

“Our liberty depends on the freedom of the press, and that cannot be limited without being lost.”

Thomas Jefferson

OPINION

“Never trouble another for what you can do for yourself.”

Thomas Jefferson

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(OPINIONS EXPRESSED HEREIN ARE SOLELY THOSE OF THE AUTHOR.)

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Retain Bibby as supervisor

Retain Janet Bibby for District 3 Supervisor. Janet has the experience to keep her hand on the pulse of the district and the where-with-all to continue being accessible, whether at the many functions she attends, on the phone or at times in her home.

Janet is able to solve problems or questions in a calm and efficient manner. I don't believe she has broken anything since she has held the supervisor position, and, if I'm not mistaken, when things are not broken, why try to fix them?

Georgene Baxter

Man of his word

Mark Jones is a humble and good man. He is more in touch with the people than the other candidates.

He is well-educated in law enforcement with 21 years in the Mariposa County Sheriff's Department. We can rely on him to do the right thing when needed.

Mark Jones will be a good sheriff of all the people.

The years I have been here in Mariposa

County, Mark Jones has always been honorable and trustworthy and has always done what he said. He is a man of his word.

J. Blevins

Sorry to see him go

I have worked with Dana Hertfelder (Mariposa Public Works Director) for several years, and I am very sorry to him leave. He is a stand-up guy who is honest and abides strictly by the law, County policies, or as directed by the majority vote of the board of supervisors.

Mariposa County does not have a harder worker, dedicated to his job, truthful, with more responsibility and with unlimited working hours on its payroll. I have personally worked with him on the Airport Advisory Committee and the Midpines Planning Advisory Committee. There are those who periodically disagree with him on issues, but no one can fault him for not being reasonable and dedicated in seeking balance for all concerned.

Be assured that this County will feel his absence for a long time. May I just say thank you for all of your service and good luck with your next endeavor.

Marvin Wells

Advice for voters

Owning property in Mariposa County since 1964 was only the beginning. When I retired and moved here in 1985, I never dreamed I would ever be involved in politics.

But I had been receiving the MARIPOSA GAZETTE all of those years, and I knew if you don't care about sheriffs' or judges' activities, don't vote - close your eyes.

Well, being here 25 years, being active in the polls and local clubs, I got to know nearly everyone who loved talking politics.

My advice to caring Mariposa people is to vote for Mark Jones. He will make Mariposa a better, safer, town and you, not the board of supervisors, will elect a new sheriff.

Wally Stiers

Thank you for sharing your thoughts and opinions.

When speech stirs the melting pot, anger boils over

CONTRIBUTED BY CHARLES C. HAYNES, FIRST AMENDMENT CENTER

A civic morality tale is playing out in Lancaster where two city officials have stirred considerable controversy because of their remarks about religion.

City Councilwoman Sherry Marquez started the ruckus last month by posting comments attacking Islam on her Facebook page. Reacting to an alleged "honor killing" of a Muslim woman last year in New York, Marquez wrote that "this is what the Muslim religion is all about — the beheadings, honor killings are just the beginning of what is to come in the USA."

Although Marquez deleted this and other negative comments about Islam an hour and a half later (an eternity in Facebook time), her words spread — and the backlash began.

Only days later, Lancaster Mayor Rex Parris added fuel to the religious fire when he told a crowd of mostly Christian pastors that "we are growing a Christian community and don't let anybody shy away from that. I need Lancaster residents standing up and saying we are a Christian community and we're proud of it."

Not surprisingly, many Lancaster citizens found Marquez's remarks about Islam wrong and offensive — and charged that her statements triggered threats of violence against Muslims in the community.

Parris also was roundly criticized for being deeply mistaken about what kind of city Lancaster is supposed to be under

the Constitution. People of many faiths (including some Christians) reacted with hurt and anger at what they perceived as the mayor's attempt to impose his religion and marginalize minority faiths.

As the debate continues, citizens of Lancaster are lining up on both sides. Dueling Facebook sites have been created to argue for (200 fans) and against (173 fans) removing Councilwoman Marquez from office.

In my view, the remarks of both Marquez and Parris were civically irresponsible. As elected representatives of all the citizens of Lancaster, their duty is to lead and unite — not divide and conquer. But if their religiously loaded comments were over the line, some of the reaction may be over the top.

Soon after the mayor's speech, the Antelope Valley Human Relations Task Force announced an investigation into the remarks of both city officials. Darren Parker, chair of the task force, explained to the Antelope Valley Press that the group "has the ability to deem an incident under its jurisdiction a hate crime or a hate incident based on evidence that has been presented to the task force."

On Feb. 8, the group met to hear citizen complaints about Parris and Marquez and then voted to send letters to both, formally "condemning" their remarks. Although Parker assured me in a telephone interview that this action isn't intended to censor speech, I can't help but worry about the chilling effect of a publicly funded task force condemning the speech of elected officials.

Well-intentioned as the task force ac-

tion may be, it appears to go beyond its stated mission to address "hate crimes." Religious and political groups on all sides have every right to criticize or support statements by public officials. But a human-relations organization created by government and funded with public money should take care not to morph into the speech police.

Ironically, a Muslim member of the task force had to defend himself and his religious community last year when gay activists filed a complaint accusing local Muslims of distributing homophobic literature.

That's the problem with government-sponsored groups monitoring and punishing speech that some people find offensive: What is hate to one is religious conviction for another. Deciding between the two is no business of government.

The Lancaster debate cooled off a bit this week after Parris and Marquez issued apologies at a hastily called press conference. Parris was effusive in his apology to the various faith leaders present. Marquez uttered a terse "I apologize" and walked out.

Deeper questions about religious identity and diversity remain, not just in Lancaster but in towns and cities across America facing new challenges in a changing nation. In our search for answers, let politicians say what they will — and trust the court of public opinion to hold them accountable.

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