

**Subject:** Re: Pledge of Allegiance Feedback

**Date:** Monday, July 15, 2019 at 11:56:20 AM Central Daylight Time

**From:** Jake Spano

**To:** Tim Brausen

**CC:** Hanna Williams

Hanna-

Thanks for the email on this and my apologies for what is largely a form email response but given the hundreds and hundreds of emails I can't personalize each answer. That said, what follows encapsulates my thoughts pretty well.

To begin with this issue has been without a doubt the most contentious one I've seen in the nearly eight years I've been on the council and from the start, I have not supported the removal of the pledge of allegiance from our regular practices. For me, there are several reasons for this but before I start I want to say that a lot of aspersions have been cast on supporters of this change as being unpatriotic and that's absolutely not the case. Secondly, some have taken the council to task for moving this forward while I was out of town and the fact that I didn't weigh in earlier is my responsibility not theirs. Lastly, while there have been a lot of voices outside of our community weighing in on this I've heard from a huge group of SLP residents who feel as I do, that the pledge should never have been removed and we need to bring it back.

To the removal of the pledge, my objections fall into three categories: issue specific, operational, and the regional and national impacts.

There have been a lot of reasons stated for getting rid of the pledge including its unnecessary, separation of church and state, and inclusivity. It's true it's not legally necessary for our work and yes I want to separate religion from our civic work and there are ways around both of those concerns. All that said, unlike opening the meeting with a prayer as many cities and our state legislature do, I think it's ok for us to acknowledge our connection to our nation when we are in civic spaces by having the US flag in our chambers and by saying the pledge. However, to the idea of inclusion/exclusion as a rationale I have concerns. Over the past month, I've had a number of conversations with non/new citizens about this and they were unanimously in agreement that reciting the pledge was not exclusionary and that in fact, participating in these civic norms made them feel more a part of the group, not less. They also wondered aloud that there were more important things that we should be working on which I completely agree and that brings me to my second point.

From an operational standpoint, this is having a huge impact on our city. We've had to shut down our front desk from taking calls because of this, city and council member's social media has been taken over, we've had to set up dedicated phone and email accounts to handle the messages, and our staff who are people of color and indigenous people, are in some cases being verbally harassed by people who are blaming them for the fact that the pledge is going away. We have important work to do and for the last month, that work largely hasn't happened. It can't continue like this and with the President of the United States talking about SLP on three consecutive days, national news outlets sending correspondents to SLP as well as devoting ongoing programming time to covering this issue, it shows no signs of ending soon. Which takes me to my final set of reasons, regional and national impacts.

I want this conversation to be grounded in our community, however I also know that we don't live in a vacuum. The President's comments last week were not an accident. I've worked for a long time in elections and politics and this issue will be weaponized by conservatives to drive moderates in swing districts towards voting for their candidates and if that happens, it won't matter that we passed aggressive climate policies when the state passes laws that preempt our ability to enforce them. It won't matter if a progressive gets elected president in 2020 if conservatives re-take congress. Honestly, when Governor Walz and Lt. Gov. Peggy Flanagan, who is a SLP resident, make statements supporting the pledge of allegiance then you know it has become a political issue that they are concerned about.

Look, I'd like to think my life and work bears out a commitment to winning on progressive issues and to do that you

pick fights for the right reasons. In the past few days, the emails I've received have largely tracked along the lines of "don't give in to outside pressures" and I understand the urge to stand for something in today's political atmosphere but that feels an awful lot like fighting for the sake of the fight, not for the sake of the issue. If we want to fight on issues, lets make them our issues not something that no one has asked us for and which has now ground the city to a halt. Every time this council passes a business energy benchmarking ordinance, holds a courageous conversation about race, or adds to our region leading affordable housing strategies, we are making our community and our nation a better, more progressive place to live. Those are the issues worth focusing on and I, like you I imagine, want us to advance those issues but it's nearly impossible to do when you are dealing with residents who want the pledge brought back, full time protestors, the national media, and the President. For our neighbors sake, for our regions sake, and for our nations sake we need to move on.

Believe it or not, there's a longer version of this email but I'm sparing you ;) Thanks for reaching out to me on this and my hope is we can move beyond this quickly.

Jake Spano  
Mayor  
St. Louis Park, Minnesota

On Jul 9, 2019, at 3:42 PM, Tim Brausen <[tbrausen@](mailto:tbrausen@)> wrote:

Ms. Williams: Thanks for the message of support. We as a community will have the opportunity to learn more about patriotism and service through ongoing community discussion of this issue. Regards, Tim

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**From:** Hanna Williams <[naege026@](mailto:naege026@)>  
**Sent:** Tuesday, July 9, 2019 12:38:05 PM  
**To:** Tim Brausen; Jake Spano  
**Subject:** Pledge of Allegiance Feedback

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Hi Jake and Tim,

I am a citizen of ward 4, and I'd like to voice my support of your city council decision to remove the obligatory recitation of the pledge of allegiance before city council meetings.

It was instated through the country as a way to single out potential Communists during the wave of McCarthyism and I think it is honestly outdated. I agree that we show our patriotism through our actions in the community, and the way in which our leaders lead, not by saying a blind pledge to a flag. Representatives should be allowed to say the pledge if they so desire, but a blanket recitation should not be required because it only seeks to bolster ignorant allegiance without criticism. We should be patriotic in our duty, but that sometime comes in the form of criticism and agitation of the current status quo, and I think we should challenge citizens to think this way rather than coaxing unfettered Nationalism. When people aren't able to see past that and challenge what is wrong or corrupt in our government, it hurts us all.

Saying the pledge does disadvantage immigrants because they may not feel comfortable pledging to a country that is new to them, and I don't fault them for that. I would feel the same way if I moved to a

country that is new to them, and I don't fault them for that. I would feel the same way if I moved to a new country. And it doesn't mean that they have any ill will for the citizens of the country at all, just that it's not the country they are used to.

Especially in our current political climate, we should require that people confront the current standard and determine when changes like these are necessary for all people to be comfortable, and for us to most importantly use our time to it's highest benefit. I believe your time can be better spent on city council matters.

Also, I wouldn't worry about our President's meddling in this via Twitter. He's got a track record of throwing his hat in the ring for a minute, but he's all bark and no bite. So feel free to keep the decision to not require it. I thought it was smart to remove it, and I support your council in this matter.

-Hanna W.

St. Louis Park Resident