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6-23-18
*submitted by
Richard Merritt

STATEMENT BY RICHARD E. MERRITT
BEFORE CITY COUNCIL PUBLIC HEARING REGARDING DOCKET ITEM 9,
THE RENAMING OF JEFFERSON DAVIS HIGHWAY

SATURDAY, JUNE 23, 2018

MY NAME IS RICHARD MERRITT, I HAVE LIVED IN ALEXANDRIA FOR ALMOST 25 YEARS, AND I AM PROUD TO SAY I WAS AN EARLY SUPPORTER OF BIG CHANGES WITH RESPECT TO THE LOCATION OF THE APPOMATTOX STATUE AND TO THE RENAMING OF JEFF DAVIS HIGHWAY.

I AM HERE THIS MORNING TO URGE COUNCIL TO REJECT THE RECOMMENDATION TO RENAME JEFF DAVIS HIGHWAY TO RICHMOND HIGHWAY AND INSTEAD CONTINUE THE SEARCH FOR THE NAME OF AN ALEXANDRIAN OR A GREAT AMERICAN, LIVING OR DECEASED, WHOSE LIFE AND CHARACTER EXEMPLIFIES OUR CITY'S VALUES AND VISION.

MY ARGUMENT IS BASED PRINCIPALLY ON THE BELIEF THAT A RECOMMENDATION TO ACCEPT RICHMOND AS A SUITABLE SUBSTITUE FOR JEFF DAVIS HIGHWAY IS FAR AFIELD FROM THE ORIGINAL EXPECTATIONS OF THE CITY COUNCIL RESOLUTION WHICH CREATED THE AD HOC ADVISORY GROUP ON CONFEDERATE MEMORIALS AND STREET NAMES ALMOST MORE THAN TWO-AND-HALF YEARS AGO.

THE KEY EXPECTATION TO WHICH I AM REFERRING WAS TO "BRING COMMUNITY VALUES, KNOWLEDGE AND IDEAS INTO ITS DISCUSSIONS AND CONSIDERATIONS."

HAD THAT EXPECTATION BEEN ADHERED TO, ONE WOULD HAVE HOPED FOR A NAME OF AN INDIVIDUAL WHOSE LIFE REPRESENTED OR REFLECTED MANY OF THE KEY VALUES EXPRESSED IN COUNCIL'S BOLD NOVEMBER 2016 "HATE FREE ZONE" STATEMENT - NAMELY **KINDNESS AND COMPASSION, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSIVENESS, RESPECT FOR THE DIGNITY AND WORTH OF EVERY PERSON, EQUAL PROTECTION, AND REJECTION OF INTOLERANCE.**

JEFF DAVIS, OF COURSE, REPRESENTED THE ANTITHESIS OF THOSE VALUES THAT MOST OF US HOLD DEAR TODAY, AND IT IS ALTOGETHER APPROPRIATE – AND I AM ARGUING ESSENTIAL – THAT HIS NAME COME DOWN TO MAKE SPACE FOR ANOTHER NAME THAT WILL DIGNIFY AND HONOR OUR CITY FOR DECADES, IF NOT CENTURIES TO COME.

MOREOVER, IF IT IS TRUE, AS REPORTED, THAT RICHMOND BECAME THE CHOICE OF THE ADVISORY GROUP PRIMARILY BECAUSE, IN THE WORDS OF ONE MEMBER, *“THAT’S WHAT THE ROAD IS CALLED IN FAIRFAX COUNTY,”* AND THEREFORE ALEXANDRIA SHOULD BE CONSISTENT WITH FAIRFAX COUNTY, HOW CAN COUNCIL SERIOUSLY ALLOW THIS CONSIDERATION TO OVERRIDE A UNIQUE OPPORTUNITY – OR PERHAPS A MORAL RECKONING--TO HONOR A LOCAL OR NATIONAL FIGURE WHOSE LIFE REPRESENTS OUR COMMUNITY VALUES?

EARLY IN THE 1930’S, A RACIALLY INSENSITIVE STATE GOVERNMENT IN RICHMOND DESIGNATED US ROUTE 1 WITHIN THE STATE AS “JEFFERSON DAVIS HIGHWAY” TO HONOR THE PRESIDENT OF THE CONFEDERACY.

