

First, I want to thank everyone for their comments here tonight. Democracy can be messy and hard, which is all the more reason why it requires we be thoughtful and nuanced. I also want to thank our staff and outside counsel, your commitment to this organization is second to none and I'm so proud, especially in these challenging circumstances, to be working alongside each of you.

As you can imagine, it was extremely unsettling to learn through social media that our city had fallen into the crosshairs of two of our most senior statewide elected officials at an unannounced press conference with no heads up or opportunity for collaboration. But, like all things in local government, we are problem solvers and started looking for a way forward right away.

After months of public comment, this resolution was intended as a statement of our community's values following the heartbreaking tragedies we saw in other parts of the country and the understandable concern and questions they caused. As I said in January, I come to this conversation as someone who started their career as an educator in Texas teaching many students without papers and serving many undocumented families who just wanted to provide a better and safer life for their children. I have a very personal understanding of the fear and uncertainty caused when our national leaders continue to refuse to address paths to residency or citizenship in a thoughtful manner.

These past months have been challenging to say the least. We've seen chaos, uncertainty, vitriol, and virtually zero self discipline from other levels of government. Those tactics have only caused more division. It is all the more reason that we in local government, act responsibly and facilitate opportunities for constructive dialogue. It's shameful that any official would ever try to prevent constituents and duly elected officials from exercising their first amendment rights whether you agree with them or not.

Our Helena community values reflect humanity and decency that is sadly absent in so many facets of our modern politics. This community asked

for assurances when there were none from above, and called for solidarity when others sought to pull us apart. The principles I have heard professed these many months are intrinsic to what makes Helena and Montana the place we all think is worth fighting for each and every day.

I also want to sincerely commend our exceptional Helena police officers. So many of you showed your support for the men and women of the Helena Police Department, and rightly so. They are our friends and neighbors. The culture of service to community in this department has been generations in the making, from Chief McGee to Chief Hagen and now Chief Petty. HPD's commitment to service goes beyond the walls of the Law and Justice Center. I see HPD officers caring for the most vulnerable among us every single day. They are often the first kind face someone sees on their worst day.

It was in that spirit - that we are all members of this community, and that we should support one another in difficult times - that I chose to stand behind a statement of values that believes in upholding the law, while doing so within the confines of our jurisdiction and with the care you would want from for your friends and neighbor.

Local governments provide the most fundamental of services: water, wastewater, police, fire. We meet human needs at their most basic level, and often without access to adequate funding.

With that said I want to level set. You've heard the press conference and seen the letter from the Attorney General. And, when a respected former Republican Attorney General, Governor and Republican National Committee Chair calls those actions "political theatre," you know something is broken.

I'll be honest, this has been infuriating. I am more concerned than ever about state overreach telling Montana communities what they can and can't think, what values they can and can't have, and then limiting our ability to fund essential services including police. Those are not the

Montana values I grew up with. The Montana I know understands that decisions are best made closest to the people. Every Montana community, Helena included, is fiercely independent. When you have a disagreement, you talk it out and find common ground. Like every other Montana community, we value local control and we also value finding consensus. I wish the state would have come to us first to have had that conversation, and I believe much of this hoopla could have been avoided. I'm asking them to engage with us now.

I've spent time the last couple of weeks grounding myself in the delegate notes from the 1972 Constitutional Convention. I came across a passage from Delegate Virginia Blend, Vice Chair of the Local Government Committee: "We have conceived our goal to be to provide options of self-determination by local government, whether in a town of 25 people or a city of 80,000. True democracy and true freedom only exist when we have the freedom of choice."

What is being done to Helena is a direct contradiction of that vision. It's certainly not measured governance. It is not original. It is a political playbook imported from somewhere else and dropped onto Montana communities like a trap, designed to ensure Helena loses either way. If we keep this resolution in its current form, we risk funding we need to function and provide critical services and support to our community. We are being baited into a fight that is rigged, and I don't believe I would be acting responsibly if I let grant dollars with real and tangible impact be put at risk. I wish we were in the position of other major institutions facing these type of threats but we do not have Harvard's \$56 billion endowment.

Let me tell you plainly what is at stake, not philosophically, but in real dollars and real lives. Last fiscal year, the City of Helena secured nearly \$14 million in federal and state grant funding. That is our fire department. our police department. Victim services. 9-1-1 dispatch. Infrastructure. Parks. And some of those dollars can only reach nonprofit organizations in this community because the City serves as the required

pass-through entity. If the City loses that access, those organizations lose that funding. Full stop. Our general fund cannot make up that difference.

Our financial ability to sustain a protracted legal fight is limited. Our contingency funds are effectively exhausted. Our outside counsel budget has a little over 3000 dollars remaining in this fiscal year and we have three months to go in this fiscal year. Our staff has dedicated over 1,000 hours to this effort thus far. Missoula has a general fund about three times the size of ours and it seems they don't see a path forward right now either. Unlike the attorney general, we cannot go ask the governor for a supplemental appropriation when we run out of money.

So let me be clear. I do not take any of this lightly and I am not taking this vote because I think the Attorney General is right. What he is doing, threatening to strip millions of dollars from Helena's most vulnerable residents over a values statement he politically disagrees with, is wrong. By adopting these two motions I believe we are pressing pause, mitigating risk to ensure we can continue to provide high quality services to the people of Helena, maintain our first amendment rights, and strategically move forward. It would be a dereliction of our fiduciary duties to Helena to vote otherwise. This is the most responsible course of action as stewards of Helena's local government.