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## Inside the eruptive world of Jim Rogers

### Experts, regents wonder whether he'll blow again

**By Christina Littlefield, Las Vegas Sun**  
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Jim Rogers' propensity for temper tantrums was in full view last week when the chancellor of higher education quit for 36 hours. The episode illustrated just how ferocious and abrupt the chancellor's temperament could be.

While Rogers and his bosses seem to have reconciled, several regents say his rashness raises questions about his judgment and ability to manage - concerns that regents continually weigh against his leadership skills.

Of the state's 13 regents, each of the 12 reached by the Sun over the last week said he or she hopes to move forward, at least through the pending 2007 Legislature.

But many are worried he'll blow again.

The question, then, is whether they have become inured to his behavior, or are deferring to him because they are walking on eggshells to avoid confrontation - or whether they've about had enough of his short fuse.

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Each of six organizational management experts from across the country who were interviewed by the Sun questioned Rogers' judgment and maturity, anger-management skills and possible narcissistic tendencies.

"This guy is acting like a child and he is using his anger to manipulate others to get what he wants," said Donna Flagg, an organizational management consultant with the Krysalis Group in New York. "From a leadership and management perspective it is completely irresponsible behavior."

If left unchecked, experts said, such behavior could have "devastating" effects on the credibility of the Nevada System of Higher Education and its ability to function.

"If you have someone who is continuously explosive, that can erode the confidence of the organization, potentially to failure if it is not addressed," said Ari Novick, a licensed psychotherapist who runs an anger and stress management consulting group in Laguna Beach, Calif. "What is happening at the very top is going to permeate everything beneath it."

The experts based their observations on their readings of news accounts surrounding Roger's reneged resignation.

The episode began when Regent James Dean Leavitt questioned Rogers' hire of failed Democratic congressional candidate Tessa Hafen as the new lobbyist for the health science system. Thinking that Leavitt was questioning his integrity, Rogers yelled at him on the telephone, and then sent a letter to Regent Chairman Bret Whipple threatening to resign if Leavitt was elected to a board leadership position or didn't stop meddling.

Whipple and Leavitt called for Rogers' resignation Jan. 12. Two days later - Sunday morning - Rogers issued a two-word memo to regents: "I quit." And then after dinner Monday night with Leavitt and others, Rogers withdrew his resignation.

At the least, the incident illustrates potentially problematic anger-management problems, experts said, which can create an environment of fear and intimidation, making it difficult for co-workers to raise questions or report problems. It can stifle creativity, hurt morale and destroy productivity.

Management experts said they were more concerned by what they described as narcissistic tendencies in Rogers' behavior. Most people are inherently self-centered, but narcissistic people have a grandiose sense of self-importance, cannot accept criticism, depend on constant praise, are arrogant and lack empathy, said Maria Hsia Chang, a UNR professor specializing in political psychology.

While not diagnosing Rogers, Chang and the six organizational management experts said Rogers' disproportional anger when questioned by Leavitt, and hearing those questions as a personal attack, were "classic narcissism." They also said his threat to quit - and acting on it because no one had called to talk him out of it - showed an unhealthy need for attention and admiration. His explosive temperament showed a failure to understand how his actions affected others.

Narcissistic bosses are at the same time charming, likable and highly efficient, experts said. They create a cultlike environment of followers and the success or failure of the whole organization hangs on their personality.

Anger and narcissism combined can lead to "group-think," where the boss and his followers have hijacked the organization and others have to either "get with the program or get out," said Jim Stroup, author of the book "Managing Leadership." "Group-think can turn an otherwise intelligent organization into a mob of lemmings, willfully plunging ahead to destruction," Stroup said.

At least a few regents say they wonder how long they could leave Rogers unchecked. His temper has left bodies in its wake, such as two university presidents, and he has repeatedly overreacted to questioning. Whipple and incoming Regent Ron Knecht said Rogers' actions raised serious questions for them about his judgment.

"You squander credibility when you do volatile and precipitous things," Knecht said.

Regent Howard Rosenberg said he has always thought Rogers' dictatorial approach wrong for higher education, but he thought his recent blowup might actually make things better.

"Perhaps this has taught him to be a little more reflexive and count to 10 rather than just five," Rosenberg said.

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Most people within the system who have experienced the worst of Rogers' temper are his greatest supporters, and say his anger is rare and that he cools off as quickly as he heats up.

"I find him very easy to go to, very easy to disagree with, and if he is angry about something and expresses that anger, I don't take it personally," said Richard Carpenter, president of the Community College of Southern Nevada.

"If he is angry about this or that, I find that I simply go back later, and by then he is more open to it."

One can also argue that regents knew what they were getting when they hired Rogers as interim chancellor in May 2004.

Tales of his tyrannical, bullying nature regularly poured out of his television station, KVBC Channel 3, and some former employees, such as retired stock broker and business anchor Mike Moody, even wrote letters warning regents of his behavior.

Some stories, such as how he once swept all of a reporter's belongings into a trash can because his desk was too messy, are legendary.

"What I saw over the years is how he intimidated everybody or made everyone afraid of him," said Moody, who spent 10 years working for "News 3 at Sunrise." "He would come to the newsroom and get upset if someone had a Coke can on their desk ... He would terrorize people, belittle them and put them down."

Regents said they hired Rogers despite concerns about his temper because they also knew him to be a man of integrity and passion, and because the state's higher education system needed his strong management.

For the most part - and Rogers himself will tell people this - his anger is fueled by incompetence or dishonesty. But sometimes, higher education officials said, its root is inexplicable, and a small annoyance or disagreement can set him off exponentially.

It is easy, of course, for regents to allow Rogers' anger. He's 68 years old, successful as a lawyer, a banker and a television station owner, now donating his time, talent - and money - to improve higher education. His brusque business style butts hard against academia, but he has also triggered efficiencies and advances in the system.

Questions of his temper are legitimate, Rogers said, but regents also have to "understand that the pressure of this job is unbelievable."

"It's easy to look in from the outside and say you should really be calmer when the house is burning down," he said. "It is a lot harder to stay calm when you are inside the house that is burning down."

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