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San Diego Chamber aims to push political clout

By U-T San Diego 6:30 P.M. AUG. 28, 2014

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A new strategic plan for the San Diego Regional Chamber of Commerce, announced Thursday, includes a bigger emphasis on political action and improved communication. Chamber CEO Jerry Sandusky, in an editorial that is a preview of the new plan, said the direction of the chamber, which has about 3,000 members who employ a total of about 400,000 people. Here is an audio transcript of the interview.

Q: Tell us about (your plan).

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A: We surveyed 150 current members, 150 past members and 150 nonmembers. They told us is they're really interested in strong and aggressive policy, strong and aggressive advocacy and then really creating an environment in San Diego that makes it easy for small business to grow and for other business to grow and one of the things that we think is really important in remembering is, business creates jobs. Government doesn't create jobs and government can only impede job growth and we've seen that with several things that have happened recently, specifically in the city of San Diego and the state of California. Our goal is to make San Diego the most business-friendly region in the state and of course we'd say in the nation, but California kind of puts us back on that. So we're going to work on San Diego first. What we have done is that we're much more out there in terms of policy and advocacy and also electing business-friendly members for the council, mayor and for the Board of Supervisors and just really working on those issues. That's really what our membership wants, according to the surveys. The surveys were pretty startling in some ways. Past members said that they didn't get enough communication from us. Nonmembers said they didn't get enough communications from us and our current members have also said they'd like to see more. So we're revamping all of our platforms. We're getting information out that business needs to help us put together an army of people who are really going to go out and fight for business. We think

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that's really important in terms of creating job growth. People want jobs, they don't necessarily want government and they don't want government handouts, they'd rather have a good job and be able to make a living that way rather than taking what the council keeps putting out. So that's really what we're focused on right now. This is a new vision for us.


Q: Talk more specifically about what you're doing because, as you know, the chamber over the past year has been significantly more politically active than it had been in the past.

A: The chamber was not politically active before I came on board and that was by design I think. Some of the board members didn't necessarily want to be politically active just because you got winners and losers all the time. When they brought me on board they said, we want to see strong political advocacy. Our political action committee raised about \$500,000 over the past year to put into campaigns for (Mayor) Kevin (Faulconer), for Lorie (Zapf), for Chris (Cate). We spent, on Kevin's campaign, about \$160,000 dollars (total) on the primary and the general (elections). We teamed up with five other PACS and put together the walking campaigns. We had people walking precincts all over the city. That's something that's normally not done in political campaigns from the Republican side. We have put about \$50,000 in Lorie Zapf's campaign to get her re-elected and about the same amount for Chris Cate and we're ready to do that again for the November election, but really what this is about is bringing a lot of different business organizations in town together so that we're working together on these campaigns instead of the fragmented pieces that have been done in the past. We've done the same thing through referendums. We did the same thing on the linkage fee referendum, where we've led the effort, but it was a partnership of a lot of different business organizations in town to fund the signature gathering, which was successful. We did the same thing on the Barrio Logan campaign where we were part of a group that went out and collected signatures and then went to ballot on that. We're doing the same thing right now on the minimum wage and the chamber has taken the lead along with several other groups and we're meeting as a small business coalition. I think 90 percent of the funding is probably in hand. We think we're in a place where we can start making an impact on the business environment in San Diego. The other thing that has been important to us was we were able to, with our Mexico Business Center, get our five congressional members together and secure the third phase of funding for San Ysidro for the border crossing. All five of them weighed in. Darrell Issa made the calls to the appropriations committee and that was passed and now we're in the budget for the final phase of that, for the final \$220 million. Those are the types of things that people are going to see from the Chamber in the future. We think it's important to make sure that we're always working in collaboration with all the other business groups. We're consistently fighting with labor and labor has always been good at this. They have a steady funding source coming in and I think we've convinced business that we can be effective with less money, but we need to be together on all these issues. So that's really what all this is about right now. In our repositioning, we'll be telling chamber members and non-chamber members that as we move forward it'll be more in these areas, very aggressive political clout,

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working with the folks in the office, but when we have folks in office who are going to go in a different direction, we'll make sure that the citizens of San Diego get an opportunity to weigh in on those issues.

