

August 10, 2021

City of Stevenson

Attn: City Council, Mayor Anderson

7121 E. Loop Road

Stevenson, WA 98648

Honorable Elected Officials:

I am submitting this comment in regard to the recent kerfuffle surrounding Council Woman McHales choice to sit during the recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance prior to beginning the July 2021 council meeting.

As an individual, Council Woman McHale has the right to sit granted to her by not only the Constitution of the United States, but also by council action that occurred in previous meetings. More directly, the council voted to remove recitation of the pledge to convene meetings as a requirement and instead made it optional.

What I find troubling about this situation, and what really led me to send comment was the manner in which Council Woman McHale exercised her right. Rather than sit politely with arms at her side or excuse herself to another area of the meeting space, she took great measure to page through (what appears to be) a magazine. Quite honestly, it appears as though she went out of her way to be disrespectful and flippant to her colleagues and the constituents that did elect to recite the pledge.

Many times, I have attended or listened in on City Council meetings and have heard Council Woman McHale express that she wishes to bring people together, promote understanding and encourage discussion amongst our community. Regrettably, her actions appear to say otherwise and could be offensive to many who hold the recitation of the pledge and honor to those who sacrificed for our rights in high regard.

Additionally, yet in connection to this very topic, I was provided a copy of a post that was made on a local social media site titled "Let's Take Action Skamania County." This site, according to their narrative, is "...meant to hold ourselves accountable as well as our leaders;" and "...collective voices will stand for a better future that entails a inclusive, compassionate, and sustainable county,".

I would argue that Council Woman McHale was not promoting inclusiveness nor was she encouraging discussion to promote the understanding of different opinions as much as she was enticing divisiveness when she reached out, as a City Council Member on this private group asking people to help her as a "resident is demanding the Mayor hold me accountable..." Well, Council Woman McHale, you cannot have it both ways and require accountability for thee but not for me.

Is there or should there be a mechanism to hold you accountable for exercising your right, even though it could be offensive to some? No. Your right is your right, as much as my right is mine. Although you may say you had no intention of appearing flippant or disrespectful, perception (right, wrong or indifferent) is 110%, and as an elected official you would be wise to remember this.

In closing, I would kindly ask that you sit with respect for your colleagues while they recite the pledge, and if you are unable to do so, please consider excusing yourself until such time the pledge is done and the meeting convenes.

Ann Lueders
Stevenson