

The debate outside Allentown Council chambers: “Black lives matter”/“All lives matter” . . . “Things need to change”/“Defunded police are less effective police”

The Bethlehem Gadfly George Floyd killing, Police July 30, 2020

 *Latest in a series of posts responding to the George Floyd killing* 

Paying attention to what’s happening in neighbor Allentown. Citizens debate outside while Council members debate inside.

from Andrew Scott, “Black Lives Matter, Back the Blue protests face off outside Allentown City Council hearing on police funding. Morning Call, July 30, 2020.

Two groups of protesters, one calling for police reform and the other supporting police, held separate rallies Wednesday outside Allentown City Hall, at one point facing off against each other, as City Council members discussed police reform proposals.

Raising their fists and carrying signs, protesters with Black Lives Matter to the Lehigh Valley chanted “Black lives matter” while the pro-police Back The Blue group chanted “All lives matter” and “USA.” Members in both groups yelled at each other while some on both sides got between them to keep the groups separated.

“We’re not here to counter-protest,” Parker said. “We’re here to peacefully express our support of the proposed resolution.”

“We’re not against the police,” Black Lives Matter protester Latarsha Brown of Allentown said. “I have many officers that I know in Allentown. I’ve always had a great relationship with them. When you don’t have proper information, it’s easy to assume someone is against you.” Brown said she and others on the Black Lives Matter side don’t want a

completely defunded police department, but simply a portion of the funding reallocated to parts of the community that need it most. She said they also want to see police officers held accountable for using unnecessary force and abusing their authority in other ways.

“Growing up in Allentown, I’d hang out with friends and watch police harass them but leave me alone,” fellow protester Jay Bickford of Allentown said. “Things need to change.”

Those on the Back The Blue side said the issue isn’t one of race, but of police going after those breaking the law, regardless of skin color.

“Defunded police are less effective police,” Back The Blue rally organizer Danielle Scott of Allentown said. “We feel there’s a little bit of an anti-cop rhetoric. We want to show that we don’t support that either. We do have a good rapport with our local law enforcement. We want them to be well-funded and resourced to do their jobs.”

Protesters on the Back The Blue side waved balloons and American flags and carried signs with pro-police messages. Joining them with banners displayed were members of America Needs Fatima, a Catholic nonprofit organization supporting the police, which prayed aloud and sang “Ave Maria.” Also present was a pro-police motorcycle club.

“By defunding the police, you’re not going to help anybody because now their response times are going to be even slower,” motorcycle club member Ski Bischof said.

Brendan Schoepflin of Allentown, who said he was a former Maryland police officer, said, “Police need as much funding as possible for upgraded vehicles and equipment so they can be more effective in serving and protecting us.”

to be continued in the next post . . .