

ADDRESS TO THE EDGAR COUNTY 911 BOARD  
IN RESPONSE TO THEIR ATTEMPT TO LIMIT THE  
PUBLIC'S RIGHT TO PETITION THE GOVERNMENT

My name is Donna Throneburg. I am a citizen of the United States of American and a resident of Edgar County Illinois.

At the last meeting of the ETSB, held on January 9, 2012, the ETSB passed a policy stating that the public's right to speak concerning issues, controlled by a tax payer funded body, will be limited to items on the current or on the previous agenda. The policy further stated that one person, and one person alone, will decide whether a citizen's concern has enough validity to be included on the agenda.

While this policy is a clear violation of the first amendment to the US Constitution, for this evening, I will speak per your policy regulations. I will address the policy limiting the right of citizens of this county to address a government body. I quote Dee Burgin, from the meeting on 1/9/12, "This is how its gonna go. (sic) If they want to comment in public session, about this or a previous agenda, they can." By your own rules, I have five minutes to address this issue. As this board has previously expressed its disdain for answering questions from the public, any questions that I ask will be rhetorical. I do not expect an answer. In fact, I will not be interrupted.

In 1776, this country fought a war for independence. One of the reasons for that war and that demand for independence was the objections of the colonies to taxation without representation. The citizens of Edgar County pay taxes to fund this body. I, as a tax payer, do not feel represented when I am told that one person will decide if my concerns are valid.

I quote now from the First Amendment to the Constitution of the United States of American. "Congress shall make no law respecting the establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press, or of the right of the people, peaceably, to assemble and to petition the government for the redress of grievances." If the Congress cannot, legally, usurp the rights of the people to address their government, I question, under what authority, does the ETSB have that right. In 1927, Supreme Court Justice, Louis Brandeis, writing in regard to Whitney vs. California said, "Although the rights of free speech and assembly are fundamental, they are not in their nature absolute. Their exercise is subject to restriction, if the particular restriction proposed, is required in order to protect the State from destruction or from serious injury-political, economic, or moral. Only an emergency can justify repression. Such must be the rule if authority is to be reconciled with freedom. Such, in my opinion, is the command of the Constitution. It is therefore always open to Americans to challenge a law abridging free speech and assembly by showing that there was no emergency justifying it." What, pray tell, is the emergency that justifies this governmental body's attempt to limit free speech in a public forum?

While I would never claim to be a Constitutional scholar or a historian, anyone who is acquainted with me, knows of my love of history, especially American history. I am in awe of my country. A country founded on the inalienable rights of mankind. Rights that 1.3 million American men and women have given their lives to defend. Besides the Bible, some of the most eloquent documents ever written were composed by defenders of those rights. The Declaration of Independence, The Constitution, and the Gettysburg Address are among the greatest of these. All three documents confirm that the power of government is established, and can be abolished, by the will of the people. Government exists, in this country, by the consent of the governed. The first



three words of the Constitution are "We The People". Note the words, We The People. Not we the founders. Not we the moneyed classes, Not we the political elite. Not we the people of power and influence, however large or small that sphere may be. I address this body as one who has no influence, no riches, no political power. If I were a person of power and influence, I might be tempted to approach the issue in another way. I could, I suppose, use that power and influence to, I don't know, to maybe make life difficult for the people who don't agree with me. Maybe even cause them to lose their job. But I think not. I would not be able to live with the irony of behaving in such a manner while at the same time worshiping my Savior, who was crucified, by the Romans, for his political activities. In fact, I am grateful that the temptation to do harm such as this is not within my power. I shall be content to have, as my only protection, the most powerful armor ever known to man-my God and my rights as an American citizen. In time, I may pay for having taken a stand here, but not today.

I believe that the issue at hand calls for a short, extremely simplified, condensed lesson on American history. When I use the word "we" in this lesson, I am speaking of a generalized we the people.

