

President demands Panama City Mayor Resign

Written by T. Rob Brown (aka Roberto Chocolate)

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This article appeared in The Panama News (<http://www.thepanamanews.com>.) The mayor (aka Bosco The Clown) has slipped to an astoundingly low 4% approval rating. Roberto

President Martinelli --- who lacks the power to fire a mayor --- demands Vallarino's resignation

Unusual "image consultant" contracts may lead to Bosco's downfall
by Eric Jackson

According to the Panamanian constitution, Bosco Vallarino should not have been on the ballot for mayor in 2009. He had renounced his Panamanian citizenship while naturalizing as a US citizen. But the US government treated his citizenship status as confidential, Bosco concealed his US passport and other documents that would have shown the situation (he blamed his mother), and after the fact President Martinelli arranged for the legislature to retroactively give him his citizenship back.

Through an attempt to double charge the city for travel expenses in Taiwan that were covered by the government of Taiwan, and to pay for his wife's travel although the law forbids that; through the hiring of a fugitive drug dealer as chief of the municipal police; through at least three criminal defamation cases; through a warrantless raid on a brothel; through irregular contracting for a large and mostly ugly Christmas village display; through a criminal case of a lie on a cedula renewal form, Martinelli gamed the courts and prosecutors to protect Vallarino from the consequences of his actions.

However, the mayor couldn't do what his predecessor did. He proved intellectually incapable of juggling and cannibalizing a deteriorating fleet of trucks in order to keep garbage collection going on a regular basis. The national government had to step in with some of its equipment and people to remove a buildup of smelly, pestilential refuse. Martinelli complained.

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Bosco Vallarino had other priorities. Alleging corruption --- which he never seriously tried to demonstrate --- he tried to cancel the city's dump management and recycling contract with a Spanish company. He didn't have the votes on city council to do that. He wanted to build a trash incinerator to replace the dump and recycling, and found nearly universal hostility to that idea.

The mayor was successful, however, in driving out many holdover employees from the previous administration --- including some of the people who know how to keep the garbage truck fleet running. Those fired or driven out were invariably replaced by members of the Panameñista Party, who did not necessarily know how to do their jobs or, in some cases, consider it necessary to actually work. City Hall became a cash cow for the mayor's party but in garbage pickup and a number of other areas work slowed to a near standstill.

The need to buy several dozen more garbage trucks became apparent, and there, too, Bosco saw opportunity. He rigged one bidding process by announcing it on Holy Thursday (the day before Good Friday), when much of Panama was headed to the beach, with bids to be in that very day. Surprise, surprise! --- only one company knew about it and got its bid in. It was such a clumsy bid-rigging job that there was an outcry from all sides, and the mayor had to back down and restart the bidding process. The new effort was duly announced --- and not posted on the city's website, and nobody was in the office to hand out details of the specifications or available on the phone to answer questions about the bidding.

At that point Martinelli announced his intention for the national government to take over garbage collection from the city.

On June 25, another city contracting problem came to light. La Prensa revealed that the mayor had spent \$923,713 on consultants, mainly to improve his public image, but also for studies on public security (the bailiwick of the National Police, not the city government), the disposal of medical wastes (the province of the National Environmental Authority, not the city government), a social analysis of "at-risk groups" in the city, maintenance of city buildings and interoffice communications at city hall. On closer inspection, the alleged consultants were companies owned by Panameñista Party activists. For the PRD-dominated city council, it was a big problem that these contracts were made without its approval. When the representantes demanded detailed information, Bosco Vallarino could not provide it.

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Also on June 25, an Ipsos poll conducted for El Panama America and the Telemetro TV network was published, and while it showed the president with declining but still strong popular support, Bosco Vallarino registered an astoundingly low four percent public approval rating.

A few days later, the mayor's own party withdrew its support from him. Then the president demanded Bosco Vallarino's resignation.

But Bosco says he won't budge, and neither the Panameñista Party nor the president have the constitutional power to remove a mayor. At the request of the city council, however, the provincial governor can briefly suspend a mayor. In a criminal case --- of which Bosco has several pending --- the prosecutor can seek a mayor's suspension until the matter is resolved and the courts have the power to grant such a motion. The legal proceeding can then slow down to a snail's pace to run out the mayor's term in office. Upon conviction for any but the most trivial crimes, a sentence can include the disqualification from holding public office for a set term.

One likely scenario is that the new Electoral Prosecutor, a Martinelli loyalist, would petition the Electoral Tribunal to bring the matter of Bosco's lie on a cedula renewal application (he concealed the fact that he had become a naturalized American) to trial, and pending trial the mayor be suspended from office. That, or any one or combination of other criminal cases, would be enough to remove Bosco from city hall forever.

In the likely event of Bosco Vallarino's removal, Vice Mayor Roxana Méndez, reputedly not a crook and anything but an idiot, would step down as Minister of Government and take over as mayor.