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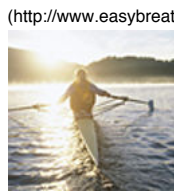


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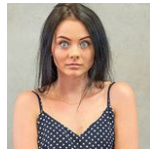
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Don Wood · Top Commenter

It's amusing to see Jerry Sanders ranting on about the sins of government, given that every job he had before being given the chamber position was with city government.

Reply · Like · Follow Post · 13 hours ago



Brent Beltran · Follow · Top Commenter

Everything that comes out of this tool for big business is a lie. He couldn't tell the truth if he was at heaven's gate.

Reply · Like · Follow Post · September 8 at 3:22pm



Kevin Swanson · Top Commenter · President & CEO / Chief Sustainability Officer at Syntropic Systems

The San Diego Regional Chamber is Jerry Sanders new empire without the limitations of City Government. Snapdragon Stadium? The Jacobs Plan for Plaza de Panama? Balboa Park Celebration Inc.? Kevin Faulconer election? The Chamber Board Meetings are not open to the Members, and the Board Composition does not reflect the Membership. Members can only get a Membership Directory if they join at the \$1500+ level, and that Directory does not include email addresses.

As a 501(C)(6) the Chamber has become a failure. It pushes private agendas for the large business contributors. Jerry hires and fires based on "my way or the highway" - which is more tyranny than leadership. Perhaps the UT could investigate the make-up of the Chamber, how many staffers were replaced under Jerry Sanders reign, what is Membership turnover, and if there are any real benefits to the 99% of small business owners in the Region to be members. Personally I was a Member for 31 years off and on, starting when Lee Grissom and Jack Borchers were there. Jerry and his gang removed me from the Advisory Committees I was on and kicked me out of the Chamber. I am proud to no longer be a part of Jerry Sanders organization, and to say that his Chamber does Not Represent Me.

Reply · Like · 1 · Follow Post · August 30 at 9:57am



Janice Edmunds · Top Commenter · San Diego, California

I can't believe that Jerry Sanders had the AUDACITY to say this..."Government doesn't create jobs and government can only impede job growth and we've seen that with several things that have happened recently, specifically in the city of San Diego and the state of California.. " What baloney...Government investment in military spending, education, healthcare.....Who do you think creates all those defense industry jobs in San Diego? surely, the ex-mayor of San Diego should know better, as he has been a government worker for many years, first as police chief and second as mayor...

Reply · Like · 2 · Follow Post · Edited · August 29 at 7:20pm



Janice Edmunds · Top Commenter · San Diego, California

the Chamber of Commerce wants to buy elections now.....Goodbye, Democracy, HELLO Fascism.....

Reply · Like · Follow Post · August 29 at 3:03pm



Gil Field · Top Commenter · San Diego, California

While the Chamber of Commerce does have the right and responsibility to push for business interests in San Diego, I wish they did it without hurting the poorest among us by lowering the City Council's modest minimum wage increase and 5 days of paid sick leave.

I fear that it's another case of the rich getting richer at the expense of the poorest.

Reply · Like · 1 · Follow Post · August 29 at 12:47pm



Charles Weir · Follow · Top Commenter · Works at Retired

Gil, You do realize that the chamber of commerce is nothing but a glorified union right?

Reply · Like · August 29 at 4:13pm



Janice Edmunds · Top Commenter · San Diego, California

Charles, the Chamber of Commerce is NOT for workers' rights...they represent corporate interests....therefore, they aren't pro-union...that's funny

Reply · Like · August 29 at 5:02pm



Charles Weir · Follow · Top Commenter · Works at Retired

Mrs. Edmunds, What I was getting at was it was sort of a union for business owners, not workers rights. They basically do the same thing. Take care of any grievances for them.

Reply · Like · August 29 at 5:59pm

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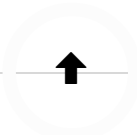
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