I like to, sometimes, imagine my country as a big vehicle that all the people are traveling through history to our destiny as Americans. The immigrants who came to America, decided that they no longer wanted to live in the Castle with Kings and Emperors. So they moved to the carriage house where there was more freedom, mainly because it was so far removed from the Castle. In time, the freedom loving colonists decided that it was time to set out on our own. But the king tried to lock the doors of the carriage house. There was nothing left for the colonists to do but break through the doors to freedom. This is it-our backs to the corner-The American Revolution. Imagine, again, the sacrifice of the ill-equipped, out-manned, out-gunned American army. An

army so poorly clothed even that they left bloody footprints in the snow at Trenton because many had no shoes. From the highest in command to the lowliest private, the entire country suffers and sacrifices. General Washington leaves his beloved Mount Vernon to lead the Patriots and does not see it again for six years. Through battle, disease, cold, snow, and hunger, the army and the revolution were kept alive by the dream of freedom. Freedom not just for themselves, but for their descendants. Our legacy.

Through sheer determination, and I believe, Divine Intervention, against all odds, we win that war. Our Independence costs the lives of more than 25,000 Americans. The founders write and the country adopts, that amazing document-The Constitution. So we all get in the wagon and set out on the open road to destiny. Quoting a response, traditionally attributed to Benjamin Franklin, "We have a republic, if we can keep it".

The king tries, one more time, to put the wagon back in the carriage house, but we Americans cherish our freedom and are not going to give it up without a fight. This is it-our backs to the corner-The War of 1812.

Again, against the most powerful army in the world at the time, we triumph. The founders have pledged their lives, their fortunes, and their sacred honor for this dream called the United States. Some have passed away. Some did indeed lose their lives and or their fortunes, but none, save one, sacrificed their sacred honor. The founders hand the reins of the wagon to the people and warn us through the years to be ever vigilant. Read the Federalist Papers. The founders warn us to stay awake, be watchful, and let no influence, foreign or domestic, undermine the freedoms payed for with the blood of so many Americans. The founders know that the road will not be smooth. They know that there is an enormous, man made, mountain that stands in the way of the carriage. That mountain is called slavery. The founders know that the mountain



must be destroyed for the country to reach the lofty ideals that it was founded on, but they have done all that they can for now. It is for a new generation of Patriots to destroy the mountain.

For now, it is fairly comfortable in the wagon for most. It's a busy time in America. The country becomes complacent. But because this is a nation blessed by God, a few remain awake and continue to shout warnings about the mountain looming in the distance. In 1860, Abraham Lincoln is elected President of the United States and the wagon crashes into the mountain. The wagon splits into two. This is it-our backs to the corner-The Civil War.

The Civil War-the bloodiest conflict in our nations history. An average of 599 deaths per day. Through it all, despite the ever present threat of assassination, the government and our president remain easily accessible to the people. In President Lincoln's day, you or I could walk right into the White House, and if he were home, and had time to see us, we could meet with the President. Colonel Robert Gould Shaw of the 54<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts (remember the movie Glory?), writes home about the time that he found himself in Washington and he and a friend decide to go to meet the President. He walks into the White House and, indeed, meets and visits with Lincoln. 150 years ago, the people would have never imagined that the government would become so inaccessible to their descendants. Of course, they did not imagine a time when government would become a life time career choice.

The American Civil War costs more than 625,000 American lives. Lincoln feels the loss of every soldier, north and south, because they are all Americans, but he knows that the Union must be preserved at all cost. The wagon has to be repaired or neither nation will survive. Both the Union and the Confederacy will be vulnerable to outside attack and a never ending struggle with each other. The war is won. The sin of slavery is atoned for in blood.

What an awesome chapter in the history of this country. Where else in history does a nation fight its own and emerge stronger than before? With all of its faults, this is a majestic country. The greatest and best hope of the world. The first to render aid to those in need, even to our enemies. The most generous nation in the history of the world. American exceptionalism? You damn right!

After the war, Lincoln wants to destroy the mountain completely. He knows that the rocks and hills and remains of the mountain will continue to interfere with the destiny of the country. The remains of the mountain are called racism, Jim Crow, and segregation. But the nation is weary. Lincoln is assassinated and the nation mourns a martyr to the cause of freedom. On the last day of his life, President and Mrs Lincoln go for a carriage ride. They talk about the things that they would like to do when Mr Lincoln's second term ends. Mrs Lincoln wants to go to Europe. Mr. Lincoln will, of course, as always, indulge her. Mr. Lincoln says that he would like to see the American west, but more than anything he wants to return to his beloved Illinois. Would the approachable Mr Lincoln even recognize Illinois today?

With the war over, we all climb back in the wagon, ignoring the remains of the mountain. We turn toward settling the west and an amazing period of invention and innovation. The wagon is busy and comfortable. We relax while the government continues the systematic removal of Native Americans.

