

My Censure is a Badge of Honor

Nothing is more important to all of us as citizens than a government—whether local, state or national—that conducts itself honestly, and competently, and with close attention paid to how their taxpayers’ dollars are spent. As a citizen myself, I care deeply about government officials conducting themselves with integrity. And as a public official myself—as a City Councilmember of Blaine, Minnesota, elected by my fellow Blaine residents to see to it that city officials in Blaine are responsible and honest—I take these values very seriously.

The voters of Blaine expect no less, and they are right.

So when I did my job as a City Councilmember of Blaine and asked hard, but important questions during public city council and planning commission meetings—questions that my constituents expected me to ask and rightly so, I did not expect that I would be “censured” for doing so.

These were questions about the mismanagement and the wasting of taxpayers’ hard-earned dollars.

These were questions about conflicts of interest.

And these were questions about certain City officials looking the other way at that mismanagement, that wasting of money and those conflicts of interest, because they didn’t care enough about the people of Blaine they were elected to serve.

Precisely because these questions were ones that certain City officials did not want asked, and could not answer, they decided that they would purport to intimidate me—and through me, others who have asked the same kinds of questions—into staying silent.

It won’t work.

My constituents and, indeed, many in Blaine have raised legitimate, significant concerns about the process by which the sports entertainment district project has proceeded, about the way taxpayers’ funds were spent in connection with the project, about conflicts of interest and about allegations that have arisen about improper financial dealings. There is evidence to support those concerns, to demand that City officials address them—forthrightly, honestly and promptly—and to investigate them.

And there are serious problems with the way the Blaine City Council has dealt with those concerns—or, more properly, failed to deal with them.

I knew when I insisted on raising these questions that some would be furious, and would seek to retaliate against me for doing so. The recent “censure” of me for advocating on behalf of the people of Blaine was that retaliation.

At the end of the day, however, this “censure”, designed to throw a figurative fastball at my head, is an insult to the people of Blaine, who have over the past days come forward in droves to express appreciation for public officials who do their duty, not the bidding of special interests.

I’m proud to have their support. And I’m proud to do the right thing.

I have given the city multiple opportunities to address these issues internally. I have repeatedly asked the city for an independent investigation, proper oversight and an impartial legal opinion about the allegations that have been raised. Ultimately, my duty is to the City of Blaine and to Ward 1 residents. It’s my ethical obligation as an elected official to seek transparency and try to ensure that taxpayer money is spent in the way residents have entrusted us to. I would have hoped that all City officials would feel the same way.

Because they apparently do not, I call upon state and federal authorities to investigate mismanagement of taxpayers’ money, potential conflicts of interest and questionable financial dealings in the City of Blaine. If, as they assert, they have nothing to hide, City officials should join me in seeking this investigation, rather than retaliate against those who are simply trying to make sure that the facts see the light of day.

I urge them to do so.

Lori Saroya is the Blaine Ward 1 City Councilmember.