

Pastor to Gay Mayor: Why Didn't You Let Us Vote?

While the country awaits a judge's verdict over the Equal Rights Ordinance, Pastor Steve Riggle calls out Houston Mayor Annise Parker over her denying the city their right to vote.

Mayor Parker,

What a shame that in Houston, Texas, a trial had to be held to simply attempt to allow the people their right to vote. We have discovered that in Mayor Annise Parker's Houston, Texas ... of the people, by the people and for the people does not exist. As the judge aptly stated, this trial was not about the merits of the Equal Rights Ordinance. It was simply about allowing the people of Houston the right to vote.

I sat through the entire trial and listened very carefully to the arguments made by your expert team of lawyers from the best firms in town. (There were between nine and 13 of your lawyers in the room at all times ... to our one.) I was very impressed with the skill with which they repeatedly made their point ... We "supposedly didn't get one signature line right on our notary form."

Not that we didn't have thousands more voters than we needed to qualify who filled out and signed the petition. Not that the circulators didn't appear before a notary and provide documentation that they were who they said they were.

Not that the notary didn't put their official stamp on the petition page. But that in relying on the sample petition we accessed through the city website, a half-inch line was missing. Do you think for a moment that we would not have included your half-inch line if we had known what it was? By the end of the trial, even your attorneys acknowledged that we were honest and decent people who were only asking for our

right to vote. Their argument was that we failed on a technical point even though our intent was very clear.

Mayor Parker, you were certainly right in one regard. When you said this was "all about you" you really meant it and have been willing to use every tactic possible. Sermon subpoenas, demeaning and flippant remarks, accusing the 54,000-signature petition of containing, in your words to the press, fraud and forgery are insulting to the many thousands of honest Houstonians who were trying very hard to get it right. I looked up the definition of fraud in the dictionary ... "a: deceit, trickery; specifically: intentional perversion of truth in order to induce another to part with something of value or to surrender a legal right."

That more represents you than the 54,000 people who signed the petition simply asking for their legal right to vote. You have done everything in your power to do exactly what you said, "I will not allow anyone to vote on my civil rights." You made that statement twice to a sitting city council member and also to a group of pastors from out of town. We have their notarized statement. You also said that you were certain that the citizens of Houston overwhelmingly support your ordinance. If that is true, why are you willing to go to any length to disallow the people their right to vote?

After testifying at the trial, you held a press conference even though the judge instructed those who were witnesses to not speak to the press until the trial had concluded. At your press conference you obviously didn't mention that in every petition submitted to the city there are invalid signatures for a variety of understandable reasons. You also didn't mention that you couldn't even sign your name in the half inch line that you and your attorneys claim is a signature line on the petition form accessed through the city website. You also didn't mention that there is nothing on that form that gives any indication that you are supposed to sign in that half-inch line.

That the sample form accessed through the city website is unclear at best and more likely deceptive and misleading apparently doesn't matter to you. This was what you needed to attempt to silence the voice of the people. In my over four decades of being a leader of many thousands of people, our staff has occasionally gotten it wrong. Not intentionally, but something was published or provided to the people that misrepresented what we were asking the people to do. It wasn't clear. I can honestly say that I never blamed the people for that. I always took the responsibility ... even when I wasn't even aware of what we had provided.

That's what leaders do, because it's not right to expect the people to know what they don't know. You nor your legal team have been willing to acknowledge any sense of responsibility the city should feel upon discovering how unclear the information provided is. As of this moment, you still have not corrected that form to make it clear.

Your repeated testimony at the trial that you were unaware of any of the details involving all of this is laughable to anyone who has significant leadership responsibility. No one but you, I guess, would have this big of a mess on their hands and claim to know nothing about it. You must have forgotten that just a few weeks ago at a city council meeting you said that you and City Attorney David Feldman had personally reviewed your legal strategy and had signed off on it.

So your expert attorneys in the courtroom were simply doing what you instructed them to do. You also said that no matter the outcome of the trial, this issue will be appealed until those are exhausted. During that process, the deep divisions and strife that you created in our city will continue. The national outrage and embarrassment that has now defined our city because of your handling of this will not end. Most importantly, you should know "we the people" will not be silenced until we are allowed to have our voice heard.

Mayor Parker, it's not too late to do the right thing. I implore you to set aside your personal agenda and bring healing to our city. All you have to do is let the people decide. Let the people vote. This is not about a personal attack on you as you have attempted to "spin" this in the past. Respectfully, it is all about the fundamental right of the citizens to vote!

How tragic if you prevail because of an unintended technical oversight on our part, even though we relied on information accessed through the official website of the city of Houston. If you prevail, all of the citizens of Houston will then lose. If you prevail, justice will not have been served. The just thing would be to let the people vote. Remember as the judge said ... this trial is all about the process of the people being allowed to vote. How tragic that in making this about you personally and about your personal agenda, ... the people of Houston do not matter at all. Shame on you for what you have done to our city and on every council member who has stood silently by and allowed this to happen without even lifting their voice in protest. All we ever asked for was the right to vote!

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