



Decorum drama

Sacramento's Democratic City Council and leftist activists don't know how to talk to each other

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The young man saw Mayor Darrell Steinberg stand to leave and made his move.

"I got something to say. Before you leave, can you listen?" he called from the back of the Sacramento City Council chambers last week. "Please, sir."

Only a handful of familiar housing advocates and council foils were left in the chambers. The finish line was near. The only tasks left that January 22 meeting were to hear comments from council members and constituents, in that order.

But with Steinberg excusing himself to catch a flight to a national mayors conference in Washington D.C., the young man saw his opportunity to address the city's mayor slipping away. He approached the podium. Soon, all hell broke loose—again.

For at least the fourth time in less than a year, a Sacramento City Council meeting ended in abrupt, rancorous fashion following a game of procedural chicken where no one blinked. Washington D.C. may own the patent on toxic partisanship, but in California's capital, the irreconcilable divide is between the Democratic local government and the leftist governed.

SN&R submitted a public records request seeking figures on early adjournments and expulsions dating back three years, but hadn't received a response as of press time. But an SN&R review of archived meeting videos shows the council adjourned early at least four times since March 27, 2018—nine days after the police killing of Stephon Clark, an unarmed black father, roiled the city.

Early adjournments also happened during meetings in which the council withdrew items that would have restricted public expression, both inside and outside City Hall. That's what happened last week, when the city manager withdrew a police-drafted emergency ordinance that would have limited what people could bring to rallies and protests.

Councilman Steve Hansen said a key factor in how meetings go is whether council members can be active listeners who treat everyone the same—fairly and with a little grace.

"I think everyone has to cut each other a little slack," he told SN&R. "I think everybody loses

when civil discourse crumbles."

Before things went off the rails on January 22, the mayor actually received kudos from some of his more persistent critics, after he chastised the Sacramento Redevelopment and Housing Agency for imperiling a year-old promise to house 1,000 homeless people by 2020.

"It'd be one thing if you said, 'You know mayor, your thousand-home idea is a little ambitious. Here's a hundred-and-fifty,'" Steinberg said. "I don't have that [proposal] in front of me. And people are dying out there."

"It's a strange day when I have to agree with Steinberg," cracked James "Faygo" Clark, a local activist who said the city is only now pursuing the housing-first strategy he and his allies have suggested since 2014. "And you're just now having these as proposals that aren't even proposals yet?"

They're just what you learned? Like, c'mon people, it's been over four years we've been saying these same things."

That relative collegiality ended when Steinberg introduced council comments and excused himself. That's when the young man in the audience tried to catch him before he left, and was censured by Vice Mayor Eric Guerra. That's when Qui LB, who earlier reamed the council, flanked the man and beckoned others to come join her. That's when the man waved them back. He wasn't looking to escalate; he just wanted to state his piece.

"I'm not trying to disrupt the proceedings, I was just trying to say something before [the mayor] left, that's all," he said.

Guerra asked police to escort the man out of the chambers when he didn't immediately sit down. The man didn't wait. He turned and left as the crowd boomed on his behalf.

"He's a homeless youth! He's, he's traumatized," LB shouted.

Guerra adjourned the meeting as the shouting continued. No one from either side heard what the young man had to say. □

"It's a strange day when I have to agree with Steinberg."

James "Faygo" Clark activist

WEB EXTRA

Web extra: For a brief history of unruly City Council meetings, an extended version of this story is available at newsreview.com/sacramento



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