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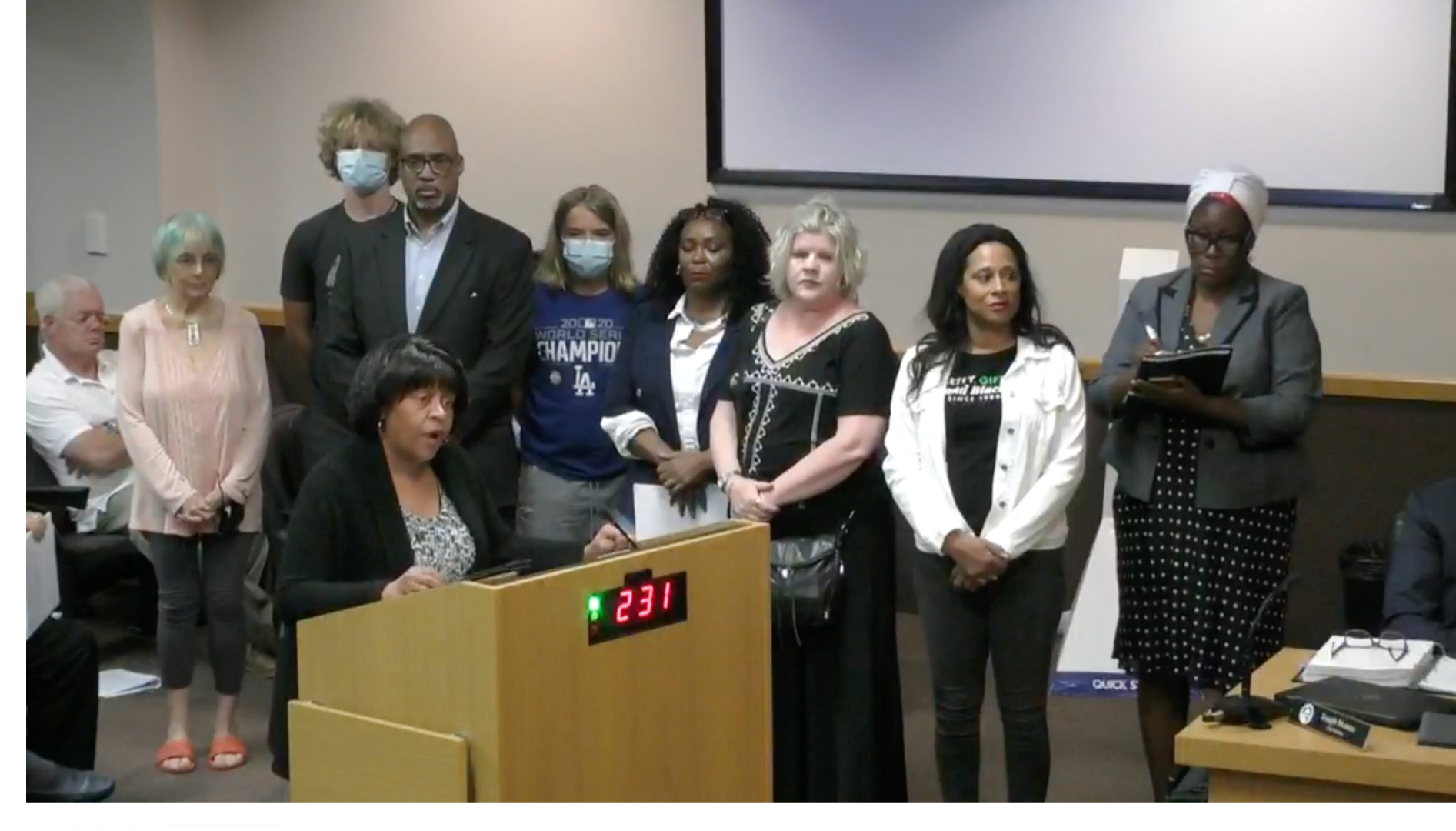
“Sit down and shut up!”: Confederate flag condemned, fury over HR Roundtable at City Hall

JULY 14, 2021 BY RYAN MANCINI (EDIT)

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SCV NAACP president Valerie Bradford spoke to the City Council about the appearance of a Confederate battle flag at a Fourth of July parade held by SCV GOP. Behind Bradford stood fellow NAACP leaders, members and supporters. Screenshot, City of Santa Clarita Government Facebook livestream.

