with them since they can use mine! Everyone who knows me knows I am truthful to the point of being blunt, and neither Rosemary nor I need the \$250 we supposedly stole. However, given the ill-mannered, vindictive, and ignorant anonymous letters posted on John's blog, I guess we shouldn't be overly surprised at such a calumny given the usual conversational tone of the web site.

Now that the old VTL is no more, the Venice Neighborhoods Coalition, which was folded into the VTL as a Committee when Sue Lang, its founder, was elected to Council, has been taken over by Gulf Coast Residents. It is my hope that the new and improved VTL is successful, and can approach the City's problems with thought, consideration, and room for a differing point of view. Its organizers claim that some will join them, but some have disputed the claim. I wish the best for those who do join, although I find it unbelievable that someone other than a Venice taxpayer will become its President, regardless of his political connections. Herb was adamant that members of the VTL be Venice citizens, although others were always invited to attend meetings and offer suggestions.

I wish to thank the Gondolier for allowing me a Guest Column to answer Mr. Patten's charges. In conclusion, I would like to add that if an officer under my command had submitted such windy ramblings to me, I would have sent him off to Night School to learn how to write a well-organized Column without invective, fabrications, and slanderous commentary.

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