

# Faulconer's First Year: Mostly Doing Nothing, But Looking Good While Doing It

by [DOUG PORTER](#) on MARCH 3, 2015 · [7 COMMENTS](#)

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By Doug Porter

Unlike the women performing on the field at Chargers' games, San Diego Mayor Kevin Faulconer is getting paid for his cheerleading efforts.

The local daily paper ran a puff piece on Sunday, celebrating Faulconer's first year in office, reporting on the "nearly unanimous praise" for making San Diego a "vastly different place than it was under the tumultuous tenure" of he-who-cannot-be-named-without-contempt.

Largely airbrushed out of history was former interim mayor Todd Gloria, whose reward for leadership following the fall of Filner was to get booted out of the position of City Council President, lest he actually accomplish any items proposed during his tenure.

The *UT-San Diego* also ran with a most excellent exercise in confirmation bias, following up on a year of editorial support, with a survey of 501 voters who mostly thought the mayor was doing swell. Why shouldn't they, when the coterie of friends and advertisers in the local media can't be bothered by and large to actually hear those critical of the incumbent administration?

The realpolitik of San Diego is that, while it's okay to talk about doing things, actual changes to the status quo are considered partisan and, therefore distasteful.

Therefore, we end up with the politics of mostly doing nothing. But the mayor manages to look good while he's doing it.

From the [UT article](#):

*"It's only been one year and it's amazing how much we've gotten done," said City Councilwoman Lorie Zapf, a fellow Republican. "It's really striking how the vibe is so much more upbeat, which is allowing people to be focused and productive."*



The politics of doing nothing are all about symbolism. And, with his background in corporate public relations and the support of the Chamber of Commerce, Mayor Faulconer really does deserve praise for his efforts in this area.

San Diego is blessed with an economy that's improving, making restorations in city services possible. Each one gets a press release or media event.

The blizzard of press releases and photo ops coming out of city hall is doing its job; making something out of nothing. This morning the mayor was handing out doughnuts (for real!) at a fire station to celebrate his anniversary in office...

...film at eleven.

## Open for Business

Recently the mayor enlisted Councilwomen Myrtle Cole and bus load of supporters and media to tour District 4, highlighting what he touted as the opportunities for investment there.



Yet when it comes to actual budget proposals for parks, only one neighborhood South of Interstate 8 (near Chamber CEO Jerry Sanders neighborhood) is included for any love in the mayor's five-year financial outlook.



The few tangible things Faulconer actually can point to are either explicitly bad (blocking minimum wage increase, earned sick days, opposing the Barrio Logan Community Plan, etc.) or Democratic ideas he botched while on the city council (all but repealing Prop A, Pure Water, etc.)

Nearly a two hundred thousand low-wage workers lost out on an average pay raise of \$1400 annually and the right to earn paid sick leave. The incremental increases in the minimum wage called for in the City Council's plan will be looking pretty damned reasonable by the time they come up for a vote in June, 2016. Other cities on the West Coast are looking at \$13 and up. And then there's the back wages the "small business coalition" employers will have to pay when voters approve the law.

UT:

*"He's really established that San Diego is open for business and he's shown the local business community he's willing to work with them," said [Chamber of Commerce CEO] Sanders, who also praised the mayor for fostering stronger economic ties with Tijuana.*

Then there's the Big Deal pay raise for San Diego Police...

UT:

*Faulconer said perhaps his biggest accomplishment so far has been a new police labor contract that is expected to help reverse recent struggles with recruiting new officers and retaining existing staff.*

*The deal increases compensation, particularly for veteran officers, without violating Proposition B, a 2012 ballot measure that froze pensionable pay until 2018.*

*[City Councilwoman] Zapf called the deal a "huge accomplishment" that displayed "outside-the-box" thinking.*

Great. Except that the framework for doing this was largely [proposed](#) by Carol Kim, the Democrat who came out on the losing end of the most recent electoral contest for the District 6 City Council seat.

## The Climate Action Plan Shell Game

[UT:](#)

*The mayor also tackled an issue that threatened to alienate the business community, a bold climate action plan inherited from Gloria when he served as interim mayor.*

Except the Climate Action Plan isn't in place. He's agreed to talk about it. That's why members of 350.org, along with Councilman Todd Gloria, Nicole Capretz with the Climate Action Campaign and the Environmental Health Coalition's Kayla Race, staged a rally in Balboa Park on Monday.