The Santa Clarita City Council was met with condemnation and fury – the former over the appearance of a “triple-threat” flag during a Fourth of July car parade held by the Santa Clarita Valley GOP, the latter over the city’s Human Relations Roundtable – during the public comments of Tuesday’s meeting.

“I’m here tonight to speak out against and to condemn what the Black and other minority residents of Santa Clarita believed was a divisive, racist and inconsiderate GOP rally thinly-veiled as an Independence Day parade held on July 4,” said Valerie Bradford, president of the SCV chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, or NAACP. “It was billed as an inclusive celebration open to everyone when, in fact, it was a party-specific show of support for certain candidates and local officials who seem to have forgotten that they were elected to serve all of [their] constituents in the Santa Clarita Valley.”

Various Santa Clarita elected officials were among those in attendance during the Fourth of July parade, also referred to as a “Trump car rally,” including Councilmember Jason Gibbs, Assemblywoman Suzette Valladares (R-Santa Clarita), Rep. Mike Garcia (R-Santa Clarita), William S. Hart Union High School District trustee Joe Messina and SCV Water Agency trustees B.J. Atkins and Bill Cooper.

Bradford said it was possible the elected officials present were unaware of the flag’s display and appearance, but declared its appearance as “the ultimate insult to Black Americans and Black voters here in Santa Clarita.”

“So now that Councilman Jason Gibbs and the rest of the City Council knows that we were offended by the display of the Confederate battle flag, we ask you, tonight – all of you – to stand up against it and to publicly condemn it on behalf of your Black constituents,” Bradford concluded.

Residents spoke against the flag’s appearance while others questioned the accuracy of the flag’s association with the parade. Resident Carole Lutnes said failure to condemn the flag’s use “gives tacit approval of the Confederate rebellion and to rebellion against our government, which means you are violating your oath of office.” Chairwoman of the GOP 38th Central Committee Sharlene Johnson said misinformation was perpetuated about Gibbs’ participation.

“We’re seeing perpetuation of divisive behavior on all sides of the spectrum,” she said.

Event photographer Ron Jones said he was shocked by the triple-threat flag’s appearance, but did not feel an apology was needed regarding what was intended to be a positive parade.

“That parade was a bright spot in our community... there was no stipulation of who could not attend,” he said.

Resident Steve Petzold noted the Human Relations Roundtable’s (HRR) press release condemning the flag’s appearance, adding that “the activities of that commission...[are] completely out of control.”

“You are out of compliance with your own council norms and procedures,” he continued. “Each one of you council people should tell Bill Miranda that he needs to bring in the members of that committee and tell them not to issue public comments that do not go through the co-chair of that commission.”

He said the HRR needed to be reigned in before they hurt someone. After asking if there was a meeting in the aftermath of the Confederate battle flag’s appearance going viral, Petzold waited for the remaining 40 seconds of his time for an answer. As some in the audience counted down, Miranda said upon the 40 seconds’ conclusion, “You’re time is up.”

Gibbs thanked Bradford for speaking to her and thanked those who came to support him. He clarified that he was at the parade on July 4 and did not immediately respond “not out of fear, [it] was not out of support for this one particular individual, it was to try and get an understanding of what occurred that day.”

“Regarding this flag... I did not know what a triple-threat flag was,” he continued. “I do not know what the Confederate battle flag is and the symbol of hate that it holds for a lot of people in our community.”

He acknowledged comments made by NAACP executive committee member Barbara White, who said to Gibbs he represents all residents in Santa Clarita and he assured he will fight for everyone, including those who did not vote for him.

