

Letter on the Quincy Sun 11/27/2024

Let's Remember: Nothing Is In Vain

It's a welcome surprise to many to hear that the State Ethics Commission's intervention played a part in the mayor's decision to defer his 79% pay raise until the next election cycle. This whole issue started long before summer, and for months there was no news of state intervention.

It's a good thing people never gave up the fight to repeal these raises—they kept pushing forward with petition drives, open letter campaigns, rallies, emails, phone calls, letters to the newspaper, and media interviews. Now that we know the state agency stepped in, it's a strong reminder that, even if the wheels turn slowly, checks and balances can still work!

As an immigrant from a country without democratic governance, this news is especially meaningful to me. Like many immigrants from non-democratic countries, I look to America as a beacon of democracy. Having experienced authoritarian practices firsthand, many of us are especially vigilant about abuses of power—sometimes even more so than people born here. We know the dangers of unchecked authority, which is why we sometimes protest with extra urgency. The open letter campaign urging councilors to hold public meetings and reconsider the raises, for example, started within the Asian community and soon expanded citywide. Within three weeks, over 400 people had signed open letters to city councilors.

Sometimes, though, I feel a bit disillusioned with American democracy. While collecting signatures, I heard people say, "It's the same everywhere; those in power just look out for each other." I've also seen people hesitate to speak up, fearing retaliation from authorities. And the mayor recently singled out a resident in the newspaper simply for criticizing his massive pay raise—a move that felt like a personal attack on dissent. But the fact that the State Ethics Commission actually stepped in—something that would never happen in a non-democratic country—still gives me hope in American democracy. America has structures in place to ensure checks and balances; let's hope that stays strong.

We need to make the most of those checks and balances and, above all, continue our own efforts to protect democracy. The struggle isn't easy anywhere, not even in America. But when we feel disheartened, let's remember: nothing is in vain, and all efforts will pay off eventually.

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