

Bob Brownstein: Mayor Chuck Reed's legacy is that of Divider-in-Chief

By Bob Brownstein Special to the Mercury News
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Unless problems are recognized, they cannot be fixed. Worshipful praises such as those presented by Dave Fadness and William Baron (Opinion, Nov. 9) do nothing to heal the deep divisiveness that Reed incited or reverse the declines in public safety his mismanagement has generated.

Think of Reed as San Jose's divider-in-chief. For decades, San Jose had been blessed with a pluralistic and collaborative political culture. The city's mixture of business, labor and community groups arranged and rearranged coalitions to get things done. Reed brought the era of mutual respect and cooperation to an ugly end.

Numerous San Jose mayors had been opposed by police and fire unions. Only Reed treated the well-being of police officers with such disdain that hundreds have left the force. To low wage families struggling in our high cost region, Reed's strident opposition to a city minimum wage increase seemed to send a contemptuous message: Live on \$8 an hour, and like it.

He tried to force city unions to work without a contract even after they agreed to 10 percent cuts in pay. By using wildly inaccurate fiscal projections, such as the phony \$650 million projection of pension costs, he created a climate of alarm and a politics of scapegoating enemies rather than solving problems.

The results can be seen in the precinct maps for the recent mayoral election. The city is split in two. The more white, affluent west supported Sam Liccardo. The lower wage, more diverse east rallied to Dave Cortese. Reed built this wall. It is his legacy. He has left us facing many long years to restore the spirit of teamwork that once prevailed.

Reed's defenders highlight his role in achieving pension reform. But his reforms are an abject failure. Most of Measure B has been overturned in court. The police force has been decimated, and crime agonizes countless neighborhoods.

San Jose once selected the best of the best to be its employees. Now its recruiters return empty-handed whether they are seeking detectives or specialized technicians. Reed has left us with virtually insoluble staffing dilemmas. How does a city reduce crime without police? How does it hire talent without paying competitive compensation? Finally, Reed has made a mockery out of the open government reforms and high ethical standards that were supposed to be his trademark. He delayed adopting the city's Sunshine Policies as an ordinance for seven years so they could be waived at will while he was in office. Is that a commitment to open government? He signed ballot arguments for Measure W with claims so dishonest that the courts ordered them deleted. Is that a commitment to ethics?

When a sunshine complaint was filed against him over the Independence Branch Library construction contract, he failed to declare a conflict of interest and presided over the hearing at the Rules Committee. Is this a commitment to opposing corruption? Reed championed a multimillion dollar subsidy to the San Pedro Square Market project, a development proposed by former Mayor Tom McEnery, a political ally, and estimated to generate less than \$50,000 a year in city tax receipts. Is that opposing cronyism?

San Jose residents are left with the task of turning Reed's rhetoric into actual, functioning reforms.

Facing the truth of Reed's years as mayor will be painful. But as Nelson Mandela has shown, truth itself

can be a force for moving forward from a time of discord.

Bob Brownstein is director of policy and research at Working Partnerships USA and was former Mayor Susan Hammer's budget and policy director. He wrote this for this newspaper.