Gibbs responded to criticism about his involvement at a July 4 car parade where a tripe-threat flag was seen. On the flag’s display, Gibbs said, “It’s not something I would have done.” Screenshot, City of Santa Clarita Government Facebook livestream.

White was met with boos from the audience as she said, “Bob Kellar touted you as a prodigy. Let’s hope that wasn’t because you, too, are an expert in turning a blind eye to racism.”

“You had people stand with you... I have great love and respect for who they are and I know they came here behind you because of your mission to believe and support this community and the people of color in this community to make sure they were heard and respected,” Gibbs said addressing Bradford. “It was the intent of that parade to do so. It saddens me that one person chose to make that decision, and they did so under the right of this great country. It’s not something I would have done.”

Council member Cameron Smyth acknowledged he was also unaware of what a triple-threat flag was.

“I have no problem saying that it’s offensive to me, as I think it should be to all of us,” he continued. “At any time, but particularly frown on Independence Day. Forgive me, I’ve got to question the intelligence of someone who’s going to fly a flag for a [government] organization – that got their asses kicked 200 years ago – on Independence Day. But you want to do that in your constitutional right, that is your right.”

He directed blame on the individual for causing the offense and defended the HRR as a means to bring the community together. Smyth concluded by saying those bearing such flags do not want the community to come together.

Before moving on, Miranda first gave praise to July 3’s first Concerts in the Park. He said it was patriotic but he could not be responsible for all the actions he witnessed that night.

“What I can do... [is] I condemn any, any racist act, any act of abuse anywhere by anyone,” he said. “I condemn that. I’ve said this from here many times already, but I’ll continue to say it... we have to address every issue as it comes. We can’t just give a blanket ‘I condemn.’ Every time we see it, we have to address it, okay?”

He also said he was not going to apologize for the HRR.

“I helped to organize the HRR, for good reason,” he continued. “Cameron was mayor, I was Mayor Pro Tem, and we met with people who have a grievance in our community. We represent everybody in the community, especially those who have a grievance in our community.”

“Yes, maybe it wasn’t perfect. But for you to come here at every council meeting and do your high-roller charades act and say – yes, you!” Miranda pointed at Petzold, who stood up. “Yes you, yes you! Sit down and shut up! We’ve heard enough from you!”

“I will not sit down and shut up!” Petzold yelled back as a Santa Clarita Valley Sheriff’s deputy approached him. Petzold sat down and stayed for most of the remainder of the meeting.

“It’s my turn,” Miranda replied. “You’ve had your 27 seconds of fame. Sit down!”

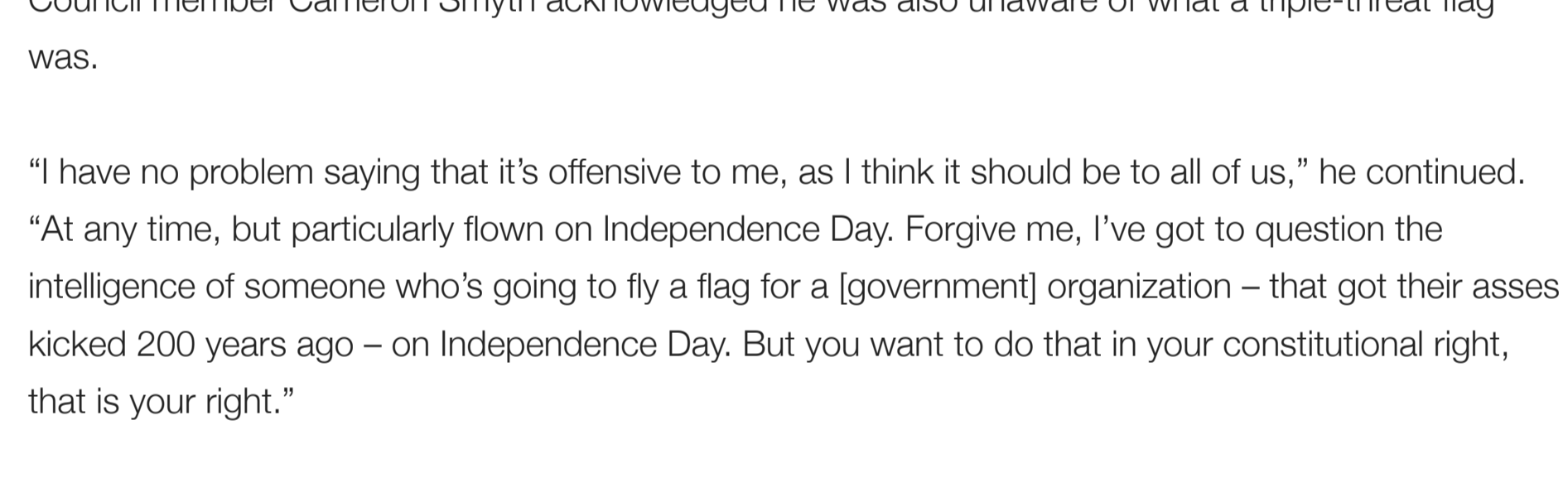
Mayor Pro Tem Laurene Weste called for a recess, as some in attendance booed “No.” Miranda assured there was no need.

