

CB9-2017

Statement by: **Jon Weinstein**

02/08/17

I beg your indulgence to read this entire message (albeit long) to understand why I voted “No” to CB9.

Over the course of what has been an incredibly contentious and divisive debate over the fate of this legislation, it has become clear to me that many of the arguments offered on both sides of this issue have not been firmly grounded in fact or reasoned analysis.

Linking the horrible executive orders introduced over the past two weeks with this bill is misguided and would have no impact on the bill if it became law. The threat of swarms of undocumented immigrants descending upon Howard County is hyperbole. One local news show even suggested the bill would “*shield illegal immigrants from some legal penalties.*” That statement was just stupid. These are just three examples of the arguments regarding CB9 that only serve to distract us from the real issue – that is, some members of our immigrant community are **experiencing real fear** of what a future in our community will look like for them, their families, and their friends.

In my deliberations regarding this bill I have spent time listening to people holding opinions spanning the spectrum, particularly people with a direct role working with members of our immigrant community. Considering the voluminous testimony, emails, calls, meetings, and conversations, I have come to believe two key problems with the bill:

- The bill falls short in that it will do very little in practical terms to allay the day-to-day fear and anxiety experienced by members of the undocumented immigrant community. To be clear, the bill’s sponsors introduced and passed a bill that **eliminated the word “Sanctuary”** from the sanctuary bill. One leader in the foreign-born community testified during the public hearings that **this was the most important part of the bill, since it did nothing else to change existing police or government practices.**
- The bill complicates interactions between this already vulnerable community and the County government, especially the Police. Our county’s Police Chief and other law enforcement officials made that clear in their testimony as well as to me in meetings I had to understand the bill’s impact. Also, during the work session I articulated my concern based on my experience as an Officer in the Army Reserve Military Police.

As I wrestled with how to vote on this bill, I met with several constituents. In one such meeting with three folks, one said that if I voted for the bill they would work diligently on my re-election effort. This particular constituent has been vigorously supporting the bill and tweeting many times each day to compel me to support it. I asked if one of the reasons she voted for me in 2014 was because she thought I was a deliberative person and would consider issues thoughtfully and based on each issue’s merit. She agreed that was an important reason. I offered that my decision on CB9 is a result of thorough deliberation, thoughtful consideration of the merits, and an analysis of whether or not the bill would achieve a positive outcome. In this case, it happened to be a decision with which she did not agree.

Like my constituent, I believe my Council colleagues have also come to know me as a deliberative person, willing to listen and work together on important... and even mundane issues. The issue of fear among some members of our immigrant community, particularly those that are undocumented, is a very serious matter, requiring serious consideration and care. Our duty is to provide tangible and sustainable outcomes for this community – to be a voice for those that cannot speak for themselves. I, personally, do not take that duty lightly.

This brings me to one of the most fundamental issues I have with CB9. I am not convinced that the bill sponsors were as thoughtful and deliberative on this issue as they should have been before filing this bill. The process underlying the development and introduction of this bill did not reflect the overwhelming importance of the issue at hand. Some in the immigrant community, documented and undocumented, are experiencing real fear that must be addressed, and while the bill sponsors may have listened to the passionate and compelling concerns of some individuals, I believe they missed the opportunity to invite and receive input from or invite feedback from other perspectives critical to forming an effective bill with concrete outcomes, especially local organizations that work with and understand the breadth of issues within the immigrant population in our community.

In my business career, and in my experience so far as a public servant, most solutions fall short unless you engage key stakeholders. An issue of this importance demands a thorough, inclusive, and rational deliberative process – the kind of process that leads to effective and sustainable solutions that we can be proud of years from now. In the absence of this kind of process, CB9 could not fulfill its true potential. The result was a **purely symbolic bill**, incapable of bringing about the benefits its supporters hoped it would deliver. Had a more deliberative process taken place, more time given to listen, learn, and understand, I believe a more meaningful and effective result could have been possible.

I'm not so naive to believe that I could be an elected official and not have to work within a political process. However, the level of partisanship at the local level has reached a fever pitch and has truly surprised me; a situation certainly complicated by the federal climate. I have been the target of a few snide comments, and a couple serious ones about appearing to be cozy with the County Executive, a Republican, during the recovery efforts for the Ellicott City flood. To me that was annoying, bordering on obnoxious because I was elected to serve my District and community which requires me to have good working relationships with many people in government, and particularly the Executive who is responsible for running that government, regardless of his or her party affiliation. As an aside, I have also been called a bad Jew because of my CB9 vote. I wonder if the name calling and ugly comments people engage with the safety of social media makes them feel better about themselves, adds to the quality of the debate, or reflects behavior of which their children, spouse, parents or siblings would be proud.

