

Letter in the Quincy Sun on Aug. 22, 2024

To the Quincy Sun Editor:

I collected signatures for the referendum petition to repeal the Quincy Mayor's and City Councilors' hefty pay raises at various grocery stores and outside the YMCA. While doing so, I could not imagine doing that if I were still in China. Here in the USA, I don't fear being jailed or having my life made miserable by the government for peacefully petitioning, even if it contradicts the authorities' interests. Let us all hope this remains true in America.

Many Chinese people came out to sign the petition. Not only did they sign, they also picked up petition papers or downloaded them from the AJustQuincy website to help collect signatures at playgrounds, condo meetings, and neighborhood gatherings. Chinese communities are usually quiet, focusing more on personal matters than civic affairs. But why did they rally against these raises this time? They were outraged by the size of the raises and the undemocratic process used to push them through. I heard their major concerns:

1. Compared to the mayor's 79% raise, schoolteachers received a meager 3% raise, making it hard to retain and recruit good teachers, thus affecting the quality of Quincy Public Schools. This could force parents to send their kids to costly private schools.
2. Property taxes increase every year, making it difficult for residents to remain in Quincy. Why do the mayor and city councilors deserve such significant raises, especially when the mayor's pay will surpass that of mayors in New York, Chicago, and Boston?
3. The City Council ignored residents' protests, rushing through the raises with no public hearings.
4. The mayor's pay raise was clearly conceived before last year's election. Why didn't he inform voters about his plan for such a raise and give them a chance to decide? If he had announced his plan and still got elected, there would be no issue. Doing it the other way around is deceitful.

Many Chinese people who signed the petition had voted for the mayor. One Chinese woman told me she felt hurt when the mayor claimed that people against his raise hate him, as she had not only voted for him but also donated to his campaign. She also told me that she wanted to sign the petition but ended up not signing it for fear of retribution.

It is encouraging to see more people in the Chinese community voicing their concerns. Most Chinese immigrants, including myself, came to the US seeking a better life through hard work. While we enjoy the benefits of living in a democracy, many of us don't participate in civic activities as much as native-born Americans or other immigrant groups. I understand this mentality. We did not engage in public affairs in China if it conflicted with the authorities, fearing severe retribution. We don't have a real voting system there either. Before coming to the US from a major city in China, I had never seen a single ballot for electing officers in my 29 years of life there.

So, to my fellow Americans, please cherish and protect the democracy you enjoy, which may be taken for granted here but is a luxury in many other countries. To my fellow Chinese immigrants,

while we have started to involve ourselves in more civic activities, we should continue to engage even more, especially by using the voting rights we gained by living in a democratic country. We can stand side by side with native-born Americans and other immigrant groups to help keep America a beacon of democracy.

Are you angry about the city councilors' ignorance of constituents' objections to the mayor's grotesque pay raise? If the City Councilors refuse to rectify their mistake despite 6,030 voters signing the petition to repeal the mayor's raise and 4,642 for repealing the city council's raise, we should exercise our civic responsibility and vote them out in the 2025 election.

Ziqiang (Susan) Yuan

A Chinese Immigrant and US Citizen

Resident of Quincy