They called for concrete steps as the plan moves through the formal review process saying it must be legally binding and provide the details of measurable methods the City will utilize to achieve the greenhouse gas emissions reductions required by the State of California.

Speakers also urged ensuring urban communities most adversely impacted be prioritized for infrastructure investment and career opportunities along with an open, transparent process prioritizing public participation to be used, and for a separate adaptation plan to be developed to prepare residents and businesses for climate impacts.

Why are people holding rallies if this is a done deal?

And then there's the matter of securing a "Sustainability Program Manager" to coordinate the climate plan. It hasn't happened.

[NBC7 News](#) ran a story full of speculation that the position was primarily for PR purposes, something the Mayor's office denies.

## The Biggest Joke of All: The Infrastructure Plan



**Here's the Faulconer plan:** Borrow \$100 million against future general fund revenue – meaning less money available for other needs.

**Here's the price tag** for fixing all our streets, sidewalks, underground pipes, parks, libraries, fire stations, etc: \$3-5 billion, according to an estimate by Independent Budget Analyst

**Here's how he's going to plug that gap**, via the [UT](#) article:

*"It's not about throwing money at the problem," he said. "I don't believe the city's been spending the money efficiently and wisely."*

Faulconer's reluctance to address the need for revenue –he won't go to voters and admit we need to raise taxes– and his cosmetic commitment to "One San Diego", while doing nothing to actually address inequity and at the same time seemingly championing all big business priorities (stadium, convention center, poverty wages) ought to be enough to convince most people of his mediocrity...

While the city under Faulconer seems willing to pay for some infrastructure North of the 8, the Mayor's been busy assuring folks South of the 8 that he totally supports non-profits who will do his job in their neighborhoods.

## But Wait! There's More!

Another thing Mayor Faulconer is reluctant to talk about is the failure of the city's managed competition. The grand plan to save the taxpayers money forgot to include the "managed" part of the deal.

It has not saved money (only in the sense of transferring balances) while leading to significant service cuts, including to the City's fleet of vehicles (garbage trucks, fire trucks, police cars...). Rather than go to the public and talk about these issues, he continues to assert managed competition and "pension reform" are the reason the City now has money to spend. (Pension reform has only cost the City money so far.)

And then there are the tens of millions of dollars in parking fees and other pots of money just sitting around. The city's not even sure how much there is. These pots of gold that could be used for paving streets exist because the various entities collecting them wait until they have enough to do a project before they spend anything. This can take years.

The crisis of the moment is, of course, building a shiny new stadium for our beloved football team.

The City of Carson held a stadium press conference that included the community and organized labor. Faulconer appointed a commission that's so poorly structured that it functions as an insult to every possible stakeholder, with probably 2/3 of the city's council districts unrepresented among other things.

Faulconer's miscue on what a viable stadium coalition would even look like (not including labor is insane) just smacks of incompetence. Political advisor Jason Roe sits in on "closed" meetings, while Tom Shepard, the consultant who played a [large role](#) in putting together PETCO Park and selling the public on the idea, is left on the sidelines.

Or... he knows that no deal is possible and is simply avoiding the public while building up brownie points in the local business community.



## Standing with the Right Wing on Immigration



For a politician who claims to be concerned about social issues, Faulconer's refusal to sign on to an amicus brief in support of the President's Executive Action on Immigration speaks volumes about his real attitude. Thirty three Mayors have signed on, including Eric Garcetti in LA.

The mayor claims the executive action is the wrong approach, and the answer is a comprehensive immigration bill passed by Congress, something unlikely to happen anytime soon.

So in other words he's okay about leaving and estimated 100,000 San Diegans in limbo. Perhaps he doesn't want to get the national Republican Party mad at him, leaving open an opportunity in a Jeb Bush administration

At the end of his first year in office, two things are sure: Kevin Faulconer is really good at public relations and very poor at coming up with realistic solutions. And really the latest in a long line of mediocre Republican mayors who is letting the city just drift along and doing his best to not do anything that would anger anyone in order to get re-elected.

To paraphrase Joseph Heller: Some men are born mediocre. Some men achieve mediocrity. Some have mediocrity thrust upon him. In Major Major Major's case (insert Kevin Faulconer's name), it was a combination of all three. In men lacking of distinction, he stood out as singularly lacking more distinction than all the rest.