



Minnesota House of Representatives

PROTEST AND DISSENT

Pursuant to Article IV, Section 11 of the Minnesota Constitution we the undersigned submit the following response to the protest and dissent submitted on April 7th, 2017, in response to Minority Leader Melissa Hortman's comments on the floor on Monday, April 3rd, 2017.

The House was debating the public safety finance bill, and specifically an amendment to remove a provision of the bill that would increase penalties on protesters. Several representatives spoke eloquently in favor of the amendment, including Representatives Becker-Finn, Flanagan, Allen, Moran, Omar, Maye Quade, and Kunesh-Podein.

Minority Leader Hortman thought it was important for other members of the House to hear these speeches, which was why she spoke out.

The protest and dissent submitted by the Speaker and Majority Leader indicate Leader Hortman improperly brought race and gender into the debate and that she questioned members' motives. We disagree.

The race and gender of the speakers were relevant to the debate. As members of the House debated the power of protest to advance civil rights in Minnesota, race and gender were relevant. Members had both Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s Letter from the Birmingham Jail and a photograph of Dr. King's march on the Edmund Pettis Bridge on their desks during the debate, and several members referenced those documents. A discussion about civil rights necessarily compares the rights and experiences of the most privileged members of society, who comprise the majority of the political and economic power structures - namely white men - to the rights and experiences of members of society who have had to fight in courts and legislatures to have those very same rights legally acknowledged and recognized - namely people of color and women.

Representative Paul Thissen described how Robert Kennedy responded to proposals to increase penalties on protesters in the 1960s. Robert Kennedy suggested that rather than contemplate increased penalties, the better response would be to invite people from the communities who were protesting to the table of government, so those already seated at the tables of power in society

might listen, determine whether there was an injustice to be remedied, and if there was, to work on addressing the injustice - and thereby address the underlying cause of the protest.

Following Rep. Thissen's speech, several members of color spoke about very specific and personal injustices they had experienced and how their experiences as people of color or members of indigenous communities gave them a different perspective on protests and their role in advancing the fight for equal rights.

The gender and racial identity of the speakers was relevant because they shared experiences that white members have not had.

The gender and identity of a group of some members who were missing the speeches was relevant, too, because those members had the most to learn from the point of view shared by Representatives Becker-Finn, Moran, Allen, Flanagan, Omar, Maye Quade, and Kunesh-Podein.

As members of the Minnesota House of Representatives in 2017, we are fortunate to serve in a legislative body that includes diverse voices at the table of government. We are fortunate that different members bring different perspectives to the House floor.

In this context, race and gender were relevant to the debate on April 3, 2017. Leader Hortman did not question motives. For those reasons, we are submitting this protest and dissent in response to the protest and dissent submitted by the Speaker, the Majority Leader, and others on April 7th, 2017.

In the wake of the controversy generated by Leader Hortman's comments and the response to her comments, we hope that elected representatives in the Minnesota House will work harder to listen to each other. We cannot hope to bridge the gulfs that divide us on various issues unless we start by listening to each other. In addition, we hope that other people will join me in speaking up to make sure all voices are heard. Now more than ever, we must build each other up and work together for a better future.

Further, pursuant to Article IV, Section 11 of the Minnesota Constitution, we direct that our protest and dissent be entered into the Journal of the House of Representatives.

Respectfully submitted,

Melissa Hortman

MA
Rena Moran