

FAULT LINES

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BY KEN GARCIA

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SIGNS OF TROUBLE

Advertising exec chose hot seat

You've got to give Ryan Brooks credit — if there's a hot political seat in town, he knows how to find it.

Brooks was recently booted off the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission as the courtesy payback to Mayor Gavin Newsom from the Board of Supervisors for having the temerity to fire the agency's chief, Susan Leal — something the commission was going to do anyway. At the time, even the supervisors who were voting to can Brooks said that he was doing a good job and deserved to sit on another commission, and the mayor vowed that he would find one for him.

Brooks' choice was the Planning Commission — a hearing on the scheduled appointment is set for Tuesday — and it appears that Brooks is going to face another grilling. Not because of his desire to perform public service, but because of his chosen profession. Brooks is vice president of public affairs for CBS Outdoor advertising, and for members of San Francisco Beautiful, that's a signal as big as a billboard.

"He may be a perfectly nice guy, but

it's not appropriate for someone who represents the billboard industry to sit on the Planning Commission," said Dee Dee Workman, executive director of San Francisco Beautiful. "In the last year, we've finally been getting additions to the enforcement team over illegal billboards and that's directly impacted by commission decisions regarding the budget and staffing."

For his part, Brooks maintains that there are only a few cases where billboard issues come before the panel and when that happens, he said he would recuse himself.

"To say that these types of issues would come up is something of a red herring," Brooks said. "Ninety-nine percent of the issues the commission deals with have nothing to do with outdoor advertising. S.F. Beautiful wants to eliminate all advertising from The City. It's what they do."

Workman says in this case, there

is a crying need for truth in advertising. You can't have an industry representative making priority decisions for an agency charged with regulating that industry. She says it's a clear conflict of interest.

As further proof, she adds, Brooks' name appears on 11 notices of violation sent by the Planning Department's enforcement team to CBS Outdoor this year.

Not the best publicity campaign. But there are a lot more commissions out there if this one isn't in the plans.



Ryan Brooks' recent selection to The City's Planning Commission has come under fire because of his position as vice president of public affairs for CBS Outdoor advertising. S.F. Beautiful calls it a clear conflict of interest.

— Cindy Chew/The Examiner