

Councilman Rick Miller
Lawrence Township Reorganization Meeting
January 1, 2009

Good afternoon.

Most of you know that I'm a man of few words. I don't usually give long speeches. That being said, I'm forewarning you to make yourselves comfortable, I have a lot to say.

Today marks my 16th Reorganization meeting, more than anyone else sitting here beside me.

For most of those meetings in I was in the clear minority.

I knew that my vote was not needed to elect our township's ceremonial mayor, but only once during those years was even asked for my support. I usually found out who my Democrat colleagues had selected to be the mayor when I showed up for the vote or from the newspapers.

Their decision was predetermined. Only once in all those years did I withhold my vote for their selection.

The resignation of Councilman Mark Holmes, who for several years served this township as my Republican colleague, provided our town with a chance for bipartisan cooperation. Something this town has not seen in a long time.

Instead, our Democrat colleagues issued a directive for selecting a replacement for Mr. Holmes. As usual, without even considering Councilman Bostock or myself.

Their plan, which Councilman Bostock outlined, was simply not something that we could agree to. It flies in the face of open and transparent government. The kind of government that Republican candidates have been campaigning on for years.

My Democrat colleagues claim that our opposition to their plan is political. I state that it's purely governmental.

I vowed to those people who elected me that I would fight for open government. I will keep my word.

A day for cooperation and mutual respect was dashed away last Sunday, when I called Acting Mayor Mount to discuss their proposal and the concerns that Councilman Bostock and I shared. I asked her to work with us to openly and

thoroughly consider the three candidates that her party had selected to succeed Mr. Holmes.

At her kitchen table, without any consideration, Ms. Mount dismissed our proposal for an open, thoughtful and deliberate process to review the candidates selected by the Lawrence Township Democrat Municipal Committee. Ms. Mount stated to me that she saw no reason for the candidates to submit written statements of interest, resumes or to hold interviews at an open public meeting.

Please understand, I was not asking her to delay the timeline as set forth in the law. Under the plan we proposed, we would still meet the deadline for filling the vacant seat which is January 27.

Let me take a minute to explain to you why we take the process of replacing a councilperson so seriously.

The person who we select will become a full voting member of this governing body in a very unusual way – one without any public input whatsoever. I view the selection of this individual as a huge responsibility. Our selection process will act as substitute for the traditional 6 month political campaign.

The law clearly lays out parameters to replace a council member.

And yes, part of the responsibility rests with the local political machine. However, there is a time when politics needs to be left at the door and government takes over. My council colleagues don't seem to understand this.

After outlining our proposal for the thoughtful and deliberative process, Ms. Mount said she would have to discuss it with the Democrat Committee. I countered that who she needed to discuss it with was Councilman Powers, not the political powers of the Lawrence Township Democrat Party.

She then informed me that the political committee had already decided that former Councilman Greg Puliti was to be appointed to the vacated seat.

If this is the case than the entire process is really nothing more than a sham.

I was surprised that she would so clearly state that her vote as a councilwoman was predetermined. I had hoped that we could work together in the best interest of the Lawrence Township.

While I am acquainted with all three candidates and have served with Greg Puliti, I don't think that that should take the place of a thoughtful and deliberative process.

I have not rendered an opinion on any of the three candidates as I haven't had the opportunity to review their strengths and qualifications or to ask them why they want to serve or what they hope to accomplish as governmental officials of this town.

Councilman Powers has implied that I've already made up mind as to who will receive my vote. While my democrat colleagues may have already made up their minds, I can honestly tell you that I have not. He went on to insinuate that my only consideration was my campaign for reelection.

Let me clearly state, he is the one bringing politics into town hall, not me.

I have lived in this town my entire life. I've served this town as councilman for a long time. Believe me when I tell you, I don't do it for any glory or fame. It is often a thankless job that takes me away from my family – as it does for anyone who chooses to serve in a position such as this.

I continue to serve because I feel that I make a difference.

I do it because people have asked me to stay involved and help this town.

I do it because I was brought up in family that taught me that it was my responsibility to give back.

I was also brought up to respect people, but I feel less and less respected as an individual on this government body.

I don't expect my colleagues to always agree with me, but I do expect to be listened to and I expect for my thoughts to be considered in the same manner that I consider theirs. Sadly, any level of mutual respect seems to have disappeared.

If I seek to run again, I'll campaign for this seat in the same way that I have in the past – on my record - no matter who chooses to run against me.

Campaigns are designed to allow the voters a chance to understand the people who they are selecting to represent them. I welcome that opportunity.

As former Councilman Holmes said on several occasions, it is about the process and let the process play out. There is a process and we should follow it as openly as we can.

I understand that there are three Democrat seats on town council and two Republican ones. However, I don't believe that because they have one more vote than we do, that cooperation and negotiation should be nonexistent. I know

that in the end, the democrats can select the council member – and the mayor -- of their choosing.

I continued my conversation with Ms. Mount asking for her and Councilman Powers to consider the suggestions of Councilman Bob Bostock and myself for some of the appointments to township boards and committees.

I also asked her to allow us to put forth names for two appointed professionals to serve this town. I didn't think that I was asking for a whole lot.

For the Democrats to think that their one vote majority gives them the undeniable right to control everything in this town saddens me.

There should be give and take, and Councilman Bob Bostock and I were willing to do - just that. This was my second attempt reaching across the aisle that day.

I was hoping that a hand would reach back, but instead I received a slap. I was rejected without any consideration at all.

Acting Mayor Pam Mount even threatened to cancel today's meeting, rather than consider any of our proposals. This was clearly not the spirit in which I called to meet with her.

In fact, the whole meeting flew in the face of a quote that appeared in the December 23 edition of the Lawrence Ledger.

Councilwoman Mount said, "The moral of the story is, we have to help each other out, I hope that in this year, we will be able to remember that and everyone will pull together in the best interests of everybody."

Apparently those words don't apply to working with Councilman Bostock and me.

I'm sorry if my remarks today seem melancholy.

Over the years, my remarks at our Reorganization meetings have been more hopeful – and brief – but I can honestly say that today is a sad day for me as a representative of this town.

Never have I witnessed such a petty quarrel.

What is so bad about our proposal? Is it just that the Republicans proposed it?

I would like to congratulate our fire chiefs – you and your members work very hard for this town in the true spirit of service. I thank you for your commitment. I wish everyone here, and all of our residents, a happy new year.

I truly hope that today provides an opportunity to put the past behind us and begin the new year with a newfound sense of cooperation.

We all know that this year will bring us challenges. I hope that we can tackle them together in the best interest of the town where we all choose to make our home.