

Gadfly trying to figure out the Councilman

The Bethlehem Gadfly Wage equality March 7, 2020

 Latest in a series of posts on wage equality 

This ordinance is designed to combat widespread gender-based wage inequalities by prohibiting employer inquiries into prospective employee wage histories, as well as employer reliance on such wage histories for determining compensation.

Councilman Callahan, December 13, 2019.

Wage Equality Memo (1)

It's time for some analysis of the personal and interpersonal dynamics of the February 25 Human Resources committee meeting discussing Councilman Callahan's wage equality ordinance on which we have spent 5 posts so far.

By a 1-2 vote (Councilwomen Negrón and Van Wirt nay), the committee postponed further discussion and vote on Councilman Callahan's proposed legislation. In reporting on the meeting to Council March 3, chairperson Callahan described the February 25 discussion in his committee as "spirited."

Gadfly has now laid out for you the entire one-hour February 25 meeting, [last time](#) asking you to view the last half-hour in one chunk.

One could call the discussion "spirited," but in Gadfly's mind that adjective usually has a positive connotation. Frankly, the word that comes to Gadfly's mind for this Human Resources committee meeting is "dysfunction."

Let's start with analysis of the core statement of Councilman Callahan's position that Gadfly isolated for you [a few posts back](#):

"This is a good ordinance. It's the same ordinance that all the cities, all the major cities are doing. I believe that 27 states that are now looking in to it. And I kind of find it hard to believe in the City of Bethlehem that it's good for all these other places, but it's not good for us. If there's some other amendment that you'd like to add, you know, throw it out

there. I mean we had discussion about a month ago, and I think that the meeting was scheduled about 3 weeks ago. So we knew this meeting was coming, we knew what the topic was. The ordinance was sent to us many weeks ago. And instead of stalling it or trying to table it, I think it's that important of an ordinance for the women of the City of Bethlehem. I want to move it forward with a positive vote, and if you don't want it, I understand it, then send it to full Council with a negative recommendation and let full Council listen to it."

"This is a good ordinance."

- Yes, everybody agreed, even Councilwoman Grace Crampsie Smith, not on the committee but who was sitting in at the Head Table. But the *women* on Council are seeing a disadvantage to *women* in the workforce in the ordinance as proposed. That ought to mean something. In Gadfly's opinion, Councilman Callahan is mistaking disagreement on a key part of the ordinance as opposition to the ordinance as a whole.

"It's the same ordinance that all the cities, all the major cities are doing."

- No, apparently not — here's the big rub in Gadfly's opinion. Gadfly would say Councilman Callahan is mistaken here. It seems the proposed Bethlehem ordinance meaningfully differs from the others in that here the complaint would be uniquely handled by a magistrate whereas in other cities it is handled by a city Human Relations Commission. (Our HRC declined involvement.) Councilman Callahan doesn't see this difference as a problem; the Councilwomen do. Gadfly understands where the women are coming from on this key point. And will talk more about it later.

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- Nobody said or even implied that the ordinance was not good for us. *Au contraire*. What the Councilwomen said was that the enforcement section of the ordinance needed work. In Gadfly's opinion, Councilman Callahan misses the point of discussion by the Councilwomen.

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- Councilwoman Van Wirt says she made her feelings about problems with the proposed ordinance known to Councilman Callahan back as far as the beginning of January. Councilwoman Van Wirt wanted Councilman Callahan to initiate personal discussion with her about those problems before bringing the ordinance to the committee and a probable vote there. Councilman Callahan did not initiate such personal discussion, felt the ordinance was fine as is, and apparently expected Councilwoman Van Wirt to come to the meeting with specific amendments if she so desired. Councilwoman Van Wirt wasn’t ready to propose amendments at the meeting; Councilman Callahan felt there was ample time to do so, and he wanted to move on. Gadfly sighs over this point of contention. What happened to “communication”?

“And instead of stalling it or trying to table it, I think it’s that important of an ordinance for the women of the City of Bethlehem.”

- The Councilwomen verbally championed the ordinance at the meeting. The veiled charge of stalling or tabling the ordinance, implying a wilful obstructionist motive, seems unfair, totally without basis to Gadfly. Councilwoman Negron has a suggestion requiring investigation by the Solicitor, a suggestion that might answer the enforcement concern raised by Councilwoman Van Wirt. Councilwoman Van Wirt wants to add an amendment that will even further enhance the protection for the employee this ordinance is designed to provide. They both want the ordinance to go forward, just not now. There is no *urgent* need for immediate action that Gadfly can discern. Stalling, if you will pardon the pun, didn’t seem on that table. Gadfly sees no reason for Councilman Callahan to object to a reasonable delay.

“I want to move it forward with a positive vote, and if you don’t want it, I understand it, then send it to full Council with a negative recommendation and let full Council listen to it.”

- This climactic point relates to bullet #4 and your conception of the function of a committee relative to the full body of an organization. The way Gadfly sees it, yes, the full body surely has full and final authority and can reverse the recommending voice of a committee. But Gadfly sees the work of the committee as to present the product of its full deliberation and not just “pass through” a proposed ordinance. Gadfly doesn’t understand Councilman Callahan’s reasoning. If there are changes and amendments to be heard, and if there is no *urgent* need for a decision, why is Councilman Callahan in such a hurry to get the issue in front of Council? Gadfly is not good at thinking “politically.” Is there some benefit to Councilman Callahan if the proposed ordinance goes to full Council as “his” proposal, even if with a negative vote? Is there some advantage to Councilman Callahan in having his basic proposal as well as any amendments “heard” in front of the three men and one woman not on the committee? Gadfly simply does not get Councilman Callahan’s almost obsessive impatience for a vote, even if negative. And is willing to be enlightened. Or slapped upside the head.

Gadfly has a hard time figuring out the Councilman here.

And he thinks the others did too. Councilman Callahan exhibits a kind of repetitive stubbornness in that last half-hour of the meeting to which Gadfly asked you to listen that, in Gadfly’s opinion, escalates tension among committee members to a point that produces some generally regrettable behavior.

Is that the way you saw it? Gadfly invites your perspective. More discussion of the interactions in this later part of the meeting coming.

to be continued . . .