

From Hong Kong to Hoboken – Why Elections Matter!

Dear People of Hoboken,

The story of my life is a tale of two worlds. As the son of an American father and a Hong-Kongese mother my life is spent in two homes. I lived in Hong Kong long enough to love that city and experience sadness when in 1997 Hong Kong became part of China. So began the slow erosion of freedom.

Under British rule, as the child of a Hong Kong citizen I possessed both the rights to live and vote in Hong Kong. Unfortunately, when I went to renew my Hong Kong Identity Card the Chinese government took away my right to vote. The bureaucrat justified the action by simply looking at me and saying that “you are not Chinese.” It’s that easy for rights to be taken!

20 years later another self-serving politician reminded me of that day in the worst possible way. Instead of taking immediate legal action or speaking out; I put the Hoboken Housing Authority ahead of my own interests and upheld my oath. If I am the only person who cares about words and oaths then so be it. I should rather die as the man I have become than live in quiet desperation bereft of integrity. When I have a family how may I teach my sons or daughters to walk tall in the world with dignity and self-respect if I do not now stand up for myself?

In May 2017, both Hoboken City Councilmembers and HHA Commissioners under the direction or influence of City Council President Giattino engaged in political retaliation and race-based discrimination. My refusal to participate in the termination of HHA employees precipitated their anger. Giattino’s campaign treasurer called and said, "You do not get any credit for being Asian." That there is a "consensus" of Commissioners and City Councilmembers that you should not be HHA Chair. And, that "it would be inappropriate for two white people to serve as Chair and Vice-Chair," despite already serving in that position. This racist consensus used my ethnicity, race, skin color, and national origin as discriminating pretexts to not only deny me the opportunity to serve as Chair, but also remove me as Vice-Chair.

Take a moment to fathom the offensiveness of declaring that I am not Asian looking enough to count as a minority therefore it is “not appropriate” to serve as Chair. And, simultaneously deeming me “too white” to continue serving as Vice Chair; making it “appropriate” to discriminate and deny me both positions.

The inspirational protests of the Hong Kong people remind me how those in power have contempt for people without power. In solidarity with the protestors, my friends, and my family, I protest the autocratic way with which my civil rights were violated by the Hoboken City Council and Hoboken Housing Authority. Their egregious record is why it is so precious to have elections. Show the people of Hong Kong how democracy works; show the protestors what they are fighting for! Hold this City Council accountable. Vote the bums out!

James Sanford
A Proud American