

CCS BOE Remarks 3-11-21

Topic: Pending Vote to Retire the Mascot

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It's pretty easy for me to get emotional these days and I've also been known to forget important points, so I prepared the following to read tonight.

Let me start off with an apology that last month I failed to acknowledge the abundant and significant information and letters we received in relation to changing the mascot. Many of those stories and articles left an impact on me and continue to weigh on my mind today.

But since the conversation was so heavily weighted on one side that night, I felt the need to speak up and defend the Natives in our community to offer some balance to the debate. I can assure you that I have been listening, reading, thinking and praying on both sides of this issue. And even after all of that, I still don't have a definitive position on whether the mascot should stay or go.

That's because I am more concerned with the health and well-being of our community and students than with a mascot itself. The mascot is not the divisive entity here – it hasn't divided this community in all of its time in Cambridge. It's the way in which this issue has been brought to the community that is the problem. "It's not what you say, it's how you say it."

I am dumbfounded by the process that we've allowed to play out here in Cambridge – and some of that is on us, the board.

- the use of petitions to try and strong arm an agenda item
- the demand to address a topic right now during a pandemic
- allowing an angry activist to yell at us and belittle our community
- the refusal by some to have a larger conversation with the community
- the hypocrisy to ignore the voices of our own people of color here
- the endless name calling and accusations being cast in every direction
- and simply the threatening emails trying to coheres us to vote a certain way.

I'm embarrassed and saddened at how people are behaving on both sides of the issue. I have cried a river of tears and then some – not over the mascot – but over the people who have behaved so poorly during all of this. How in the heck did we get here!? We are Cambridge – and yet, we are a mess!

I've been reading about social justice and understand it to be both a goal and a process. They go hand in hand. While some have their eye on the prize – to remove the mascot, it seems as if we are skipping out on the homework – the process – the real work. The kind of work that would leave the greatest impact on others.

A vote can provide temporary change. But real, meaningful, long-lasting change starts with real conversations where we are listening to understand each other. Every article I've read about social justice speaks volumes to the importance of conversations and one of the four principles of social justice is participation. Yet when we bring up the idea of a community conversation that would allow everyone a voice, our social justice group simply yells louder: No! Do your job and vote now! That confuses me and concerns me, because are we fighting for social justice or do we simply want to take away a beloved mascot?

I don't like to be rushed. I don't like to be told what to do. I like to do things right, and I like to take my time if I can to make sure we get it right. And that doesn't make me a coward or a racist. God knows my heart and where I stand. And I will not be bullied to vote to change our mascot without a full and collaborated effort to do so.

Amanda Gorman at the Presidential Inauguration said, "And, yes, we are far from polished, far from pristine, but that doesn't mean we are striving to form a union that is perfect, we are striving to forge a union with purpose, to compose a country committed to all cultures, colors, characters and conditions of man.

But how do we forge that union here in Cambridge? Any college professor would say: Follow the 3 Cs of a healthy and prosperous relationship: Communication, Collaboration and Compromise. Folks in this town have been communicating in all sorts of formats – both good and bad. But the collaborate and compromise pieces are missing. Those components represent that participation principle found in the social justice handbook. And without those exercises of inclusion, this vote is nothing more than four individuals using their power and privilege to make a decision for everyone else.

If I vote against the mascot tonight, it's not because of the mascot, it's because of the process or the lack of process we have incurred. Just as I would not vote for the budget without knowing the details of how it will work.

I could however vote in favor of changing the mascot if we followed the three Cs and the proposal that is presented to the board and it included a plan born of an inclusive process that brings our community closer together, rather than apart.

I care about the people in this community too much to cast a rushed and uninformed vote that ultimately changes nothing in the bigger picture because we failed to do the difficult work. Let my vote be a symbol, like the mascot, that it stands for something much bigger than its face value. Let it be a reminder that we can do better than a simple yea or nay on an issue that is clearly so important to all of us.