

Taped remarks stir up sanitary district

San Mateo County probes alleged threats

By Alan Gathright
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An East Palo Alto Sanitary District member's threat to hire a crack dealer to kill a fellow director was simply people "joking after a tense meeting," one official said yesterday.

The hit-man remark by then-

board President Belinda Rosales about board rival Samuel Rasheed and another official's quip about getting "a pregnant crack head girl to go beat (Rasheed) up" was captured — along with belly laughs — when the official tape recorder was accidentally left running at the end of the Feb. 7 board meeting.

However, Rosales was heard on the tape saying, "I'm serious."

The laughs stopped yesterday as the San Mateo County district



Dennis Scherzer said, "Nobody has any intent to harm (Samuel) Rasheed or his family."

attorney began an investigation of the alleged threats.

"People were joking after a tense meeting," said district Gen-

eral Manager Dennis Scherzer, who made the crack about hiring "a pregnant crack head girl" to beat up Rasheed. "I know for certain that nobody has any intent to harm Rasheed or his family."

"Everybody laughed because we were joking, and that was as far as it went," he said.

But Rasheed, who had left quickly at the meeting's end and didn't hear the remarks when they were made, took the threats seriously after reviewing the re-

corded comments.

"Yes, I take it as a serious threat," he said yesterday. "She said, 'I'm serious.' She's not laughing."

"Naturally, the spin now is 'Oh it's a joke.'"

Rasheed added that since the Feb. 7 meeting, he has been plagued with harassing phone calls and had the power to his

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East Palo Alto Sanitary District Board member Samuel Rasheed gave the Daily News a copy of the portion of the Feb. 7 board meeting that district manager Dennis Scherzer had erased on Thursday.

The following are excerpts from the transcripts. Rasheed provided the Daily News with the names of the people speaking in the tape.

Belinda Rosales: It's a protest ... against Measure C. If you guys could support a letter and sign it.



ROSALES

Board member Peggy Argus: You mean the Ikea thing? ... Your names are going to show up.

Rosales: It's just going to be — there

are going to be — there — Joe Blow.

Board secretary Todd Gaviglio: I think ... um ... how's it going to appear because I want to be a cluster of the ... just if we write this letter right now if we want to work with City Council — (inaudible. Gaviglio is cut off while many people are talking)

Rosales: It's not going to matter none. We are going to do it as citizens.

Gaviglio: But (what) I mean is that the City Council is not ... is not, um — it's not unanimous.

Rosales: They're not unanimous, I don't think. ... We're not unanimous.

Another person, unknown identity: I do.

Another unknown person: I'll endorse him.

Still another person, unknown: Who's that?

Gaviglio: He's running for county superintendent of public schools and he's opposed to all the corruption in Ravenswood (City School District), where as ... where as the other guy (John Mehl) ... is going to look the other way.

Dennis Scherzer: I want to come up to (Ravenswood superintendent) Dr. (Charlie Mae) Knight and say, 'How dare you defy Rafael Ramirez.' (Laughter.)

(It is unclear from the tape how the following conversation started.)

Gaviglio: That's the attorney Ravenswood uses all the time.

Rosales: Who?

Gaviglio: Tony Tanke, right?

Scherzer: No. No.

Gaviglio: Why do I see his name all the time?

Scherzer: Because he's suing the city. ... Sgt. (Robert) Cole, the utility tax, the property tax, 756 Runnymede. The utility tax and 756 Runnymede are the two I'm working on with him.

Rosales: You asked Matias (Varela), you tell him —

Gaviglio: He didn't even mention your name.

Rosales: I wasn't even in there. Matias went out of the meeting and I was still in the council chambers, and Matias purposely went to follow him.

Gaviglio: Matias can be pretty ghetto sometimes.

Unclear who is speaking: Matias told me he was one inch from knocking (Samuel) Rasheed unconscious. (Laughter.)

Rosales: I mean the slander that he put in there, my God.

Scherzer: You're a public official — you get slandered, you just got to take it.



RASHEED

Rosales: The guy is a nut. He's an absolute weirdo. ... Would I threaten him? No, I wouldn't do that. I'd go hire a crack dealer to kill him.

Argus: What are you talking about, Belinda?

Rosales: Seriously, you don't think I've ever thought about it?

Dennis Scherzer: You don't hire a crack dealer, you'd hire a crack head.

Rosales: A crack head.

Board member Edrick Haggans: A dealer is a businessman. You don't want to hire him.

(Laughter)

Scherzer: A pregnant crack head girl to go beat him up, you know ...

Rosales: And he's a liar. When he got the letter, he went to Sue Travers' house and told Sue, 'look at these lies they're saying about me.'

Scherzer: No, no he never has enough information.

Rosales: No, of course he doesn't. What an idiot.

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Taped remarks of killing official are called a joke

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home shut off at the circuit breaker.

He has turned a copy of the tape over to police.

Rosales could not be reached for comment yesterday.

The bizarre incident is just the latest melodrama on a sewage board that has a long history of political backbiting and meddling in City Council affairs.

Ironically, during the meeting that produced the offhand remarks, Rosales lectured Rasheed about the board's responsibility to behave professionally and be good "role models" after she accused him of "flipping off" the city's mayor during a heated Jan. 8 City Council meeting. Rasheed, who denied making the gesture, was led out of the council meeting by police after strongly objecting to an affordable housing project planned for his neighborhood by a nonprofit group to which Rosales belongs.

"This isn't the kind of behavior that we want (from a) public official, especially (one) representing the sanitary district," Rosales said during the Feb. 7 meeting. She noted that the board recently stressed the goal of behaving with

"a certain degree of professionalism ... because to some degree we are role models."

Against Rasheed's objections, Rosales won approval of a letter to the council saying that, while "Rasheed adamantly denied making an obscene gesture," the sanitary board wanted to "clear the air and assure the City Council that the (sanitary district) does not condone negative behavior toward the members of the City Council."

Rasheed complained during the board meeting that he had been "blindsided" by the letter Rosales introduced. He then failed in an attempt to introduce his own letter accusing Rosales of being present when a member of her nonprofit housing group, East Palo Alto Community Alliance and Neighborhood Development Organization, physically threatened him after a City Planning Commission meeting in November. He also accused Scherzer of "wrongdoing" in his general manager role.

District Attorney Jim Fox said yesterday that his office will review the meeting tape and interview witnesses next week.

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