As it relates to CB9... demeaning this important issue by painting it with a partisan brush is, in my opinion, unconscionable. Since it's introduction, when folks started to feel I'd vote against it, I've been called out for not being a good Democrat. The way I see it, my main concern is with being a good person and a faithful public servant. Making prudent decisions on behalf of my constituents and community requires me to look through an unbiased lens, not a blue or red one. Morality and faith are not the providence of any political party but found in the intersection of our hearts and minds, informed by our own experiences, and

for many our faith. To be blunt... If I voted based on the “politics” or “optics” (another thing I was warned about by some), I would have voted “Yes”.

So besides voting “No” what did I do? For those in politics or in Howard County that know me as a business owner and active community member, they won’t be surprised to learn that I went to work to find a path that would provide tangible benefits for the people the bill was purported to help. I repeat, one of the reasons I voted against CB9 was that it would do very little in practical terms to allay the day-to-day fear experienced by the undocumented immigrant community. I worked with stakeholders in our County government and our non-profit community to get to the heart of the matter and to directly address the core issues confronting undocumented individuals in our community.

The solution that was developed buckled under the pressure and ugliness of the debate and the personal assault on the people working on the action. I was disheartened by the failure to achieve an agreement, but more saddened that tangible support for undocumented people in our community would be delayed. In my remarks when I voted against CB9, I asked the County Executive and relevant non-profit organizations to work together to review our existing policies and practices to insure that County employees, in the conduct of their official duties, do not deny services based on an individual’s immigration status nor inquire into his or her status except as required by federal or state law.

So why did I spend the time to work with others, particularly members of the “other party” to develop a solution outside the construct of CB9? **If you’re like me, you’re tired of watching one side of an important issue demeaning the other side in an effort to “win” a battle over.** These battles, that need winners and losers are tearing our country apart, and are now infecting our community, piercing the Howard County “bubble.” So since being elected, actually well before being elected, I have sought to stake out a solid foundation in the “Middle.”

The Middle is NOT the place indecisive Democrats and Republicans go or where Independents are stuck; it is a place where people come to work together. Everyone is welcome, even just for one or another issue. The Middle is not a place on the political spectrum; it is an actual community with rules and processes of engagement we follow voluntarily, not for the sake of having or following rules, but together, to create real solutions. Without process and rules, our passions and egos dominate, and those we seek to help, suffer. The people who come to or live in the Middle do not always agree. In fact, respectful disagreement is core to the value of the constructive conversations that take place in that special place known as the Middle.

In 1994 I left the Republican Party for the Democrats; or as people often say, I felt the “party left me.” I was concerned with the “culture war” that was declared by Newt Gingrich at that time and found the Democrats welcoming, even though my positions on issues ran the political spectrum. I’m concerned that the politics and partisanship that dominates our public discourse has degraded both parties to the point of no return. This is a future that we cannot leave our children. We have to change our own behavior and seek to elevate public discourse. We have to ask ourselves what example are we setting for children and what kind of blueprint are we leaving in our wake.

While the debate on CB9 exposed fissures in our community's unity, we can all do our part to contribute constructively to and raise the standard of public discourse in our community. Here's what I commit to doing:

- Remain deliberative and thoughtful on matters before the Council.
- Work with key stakeholders to accomplish tangible results whenever possible, regardless of party affiliation, opposing position on the issues, or previous positions on issues.
- Avoid the name calling, shaming, threats, and other uncivil behavior that are present in our public arena today.
- Provide vigilance on issues important to my constituents and the community.
- And on this issue... work with community organizations like HopeWorks and FIRN to promote and support their efforts to address the fear experienced by members of the immigrant community.

The divisive politics that has infected national politics and has seeped into our community cannot be allowed to become the norm. **We all must work together to build a stronger Howard County. To do that, you may have to visit the Middle. I hope you will join me there and I look forward to working with you.**

Jon Weinstein, Chair

Howard County Council

Councilman, District 1

– Ellicott City, Elkridge, Columbia, and Hanover