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## *An Indecent Proposal*

### **A city council horror, just in time for Halloween.**

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Four out of five members of the Glendale City Council having voted to remove two appointed commissioners from their seats was so deeply wrong on so many grounds, and on principles of such fundamental importance, that it should leave citizens of every ideological stripe slack-jawed, stunned and outraged. The council majority put on for the public a display of testosterone, pouting, ignorance and mental defect so appalling that the episode easily stands as the most pathetic and troubling government session I've ever watched.

To get the preliminaries out of the way, in late September councilman Dave Weaver asked the council to place discussion of removing of two commissioners on the following week's agenda. At the time, Lenore Solis served as president of the city's Water and Power Commission, and Patrick Masihi was on the Transportation and Parking Commission. The pair were among vocal critics of city proposals to close a street and make other changes on the city's border with Los Angeles that were related to railroad safety.



*Glendale Councilman Dave Weaver*

It's no surprise the suggestion of removing commissioners first came from Weaver. For years he's been a cannon loosed on the rolling decks of City Hall, while often also the one responsible for the very waves rocking the ship. As has been the case so many times before throughout Weaver's two terms, his blustering twaddle once again gave voice to the bizarre, self-important and oft-inaccurate twists of his deeply dysfunctional mind.

Coming from anyone else, the real horror in the removal of the commissioners might have been the utter nonsense spilling from a councilman's

cranium and onto the dais. From Weaver, however, it was just more of the same ol', same ol'. All that was missing was his usual assurance that his 30 year career with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers somehow provided him with special insight and analytical abilities in the matter. We can be sure he still feels that way, but at least he didn't mention it.

Weaver's rationale, though I do enormous disservice to the word by applying it to the troubled councilman's demented contortion of reality, was familiar. It was a series of platitudes handled the way a monkey might assemble a 1,000 piece puzzle. The pieces used do make up a picture. But as applied, they bore little resemblance to the picture on the box, or logic. Weaver hammered ill-fitting pieces into a space until they were bent and broken enough to suit his purpose. Consider his first words on the matter, addressing the comments of public speakers who'd just addressed the council, and who, without exception, urged the council not to remove the commissioners.

"Everybody who has said something so far has been absolutely 100 percent wrong," Weaver announced.

No ifs, ands or buts. According to Weaver, when speakers announced their own names, they even got that wrong. No need to distinguish between disagreements on opinion, speculation or the facts. What would the addled citizenry do without Dave Weaver up there to give us The Word?

Of course, it wouldn't be Weaver all the way if his next words didn't confirm, almost point by point, virtually every scrap of speculation and opinion previously expressed by that same band of doltish public speakers. And that's just what his words did. Speakers had assumed he wanted to remove the commissioners because they opposed the city's street closure plan, and that's precisely what he said he wanted to do, and why.

Also as usual, Weaver read from his own script. One can't help but imagine Weaver crafting these screeds, bleary-eyed and sitting alone late at night with a highball glass kept full and never far away. I suppose he uses a computer for later drafts. But I'm guessing the first version is handwritten, because it's hard to type while manipulating the steel ball bearings in one hand, this as he fantasizes about his words gorily vanquishing the many fearsome enemies he imagines aligned against him and the forces of goodness.

In pedantic and patronizing tones, Weaver went on to explain, "Commissions of the city of Glendale are advisory in nature, and once their recommendations are heard, the city council develops policy for the city." He went on to say that, after the council took steps related to the controversial closures, the commissioners then "misrepresented the intent, the policy and the actions of the city council."

This might have been the place for Weaver (or anyone else) to mention that the issue on which the commissioners disagreed with the city's direction had

virtually nothing to do with the respective commissions of the blacklisted appointees. No such luck.

Despite his declarative statements, Weaver's characterization of what Solis and Masihi did are widely disputed. More importantly, the unaware might conclude from Weaver's vague version of events that the two miscreants took whatever steps they did during meetings of their respective commissions, holding up proceedings as they irrationally railed against a city council proposal. Perhaps they issued letters on commission stationery offering their opinions on a political issue? Oh, no, wait. It was the chief of police who did that last year before an election. That was perfectly okay with Weaver.

In fact, the offending commissioners voiced their opposition to a council plan at public gatherings outside City Hall, and by talking to reporters. Both repeatedly announced they were speaking as citizens, and or on behalf of neighborhood groups they'd been asked to lead.

But according to Weaver, "It has been clearly demonstrated that, once we have set the policy, signified our intent and taken action, that they have not chosen to follow that."

