

# Negron to Callahan: “You have to shut up, ok?”

The Bethlehem Gadfly Wage equality March 11, 2020

 *Latest in a series of posts on wage equality* 

## Wage Equality Memo (1)

<https://youtu.be/rEzHfYrKJwg>

*Final 15 minutes of the February 25 Human Resources Committee meeting*

*Councilwoman Negron quote at min. 9:50*

Councilwoman Negron raised her voice, and raised her voice to a man. We know how certain people feel about that.

Councilwoman Negron told Councilman Callahan to shut up. In public. At a meeting. In front of one spectator (the delicately eared Gadfly larva). And a tv audience. Forever archived.

That’s not good. Not good at all. That’s bad, in fact. Bad. That is not proper behavior for a Councilperson at a Council meeting. Councilwoman Negron should not have said that. Gadfly will not defend it. Gadfly must condemn it. Councilpeople should not ever talk to other Councilpeople that way. Not ever.

Council-watchers are well aware that Councilors Negron and Callahan have a “history” that might well have fueled the Councilwoman’s outburst. But that is no excuse. In the past she has occasionally walked away from the Head Table in quiet but unmistakably pointed rejection of her colleague. Not this time.

We live in a soundbite culture. You can’t deny that “You have to shut up, ok?” was the soundbite of the night, the headline if the traditional news outlets had covered the meeting, the topic of conversation around water-coolers and in the blogverse the following day.

But instead of starting with the “obvious,” Gadfly has taken five or six posts and five or six days to get to it. Why?

Focusing on that simple soundbite is much too simplistic a response to the interesting and revelatory interpersonal gender dynamics at the meeting. So Gadfly has asked you to walk slowly through the meeting up to the last 15 minutes in the video above. Which he now encourages you to watch.

Listen to the Councilwoman's calm voice in the beginning of the video selection supporting the motion to postpone, laying out reasons for needing "more time" to have a "beautiful" ordinance that the Councilman proposed. No sign of anger.

Listen to the Councilwoman's engaging voice using potential examples from a Bethlehem business and real examples from her own life to highlight problems with the current ordinance and to justify postponement so that they can be resolved (4:03). No sign of anger.

Listen to the Councilwoman's temperature begin to rise when she responds to the Councilman's rather condescending plan — totally and inexcusably misreading her position, as if he were not listening to her at all — to have women's groups lobby her to vote for an ordinance she is already in favor of: "I don't need to talk with anybody else, I want to pass this, I like it, I just need to be sure that it's right" (8:20).

Listen to the Councilman's — in Gadfly's opinion — totally off-point response to her, returning immediately in a kind of non-sequitur to one of his repeated attack points about the fault of the Councilwomen in not communicating with him, ending with his oft-repeated line "I'm good with it [the ordinance proposal] as it is written," which indicates he is not at all swayed by the new ideas that have been raised (9:05).

So what set the Councilwoman off?

Let's look beyond the sensational soundbite.

Let's look first at the immediate context of that line.

It comes at the end of this passage:

*"So if you want to respect a woman in the City of Bethlehem start with your two colleagues. Please, respect what we are trying to tell you, and*

*don't be talking down to us. 'You didn't call me, you didn't . . .' It's your ordinance, and we want to pass it. No, you listen to me, because you are used to speak on top of us. And I am tired, I'm not going to let you. You have to shut up, ok? Respect us." (9:50)*

What's the key word in the passage? Respect. The Councilwoman feels lack of respect. And she blows!

There's a devastating irony here. Think about it. The male creator of this ordinance to respect the equality of women, and who says incredibly pious things about helping women, especially minority women, and who stresses the urgency to do so as a reason to pass the ordinance as is and immediately on to the full body of City Council, feels himself opposed by the three women on Council and charged with lack of respect by one of them, while implying that they — the females — might be stalling an ordinance designed to address an abuse of females and an abuse they themselves have experienced.

Dear God — as they say, you couldn't make this up!

Is there any truth to the lack of respect charge?

Gadfly thinks there is.

Without excusing Councilwoman Negron's behavior, Gadfly understands it.

The Councilman devalues women's ideas (about the enforcement hole in the ordinance), denies women's experience (about salary sharing, about needing a lawyer to face a judge), continually blames women for the failure of the relationship (not coming to the meeting prepared), ignores their offer to help (with investigating enforcement options), finds them incomprehensible (almost literally saying, "what is your problem?"). He calls the enforcement question about his proposal a "minor tidbit," infers "stalling tactics," suggests that someone didn't do her homework, considers the major objection to his proposal "made up."

In an alternate universe, "minor tidbit" for the serious and clearly articulated enforcement problem would have been the soundbite of the night.

Toward the very end of the evening, a cordial Councilwoman Crampsie Smith breaks in to a verbal gnarl between the Councilman and the two committee members to offer him clarification and to offer him help: “Bryan, I think what we talked about is that the other cities have the Human Relations Commission, we don’t. . . . I can help you with this, we can see what other avenues there are. . . . I know a lot of female attorneys that are real advocates for women, maybe they would be able to do something pro bono. There are some things we could check out. Does that sound good?”

But the Councilwoman’s cordial offer of help is ignored with a brush-offing “Sure, sure.” And the Councilman immediately turns instead to a man, the Solicitor, for advice: “Mr. Spirk, do you have any suggestions for a solution to this as far as getting any women that have a complaint against an employer, I mean, what would you suggest?” (14:55)

Gadfly gets the lack of respect.

*Gadfly would like to say that Councilman Callahan explained to him the serious reason that he checks his cell phone at Council meetings, a practice Gadfly called attention to two meetings back.*