In the 1830's, we get a bus (steam powered at first, gasoline later on). We are a free people, but some of us are sitting in the back of the bus. Being Americans, and because this is what Americans do, the people in the back of the bus question why they are sitting there. Their ancestors fought and died in the Revolution, the War of 1812, the Civil War, World Wars I and II and in every other conflict that their country was engaged in. They pioneered, invented, farmed, mined, built railroads, and brought law and



order. So those brave Americans got off the bus and demanded that the rights, guaranteed to them in the Constitution, be honored by all government, including the local ones because that's what Americans do. Dr Martin Luther King, Medgar Evers, James Chaney, Michael Schwerner, Andrew Goodman, and four little girls attending Sunday school at the 16<sup>th</sup> St. Baptist Church in Birmingham were among the many martyred for the cause. Their blood leveled the remains of the mountain called Jim Crow and segregation. The Klan and its ilk still ride in an attempt to protect that last bastion called racism. What a proud day 9/11/2001 must have been for those original terrorists, the Klan. Al Qaeda learned the lessons that the Klan taught well. Do not attack on the battlefield like a people of honor. Instead, terrorize and murder those who are just trying to raise their families and make their way in the world.

September 11, 2001. This is it-our backs to the wall-The War on Terror.

The bus has been very uncomfortable in recent years. The sacrifices made by those who went before us have been forgotten by many. Big government, championed by progressives like FDR, has continually attempted to lure We the People into a sense of apathy while they try to take the reins of government. The founders envisioned a small federal government, limited in scope and power. Government was to be at the local level. They envisioned active participation from the people. Read the Constitution. Read the Federalist Papers. Read your country's history. In many ways they have succeeded. They have eroded the rights of the people. But there is hope on the horizon. Hope in the scores of young men and women who enlisted in the armed services when their country was attacked. Hope in the rise of patriotic Americans who are determined not to surrender their country. The days of the government, whether Federal, State, or Local telling the tax payer to sit down, shut up, and write the check

are coming to an end. We the American people are the heirs of this Republic. It is our job to protect it from all enemies, foreign and domestic. We are the sons and daughters of immigrants and pioneers, of slaves and Native Americans, of a free people who from Lexington and Concord to Iraq and Afghanistan have sacrificed, bled, and died for freedom.

To make the excuse that other local government bodies have also attempted to interfere with the people's right to address them is a little like saying that Jim Crow is law in Alabama so it must be okay for us folks in Mississippi as well.

Remember that the signers of the Declaration of Independence pledged "their lives, their fortunes, and their sacred honor"? There is no honor in what you have tried to do here.

It should escape the notice of no one that the only dissenting vote concerning this resolution came from a US military veteran.

Let us remember the words of Abraham Lincoln at Gettysburg in 1863, words that should speak to Americans from age to age and in every circumstance:

Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent, a new nation, conceived in liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.

Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived and so dedicated can long endure. We are met on a great battle-field of that war. We have come to dedicate a portion of that field, as a final resting place for those who gave their lives that a nation might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this.

But in a larger sense, we can not dedicate, we can not consecrate, we can not hallow this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here have consecrated it far above our poor power



to add or detract. The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here. It is for us, the living, rather to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us-that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion-that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain-that this nation under God shall have a new birth of freedom-and that government of the people, for the people, and by the people shall not perish from the earth.

In regards to this board's attempt to limit the public's right to address government, in honor of the blood and sacrifice of the more than 1.3 million Americans, I can only ask-Are you serious? Does that venerated document, The Constitution, mean nothing to you? This board expressed that they may have to stay more than an hour if limits are not placed on the people's right to speak. In honor of patriots who fought and died in the rain and the snow, in oppressive heat and bitter cold, in battlefields far from the comforts of home, I can only ask-Are you serious? Or are you attempting to avoid uncomfortable questions about the policies of this board and about the way that the tax payer's money has been spent?

There is only one honorable course left to the members of this board. Each and every one of you who voted to limit the right of the public to address their grievances should immediately resign your memberships on this board.

If my remarks seem incendiary, they were meant to be. It is my intention to call your attention, and the attention of the citizens of this county, to the rights guaranteed to each citizen by the Constitution, rights that this body has attempted to erode.

There is no honor in what you have done here.