Tortured grammar aside, Weaver's words paint a nightmarish picture for those citizens civic-minded enough to serve their neighbors and friends by volunteering for city commissions. Once the city council has expressed a majority opinion on an issue, commissioners lose their rights as American citizens to publicly disagree with the city council. Indeed, as is clearly and irrefutably demonstrated by Weaver's standard, if the council approves a waiver of parking codes for a new business, even a member of Glendale's Commission on the Status of Women is verboten to criticize or dispute the decision.

Addressing the commissioners as he moved for their removal, Ayatollah Weaver said, "...When you do not follow the intent, the policy and the actions that the city council has taken, I'm sorry." He went on to urge them to stay active in the city.

**Sophomore councilman Ara Najarian came next, also reading from prepared remarks. One wonders when councilmen will finally recognize that, by reading their profound decisions from scripts, it only proves beyond doubt that they entered the meeting with their minds made up, and without a whit of interest in any comments or evidence that might be offered by colleagues, staff or the public during the public portion of meetings. The "deliberative process" has become a political euphemism for "reading aloud for the public the decision I made long ago, based upon information and opinions I received in the back halls and from my pals."**



*Councilman Ara Najarian*

**Najarian restated some of the duties for commissioners that were outlined by Weaver, but he was more generous. He said the duties do not rob commissioners of their rights to speak out and hold opinions different from the council majority's. Alas, he then went on to enumerate the things commissioners could NOT do, in the process implying Solis and Masihi had done them.**

**As an example, Najarian said Solis in particular had "involve[d] an LA city councilman from another district to threaten the city of Glendale with a lawsuit!"**

**Let's parse this a bit. Solis objected to the council's proposal to close Chevy Chase Drive at the border with the city of Los Angeles. Los Angeles residents who live near the proposed closure also objected, and a councilman from that city floated the threat of suing Glendale to stop the closure. By Najarian's simplistic and naive perspective, the councilman's threat is the responsibility of Solis. What, if she'd supported the closure or shut up about it, does Najarian imagine the councilman would have greeted the closure with open arms?**

**Najarian's long list of "buts" completely undid his earlier claim of commissioners being free to speak their minds, or at best, concluded they can only speak their minds when they are in full agreement with the council.**

**Time and again Najarian attributed to Solis and Masihi responsibility for the words and claims of every person in Los Angeles and Glendale who objected to the closure proposal. Later, council members Bob Yousefian and Rafi Manoukian did the same. Perhaps the best example was the repeated citation of an article in the Spanish-language newspaper La Opinion. Solis, who was mentioned in the article, was accused of pitting Glendale's Armenians against LA's Latinos.**

**Having read the article, I'd agree that many who commented for it, and perhaps the newspaper's staff, were convinced the proposed closure was**

tyed to Armenians attempting to hinder Latino access to the city of Glendale. But the article's only reference to Solis identified her as a leader of the Atwater neighborhood group, another community service position she does hold. The article relayed her statements that local residents were organizing to ask Glendale not to close the street, and that the federal government had appropriated dollars to pay for the closure. There was not a direct or indirect reference to race or motives.

Based upon that article, Najarian and others accused Solis of "inflaming" racial tension. By the same standard, I could craft a racist or anti-Semitic column, and within it note that councilman Weaver confirmed there will be a council meeting next week. Weaver would thus be deemed unclean and summarily removed from office.

If only it were that easy.

Najarian said commissioners are prohibited from "Creating a situation where one ethnic group is pitted against another." But, since "creating a situation" is apparently defined as speaking out on an issue, commissioners are effectively barred from doing so. I'm hard pressed to think of any issue discussed in Glendale that does not prompt someone somewhere to claim that ethnic favoritism or bigotry is playing a role.

Najarian also condemned Solis and Masihi by declaring commissioners should not be "dramatically accusing staff of being incompetent ... not leveling accusations of crime, and bribery." Again, Solis and Masihi didn't allege criminal activity. Charges were leveled by others opposed to the street closure. The commissioners also didn't allege incompetence, though I suppose that might be a fair inference of their having disputed the city's proposed closure. But even still, I and perhaps most citizens would eagerly disagree with Najarian's statement.

If any Glendale commissioner has reasonable cause to level an accusation of incompetence or criminal activity, I believe it's their duty to report those as widely and often as is required to accomplish a meaningful investigation.

One hopes Najarian will some day show as much interest in determining whether such accusations are true as he has in barring commissioners from leveling them.

Another interesting aspect to Najarian's words was the way he downplayed chances of the proposed closure coming to pass. He's characterized the idea as "practically defunct." No one seemed to notice how that ran smack up against Weaver's characterization of the all-knowing council having definitively rendered a final decision, one which all city appointees and staff are now obliged to line up behind in serf or lemming-like fashion. Remember, Weaver said, "We have set the policy, signified our intent and taken action." Najarian seems to think otherwise.

