

## Filner Accusers Talk Sexual Harassment

Union-Tribune, October 2, 2013 by Jonathan Horn



Businesswoman Patti Roscoe, employment attorney Dan Eaton, and Joyce Gattas, a dean at SDSU, at a panel discussion on sexual harassment, held Oct. 2, 2013 in Carmel Valley. — *Jonathan Horn*

Mayor Bob Filner may have resigned in August, but the conversation on sexual harassment in the workplace is only picking up.

That's why two of his accusers, Patti Roscoe and Joyce Gattas, spoke to about 50 professionals at a panel Wednesday, recounting their experiences with the ex-mayor, and also offering advice on how to handle future situations. They were joined by employment attorney Dan Eaton at the Carmel Valley event, hosted by the nonprofit San Diego Employers Association.

Roscoe said she decided to come forward in July when she felt earlier claims weren't being believed.

“We felt that it was going to be pushed aside,” said Roscoe, a businesswoman. “We each had had experiences with Filner and really wanted this to come out.”

Filner is gone, but other issues in the professional world can still be pervasive.

“As long as there is power in the workplace, there will be abuses of power in the workplace,” said Eaton, of downtown firm Seltzer Caplan McMahon Vitek. “That includes sexual, racial, the whole gamut of things.”

Gattas, dean of the College of Professional studies at San Diego State University, said the silence on Filner’s behavior lasted too long.

“This behavior was well known, it was in the air and I began to realize that I was engaging in this collusion,” she said. “This was well worth doing and I think the outcome is one that is good for the city right now.”

But even with Filner out of office, there remains the issue of inappropriate behavior in the workplace. The women offered advice on how to handle uncomfortable situations at work, such as unwelcome hugs.

“There are social hugs and sexual hugs and men know the difference. And women sure do,” Roscoe said. “I think from a woman’s standpoint, if you’re getting into an uncomfortable situation in a hug, I think you quietly say to that person, ‘I’m not really comfortable with this.’”

Gattas offered a suggestion to take the initiative and go for the handshake.

“If women don’t want to hug somebody, your hand ought to be out there,” she said. “And if a man comes in for a hug, you just keep putting your hand out there.”

All three said one of the best things to do is tell a girlfriend about an uncomfortable situation to get feedback and advice. From a personal perspective, provide guidance and resources can be key.

“You really need to talk about this and in this city, unfortunately, or fortunately, now we’re talking about a lot,” Roscoe said.

From a legal perspective, Eaton said it’s vital to tell someone with similar characteristics, such as age and gender. If that person agrees, then a next step would be to go to another supervisor or the human resources department with the complaint.

“If you don’t do a reality check, the law will,” Eaton said. “You should really do this reality check with someone to say, ‘Am I being hypersensitive? Because if you don’t do that reality check and it turns out you are being hypersensitive, then you take that ultimate step of suing, you’re going to lose.’”