“Is it perfect? No, it’s not perfect,” Miranda concluded. “All right, let’s move on... But we all need to know how passionate I am about this issue, okay? I apologize for making the meeting go a little strange.”

Neither Weste nor Councilmember Marsha McLean commented on the Confederate battle flag controversies before the meeting resumed.

Reactivated last September, the HRR is chaired by Miranda and co-chaired by William S. Hart Union High School District board member Cherise Moore. The roundtable’s mission is “to eliminate all forms of racism and discrimination,” according to the city website.

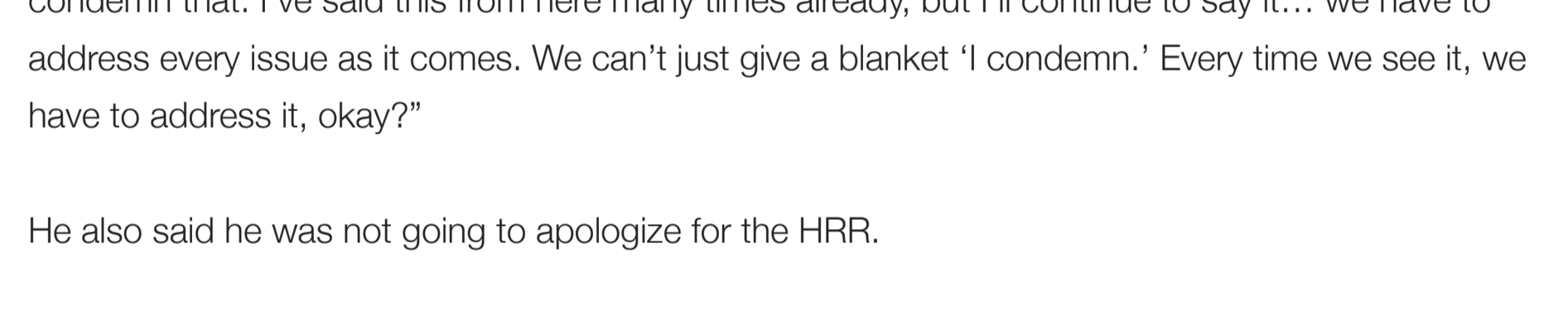
Official statements by Valladares, Garcia, Messina, Atkins and Cooper have not been issued regarding the flag’s appearance at the July 4 parade.



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Ryan Mancini is a journalist, editor and a graduate of California State University, Northridge. Born in Los Angeles, he and his family moved to the Santa Clarita Valley in 2002. He previously covered local news for The Daily Sundial and The Santa Clarita Valley Signal, and he is also a host of the arts and entertainment podcast “Mars on Life.”

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