Weaver slammed the commissioners for battling a plan that he said was the city council's. Najarian hit them for opposing a plan that didn't really exist.

It would have been nice if someone with a modicum of integrity had taken moment to acknowledge how opposition to the closure had ultimately compelled the city to reconsider the idea. But this was a night for egos and excess, not integrity.



*Councilman Bob Yousefian*

Councilman Yousefian's words and reasoning were little different from that of his colleagues, though he did squeeze in one of his notorious "apples and lawn furniture" comparisons. He noted that, if he voted positions in his capacity as an airport commissioner that conflicted with the council majority's stated wishes on airport policy, they'd be entitled to remove him from the seat.

I'm glad he has that much figured out. Unfortunately, a more apt analogy to the situation at hand would be the council removing Yousefian from his airport seat because, while speaking at a homeowners association meeting,

he criticized a council majority vote to reduce spending for street repairs. And by the council's October 4 logic, if someone else at the meeting then alleged street repairs are a higher priority in Armenian neighborhoods, Yousefian would have committed the further sin of what Najarian called "pitting one ethnic group against another." Had another attendee wondered aloud whether cash payments assured prompt attention to potholes, Yousefian would have suffered a third strike.

Of the four officials who favored the removal, only Mayor Rafi Manoukian offered a complaint that was rational and fair. He said that, at the close of a meeting of the Water and Power Commission on the previous day, Solis mentioned the upcoming council vote on her service. Noting it might be her last meeting (it was), Solis announced she held her commission colleagues in high esteem, and said she wished she could hold the council in the same esteem.

The remark was gratuitous, and unfair of Solis - until the instant after the council voted for her removal. There are countless excuses for the remark, but I can't argue it should be ignored. I can argue, however, that it was hardly worthy of summary removal.



*Mayor Rafi Manoukian*

Clearly, Manoukian was offended by the remark. That's equal parts his

problem and Solis'.

**Ironically, Manoukian went on to scold Solis for having failed to contact him and the other council members privately if she had a problem that warranted her lack of confidence. After all, Manoukian himself confronted Solis about the remark in a similar public meeting. He hadn't picked up the phone or dropped an e-mail in the intervening 24 hours to privately express his displeasure, and to ask after her rationale. It would be hard to find a better example of "Do as I say, not as I do."**



*Councilman Frank Quintero*

**Councilman Frank Quintero vehemently opposed Weaver's purge, though his obvious shock at the council majority's apparent intent and bizarre grounds rendered him less articulate than he might have been if he'd decided long ago how he'd vote and sat down to write a script. He did take a moment to address his colleagues having alleged the commissioners made certain claims and accusations at a particular community meeting. Quintero noted he was the only one of the five who actually attended the meeting, and he assured everyone the commissioners never said or did what his colleagues accused them of doing.**

**It was all for nothing, and the 4-1 vote was cast. Quintero then announced he was leaving the chamber with the two just-fired commissioners because, "I think I have more in common with them than with the elected officials here tonight."**

**It's interesting to contrast Quintero's departure, the first I can recall throughout his years of service, with those post-vote tantrums for which Weaver is infamous (among so many other things). When Weaver storms out after votes that don't go his way, he typically does so without a word, his eyes and face red while slamming books, flinging pencils and storming like a belligerent drunk. Quintero's pique was more reminiscent of Joseph Welch's renowned words to Senator Joe McCarthy, "Have you no sense of decency, sir, at long last? Have you left no sense of decency?"**

**I like to believe that, on almost any other day, with more experience and wisdom under Najarian's belt, without Manoukian's ego and emotion so recently inflamed, and without Yousefian so easily succumbing to drama and the woefully unreliable fourth-hand stories and interpretations he consumes and regurgitates with relish, the current council majority does have the principle and mettle to resoundingly reject proposals like Weaver's latest.**

**As for Weaver, because of his poor showing in the most recent election, his fourth place finish was only enough to win the two term incumbent a consolation prize; the half term left behind by a colleague who resigned office early.**

**When that term ends in May 2007, virtually any challenger who ever has or ever will make it to the council ballot in Glendale is likely to be less embarrassing to the city than Weaver has been consistently, and can probably be relied upon to do less damage to the city's credibility and soul. If there's justice in the world, in June 2007 Weaver will somehow find himself in New Orleans where he can boast, to whatever post-Katrina residents are left, the infallibility and wisdom of the systems, processes and efforts of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.**