

STATEMENT REGARDING MV FORWARD SLATE'S
PRESS RELEASE REGARDING ETHICS AND TRANSPARENCY

On March 18, 2021, I posted a document I created called "Elected Official Candidate Commitment signature page" to mountvernoncitizen.org, FB and Nextdoor.ⁱ The document espoused 5 principles that were important to me. The idea was simple: if a candidate knocked on my door asking for a petition signature (a requirement to get on the election ballot), I would only consider signing their petition if they signed my Elected Official Candidate Commitment. I invited other voters to use the document as is, or to use it as a template to create their own signature page, one that espouses their principles.

On April 7, 2021, Danielle Browne reached out to me to share that she, Cathlin Gleason and Ed Poteat had signed a version of my Candidate Commitment. She shared their version with me via a google drive link. They used my first, second, fourth and fifth principles, verbatim- word for word. They offered a modified version of my third principle, and they added 3 new principles. I told Ms. Browne that I thought it was great that they signed this Pledge, and that I liked the principles they added (i.e., #s 6,7, and 8).

On May 20, 2021, I found out that on April 8, the day after Danielle Browne and I spoke, the MV Forward Slate issued an online "press release" to the website Medium.com announcing that they were "Leading an effort to bring ethics, courtesy, transparency and commitment" to Mount Vernon politics.ⁱⁱ They posted their Candidate Commitment- including word for word sections taken from mine- without citing authorship.

A few concerns:

1. Had this press release been posted to the MV Forward website and FB Page, I would have seen itⁱⁱⁱ and I would have reached out to them immediately about the lack of acknowledgement of my work. I created the "Candidate Commitment" as a tool to help voters hold candidates accountable. For the MV Forward Slate to take it, repackage it, and put it in a press release without proper citation was an error on their part.
2. I found out about this press release because someone forwarded an e-mail to me in which a MV resident was pitching the MV Forward Slate to some other residents (none of whom I know) and using the press release as evidence of the integrity of the MV Forward Slate. Since the press release didn't acknowledge my work, the residents on the e-mail would have been left with the impression that the Pledge was the original work of the MV Forward Slate.
3. On May 21, I posted a statement about this to a small FB group I set up^{iv}. Bizarrely, Ed Poteat posted this in response: "In all fairness Chris, we made this commitment before your pledge. It's one of the reasons we decided to run together. That's the thing about good ideas. More than one person can have them...lol. But I'm happy you are holding the candidates accountable."

This is bizarre because the right thing for Mr. Poteat to do was to acknowledge the mistake and correct it (by correcting the press release). Instead, Mr. Poteat attempted to frame the error in a positive light for them with "In all fairness...". Fairness to the MV Forward Slate is not the issue. The issue is the unacknowledged use of someone else's work in a press release. The result is that whoever reads that press release will be under the false impression that the content was the original work of the MV Forward Slate, when half of it was someone else's work.

Consider the 1st principle of the MV Forward Pledge. "I will behave ethically: I will be honest and fair. I will be a model for integrity for the community, particularly for the children living in our community." *I wrote this principle*, but the MV Forward Slate did not acknowledge this fact in their press release. That was a mistake that has not been acknowledged or corrected.

The Candidate Commitment that I wrote is an expression of Principles that are important to me. While citation standards can at times be ambiguous, in this case there is no question that in their press release the MV Forward Slate had an obligation to acknowledge that a significant percentage of the content of their Pledge came from another source.

What's so sad to me about this is that this mistake could have been fixed so easily. The MV Forward Slate just had to adhere to Principle #4 of their Pledge: "I am human and I may make mistakes in my elected capacity. If I make mistakes in my elected capacity, I will report them to the public as soon as possible. In addition, I will give my analysis as to how the mistake was made and what actions will be taken to reduce the risk of making the same type of mistake again."

And for the record, I wrote Principle #4, not the MV Forward Slate.



Chris McDonough 6/13/21

ⁱ My Candidate Commitment Signature Page can be viewed here: <https://mountvernoncitizen.org/blog> (scroll down to "Other Files")

ⁱⁱ The MV Forward Press Release can be viewed here: <https://votemvforward.medium.com/news-mount-vernon-forward-team-signs-candidate-commitment-pledge-on-ethics-and-transparency-4f5d0005216a>

ⁱⁱⁱ Since early April, I've been in the habit of intermittently checking candidate websites and FB Pages. There is no question that I would have seen this press release prior to May 20, 2021 had it been posted by the MV Forward Slate.

^{iv} <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1308902019483373/permalink/1371856246521283/>