

The FOP president defends his officer

The Bethlehem Gadfly Police June 19, 2020

 Latest in a series of posts about the Bethlehem Police 

“Marijuana mayhem: Bethlehem struggles with decriminalization implementation,” Brown and White, Lehigh University, February 23/March 4, 2020.

Officer William Audelo, head of the Bethlehem Fraternal Order of Police, addressed City Council at the beginning of the June 16, 2020, meeting.

Audelo’s 9-minute address was very forceful. You must listen.

Audelo’s address was broken into two parts: 1) a specific response to the possibility that there was a racial issue surrounding a traffic stop, and 2) a general response to the quality of the relationship between the police department and the community.

Gadfly would like to look at each part individually, beginning with the approximately 4-5 minutes addressing the traffic stop. He will look at the other part in a subsequent post.

Officer Audelo said he was responding to June 3 allegations of racial profiling (physical and verbal misconduct) by Councilwomen Van Wirt and Negron about a September 11, 2019, traffic stop of an Hispanic man at 6th and Hayes. Followers will recognize that Gadfly has been troubled about the way this stop was handled and has written extensively about it (go to **Police** under Topics on the right-hand sidebar and scroll back to February and March). Officer Audelo referenced the Lehigh University *Brown and White* article of February 23/March 4 linked above as the source of the public controversy over this event.

Almost all the material in the *Brown and White* article is familiar to Gadfly and has been reported to you here in the past. Except a quote attributed to the operator: “(The officer) was aggressive and rough with me,” [the operator] said. “I was thinking of my son, I was thinking of my wife . . . I’ve never had any situation with any police officer, never been in

any trouble here. It was a very bad experience.” I don’t remember seeing that quote before, and the *Brown and White* does not give its source. (Parenthetically, would you agree that we’ve heard these words dozens of times in reports of minority residents stopped by police?)

Let’s listen. You must listen. Gadfly says always go to the primary source. Form your own opinion.

Audio Player not available in this archive

“I am here today to say publicly that the allegations concocted by this male are not only false but a work of fiction. The Brown and White article . . . was based on a lie. An article on the world being flat would have been more accurate than the account between that gentleman and our officer. The insinuation that the traffic stop was based on the male’s race was absurd. The officer was parked monitoring an intersection from about seventy-five yards away with no street lights. When the male very clearly drew (?) through the stop sign, it would have been impossible for anyone to determine the race of the driver. I understand that those who rallied to the gentleman’s story had their hearts in the right place. But they were duped. In fact, the most serious policy violation was when the officer offered to park the man’s vehicle so it would not be towed. The officer did park the male’s vehicle — I don’t believe anyone here would like to see him punished for it. The male who lives in West Bethlehem told the officer he was just going for a drive and for some reason just decided to drive the back streets of the Yosko Park area, one of our highest crime areas, with burnt blunts under his seat. During the interaction the officer was alerted to an immigration warrant for someone with the male’s name and even the same scar on his wrist. During the entire interaction between the police and the male, the officer was professional, polite, and treated the male with the same dignity and respect that I would expect my family to be treated with. This allegation came as a surprise to many of us because the involved officer is one of our finest. The officer just finished three months of field training with one of our newest hires, who was a proud Puerto Rican born American. And I am aware what occurred during this training because I was the training sergeant responsible. . . . When the involved officer was hired, he was also trained by a minority. I know for a fact that he was trained to respect every one of our residents because I

trained him. And, you see, I'm the first-born son of a man who came to this country illegally from Mexico. . . . I know what it means to come from nothing, and I know never to underestimate the struggles of a stranger. For these reason I find myself so angry that the man would fabricate this story and pass it off as true. . . . Personally, I believe the man should be arrested for false reports to law enforcement. There is overwhelming evidence to convict him. I can assure you that if this was another person that did not have the political backing and proceeded to accuse someone of a crime, there would have been charges. Tonight I respectfully request that we work together to rectify this situation. As you know, police officers in our city wear body cameras as well as dash cams. While I don't have the authority to release the footage, I can assure you any concerns regarding the incident can be found in the footage. If you have the opportunity to watch the video and find no issues with the officer's conduct, I ask that you publicly rescind the allegations of racial profiling by the officer. I ask that you condemn the man who made the allegation."

