

September 23, 2024

Dear Esteemed South Bend Common Council Members,

The word "Silence" is often a Golden act. Thus, I prefer silence when I am praying. Silence is favorable when one is meditating. Wisdom is gained when reflection is done in silence. Silence is optimum when pondering.

Henceforth, I have maintained silence regarding the incident between South Bend Common Council Vice President Sheila Niezgodski and Mr. Logan Foster. During my silence I reflected on what I witnessed, and I pondered on what was my responsibility. For eight (8) South Bend Common Council meetings I hoped that the conflict between Vice President Sheila Niezgodski and Mr. Logan Foster would come to a restorative conclusion. To my dismay, the conflict continues to fester. I wish I was more like United States Senator Bernie Sanders. He immediately responded when Republican Senator Markwayne Mullin challenged Teamsters Union President, Sean O'Brien to a fight. United States Senator Sanders responded, "Sit down! You are a United States Senator!" Likewise, I also thought of the courage of former United States Congresswoman Liz Chaney who denounced former United States President Trump for his involvement in the January 6th uprising. United States Congresswoman Liz Chaney lost her seat because she spoke up for what was right. Henceforth, I have pondered and reflected long enough. Now, it is time for me to speak up regarding this matter..

On May 13, 2024, I witnessed South Bend Common Council Vice President Sheila Niezgodski rise from her seat immediately at the close of our Common Council meeting. She walked behind my seat and the seats of two other council members. As she turned left to go down the steps, she turned her face toward the seated council members. That is when I saw the anger in Vice President Niezgodski's face. I said - "Stop her. Someone needs to stop her." Vice President Niezgodski proceeded to walk from the Council podium purposefully toward Mr. Logan Foster. I knew this was not going to end well. I hoped that South Bend Common Council President Sharon McBride could have reached her before something explosive happened. I put my head down because I didn't want to see anymore. At that point I decided to talk to the citizens who made a presentation about Narcan. I was talking to them when I heard Mr. Foster raised voice accusing Vice President Sheila Niezgodski of assaulting him. I have reviewed the video of the incident multiple times and reflected on my firsthand observations.

The following are my conclusions regarding this matter. My first conclusion is that the behavior South Bend Common Council Vice President Sheila Niezgodski displayed on May 13, 2024, in council chambers falls short of the standard of conduct and decorum expected of South Bend Common Council Members. As elected officials we are all under the scrutiny of the public. Our citizens share their opinions, report their findings and ask questions during the privilege of the floor. We may not agree with them. We may even feel they are targeting us, but we must maintain composure. I am quite familiar with being held to a higher standard of conduct. During my nearly four decades in public education and two of those four decades in public school administration, I have been called vile names to my face by adults. Adults - not students, have

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City Clerk, South Bend, IN

threatened to assault me. I have never responded in kind. I maintained the decorum expected of me as a school official because I knew that responding in kind would only escalate the situation. I believe in the mantra popularized by former United States First Lady, Michelle Obama. "When they go low. We go high."

My second conclusion is that the known outcome of the South Bend Common Council Rules Committee's executive session was misleading. The South Bend Common Council Rules Committee deemed that no wrongdoing occurred on May 13, 2024. Perhaps the members of the South Bend Common Council Rules Committee focused on the accusation of assault. Ultimately only a court of law has the authority to rule whether behavior constitutes assault, but the Rules Committee did have the authority to assess whether Vice President Niezgodski's behavior was in keeping with the decorum expected of council members. The South Bend Common Council Rules Committee should have reiterated the standard of conduct expected of council members and should have clearly stated that her behavior did not meet that standard.

Respectfully know that I have issued this statement because I want my constituents in the 5th District of South Bend, Indiana, as well as all the residents of the city of South Bend to know where I stand regarding this matter. The entire South Bend Common Council was elected on the Democratic ticket, but we are not a monolith group of elected officials. We have different perspectives, but we should be united around the well-being of the City of South Bend. The health of our city is improved when more citizens are engaged in local politics and public policy.

Further, our residents should not be afraid to come to the privilege of the floor during the South Bend Common Council meetings. Our residents and the press play an important role in local government. They hold elected officials accountable and keep us sharp. We the members of the South Bend Common Council should commit to displaying a decorum of respect and grace that is expected of public servants throughout every council meeting for the rest of our terms in office.

Thank you for taking the time to read my concerns regarding this matter.

Sincerely,

Mrs. Sherry Bolden-Simpson, (D)
Fifth District Councilwoman
South Bend Common Council