LATE IN THE SECOND DECADE OF THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY A RACIALLY DIVERSE AND FORWARD-THINKING CITY COUNCIL HAS A RARE OPPORTUNITY TO MAKE AMENDS, IF NOT OFFER A SMALL ATONEMENT FOR A POLICY OR ACTION WHICH, IN THE WORDS OF TA-NEHISI COATES, WAS *“ROOTED IN THE ASSUMED INHUMANITY OF BLACK PEOPLE.”*

“EVERY GENERATION HAS A DUTY,” WROTE DAVID BROOKS, THE CONSERVATIVE OPINION WRITER FOR *THE NEW YORK TIMES*, *“TO ROOT OUT THE STUBBORN WEED OF PREJUDICE FROM THE CULTURE.”*

COUNCIL CAN BEST FULFILL THAT CHALLENGE BY REJECTING RICHMOND AND COALESCING AROUND AN INDIVIDUAL WHOSE LIFE REPRESENTS OUR GREAT CITY’S BEST VALUES AND VISION.

WHETHER IT WAS DIVINE INTERVENTION OR ONLY PURE COINCIDENCE, I AM ASKING EACH OF YOU TO TAKE A MOMENT TO

REFLECT ON THE MOTIVES AND INSPIRATION BEHIND THE ACTION THAT WAS TAKEN JUST FIVE DAYS AGO IN RICHMOND -- HOW IRONIC - TO CHANGE THE NAME OF J.E.B STUART ELEMENTARY SCHOOL TO HONOR THE 44TH PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES, BARACK OBAMA.

I LEAVE YOU WITH JUST ONE BRIEF QUOTE FROM JASON KAMRAS, THE RICHMOND SCHOOLS SUPERINTENDENT: "*THIS IS THE FORMER CAPITAL OF THE CONFEDERACY, AND J.E.B STUART IS AN INDIVIDUAL WHO FOUGHT TO PRESERVE SLAVERY. ...THE SCHOOL IS THE ONLY ONE IN THE CITY NAMED AFTER A CONFEDERATE FIGURE, AND THAT THE MOVE TO RENAME IT REFLECTED THE PROGRESSIVENESS AND DIVERSITY OF THE CITY,*"

SOUND FAMILIAR?

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6-23-18

Gloria Sitton

From: Brian Kelley via Call.Click.Connect. <CallClickConnect@alexandriava.gov>
Sent: Wednesday, June 20, 2018 6:12 PM
To: City Council; City Council Aides; Alexis Lacy; Call Click Connect; Gloria Sitton
Subject: Call.Click.Connect. #150445: Mayor, Vice Mayor, City Council Dear City Council and Mayor,I am...
Attachments: map.png
Follow Up Flag: Follow up
Flag Status: Flagged

Dear *Call.Click.Connect.* User

A request was just created using *Call.Click.Connect.* The request ID is 150445.

Request Details:

This is a "private" request. Information should only be provided to the original customer.

- Name: Brian Kelley
- Approximate Address: No Address Specified (See [map below](#))
- Phone Number: No Phone
- Email: bpkell@gmail.com
- Service Type: Mayor, Vice Mayor, City Council
- Request Description: Dear City Council and Mayor,

I am a resident of Alexandria, and I favor renaming Rt. 1 to Richmond Highway. As a member of Grassroots Alexandria, I have become aware that for some in the group, this name change does not go far enough. They are asking the Council to name the road after a great Alexandrian or American figure, though there is no consensus who this person should be, and they associate Richmond with its history as the capital of the Confederacy more than as the capital of Virginia. The city's ad hoc advisory group was asked to bring community values into the name change. I believe it did just that by deciding to remove the name of pro-slavery and anti-American Jefferson Davis from our streets, replacing it with the name of the state capital that the road eventually connects to. It is not just because Fairfax County calls it Richmond Highway, but because Arlington is also thinking about calling it that. Naming one road one name over several adjacent municipalities should be as noncontroversial as it is intuitive to people traveling along Rt. 1 from out-of-town. No one is marginalized by this choice. Please do not restart the entire process now that we are so close to a conclusion.

Sincerely,
Brian Kelley

- Expected Response Date: Monday, June 25



Please take the necessary actions in responding, handling and/or updating this request at the [Call.Click.Connect. staff interface](#).

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6-23-18

Gloria Sitton

From: William Euille <williameuille@gmail.com>
Sent: Wednesday, June 20, 2018 12:57 PM
To: City Council; Mark Jinks; James Banks; Gloria Sitton
Subject: Docket Item 9 for Saturday, June 23, 2018

Dear Mayor and City Council Members,

Due to personal family matters, I will not be able to attend the Public Hearing on Docket Item No. 9, regarding the Renaming Jefferson Davis Highway, Ordinance 18-7755, schedule for a Roll Call Vote on Saturday, June 23, 2018.

I am both personally and historically opposed to the name "Richmond", and would encourage Council to not take any formal action at this time, and further, to delay a decision to a future date, to allow for other more "appropriate names" to be offered up and considered.

Your prompt attention and consideration would be most appreciated.

Always,
Bill Euille
Former Mayor

Sent from my iPhone