Let me make two preliminary observations:

- To Gadfly, the issue was never racial profiling but “racial insensitivity.” Not using race as a pretext for *making a stop* but racially insensitive behavior *during the stop*. Officer Audelo addresses both profiling and insensitivity, but to Gadfly the latter possibility was the key one.
- Officer Audelo indicates the operator has made charges and allegations and wishes him condemned for lying and fabrication. Gadfly is not aware that it is so that the operator has made charges and allegations. As far as Gadfly knows, this situation became public only after the operator talked to the judge who then discussed it with the arresting officer — and this was approximately six weeks after the incident. As far as Gadfly knows, the operator never made a direct charge or allegation. Since the City shut down inquiry, Gadfly can not even be sure that the operator was interviewed as a result of the internal investigation. If the operator himself made charges and allegations, when and where did they occur? The judge, however, did make a formal complaint against the officers. That's the judge who did that not the operator and not even on the operator's behalf. But Officer Audelo is not aiming his condemnation at the judge. But even

in his complaint letter to the Mayor of December 20, the judge is measured in his approach, saying he's "not in a position to verify whether this officer engaged in racial profiling or ethnic intimidation." Gadfly is quite troubled by what seems to him to be misfiring by Officer Audelo and would like to be straightened out.

Now, to make a long story short (or try to), the key point in Officer Audelo's statement is his claim of what can be found in the videos: "*I can assure you any concerns regarding the incident can be [resolved] in the footage.*"

Videos we can't see.

Everything else is beside the point. Officer Audelo's comments on the officer's past record and his prior training mean nothing to the resolution of the controversy here. Officer Audelo's comments on his personal and family history mean nothing to the resolution of the controversy here.

All beside the point.

Blowin' smoke.

Resolution rests on the videos. That simple.

Precisely the point of Councilwoman Negron's comments at Tuesday's Council meeting and explored in [Gadfly's previous post](#).

Let's look at key points the videos might/would resolve:

- The operator says he was on New St. when he noticed he was being followed by police, causing him to detour a bit into a high crime area. Officer Audelo says the arresting officer was parked "monitoring" an intersection. Who is right? Were there cameras on?
- The operator says, "(The officer) was aggressive and rough with me." Officer Audelo says, "the officer was professional, polite, and treated the male with the same dignity and respect that I would expect my family to be treated with." Let's see the tape, and we'll make our own judgments.

- Officer Audelo says the operator has the “same scar” as on the immigration warrant. Gadfly was led to believe the operator had no scar. Let’s see the tape in which the officer verified the scar. We should be able to see the scar.
- The operator indicated that he didn’t give consent for the search. The police report describes a “consent search.” Let’s see that interaction. Gadfly understands (he just plays a lawyer on the blog!) that there are certain conditions that permit a search. Let’s see the reason given for the request to search. There is none on the police report.
- Did the officer park the operator’s car? There’s disagreement on that. Let’s see the tape.

“Tonight I respectfully request that we work together to rectify this situation” of a false report against a police officer, says Officer Audelo.

How in god’s good name can Officer Audelo expect that to happen without the video evidence that he sees but City Council can’t.

Doesn’t make sense.

Officer Audelo, respectfully, you don’t make good sense here.

Do you not see the problem too?

Councilwoman Negron has said she would apologize for doubting. Gadfly has said that too. He bets even the judge would jump on the apology train.

And we would take the operator behind the barn and verbally thrash him.

If video evidence showed proper police behavior.

Something has to be done.

As indicated above, Gadfly will comment on the rest of Officer Audelo’s address in a subsequent post.

The Bethlehem Gadfly