

It is with great joy that the day of Councilman Robbie Templeton's exoneration has come to pass. The fact that the allegations made by Aaron Khan were baseless, meritless, and made, in our opinion, with malice is not new to anyone with Greenwood County; however, now the allegation's hollowness is confirmed by the South Carolina Law Enforcement Division (SLED).

The question now is where do we go from here? While Mr. Khan, and his limited supporters, will merrily move on to the next scandal they can attempt to initiate, yet those of us that are actually here to help *Greenwood Grow Greater* have to deal with the aftermath of Mr. Khan's shenanigans. This damage includes the reputation of a long-serving Greenwood County Councilmember, and it also includes damages to institutions of Greenwood County, for example our safeguards of Taxpayer's Money. While some may view the actions of the past months as citizens having the ability to have their grievances heard by their government, I believe most of us can agree that there is something different afoot. An individual exercised his Andy Warhol proclaimed "fifteen minutes of fame" to besmirch a pillar, Councilman Robbie Templeton, and pillars, the financial system of Greenwood County and Greenwood County Council as a body, of Greenwood County. For his efforts he and his supporters, including those that have been vocal and those that have

instigated from the shadows, are owed nothing but our contempt.

According to a September 2023 Pew Research Study only 2% of Americans have ever run for, much less actual won, political office...ever, in their entire lives. Having someone criticize your position on policy matters, hiring decisions, or taxes is a legitimate part of the process. The ability for Citizens to have their grievances addressed by their government is as foundational as the right to a free press, the ability to avoid being searched without a showing of probable cause, and the right to not have a State Supported religion. However, we have just experienced something far more sinister than having grievances addressed, what we have just experienced was the weaponization of the Criminal Justice System. Unfortunately, that weaponization was trained and targeted at Greenwood County Councilman Robbie Templeton. Mr. Khan, due to his personal animus towards Councilman Templeton, used the Criminal Justice System to try and prosecute him. Please allow that to sink in for a moment. An individual, based on an allegation that was in no way supported by evidence, attempted to have the South Carolina Law Enforcement Division criminally investigate a County Councilmember simply because the individual did not like the way Councilman Templeton ran a contentious County Council Meeting.

Our 40th United States President, Ronald Reagan, is famously quoted as saying "Freedom is a fragile thing and never more than one generation away from extinction. It is not ours by inheritance, it must be fought for and defended constantly by each generation, for it comes only once to a people. Those whose who have known freedom and then lost it have never known it again." For many this quote is about the military and our Country's willingness to engage in conflict to preserve democracy. However, there is a much more pervasive and imminent danger to our democracy than a military invasion and that is what happens when good people decide that they are no longer willing to serve at the local level of government so that they do not have to endure the nonsense that Councilman Templeton just experienced. If people have concerns now about the decisions that are being made, what happens when the best and brightest of us are no longer making decisions? Do we honestly think that having less qualified people making decisions will improve the outcomes?

Councilman Templeton has been cleared of all allegations made against him and for that both he and Greenwood County are thankful. Councilman Templeton is a coach at Greenwood High School, former Council Chairman and former Chairman of the South Carolina State Council Coalition, a time tested and respected member of your

Greenwood County Council. The ask of you is that the next time someone makes unfounded, malicious and sensational claims on a social media site, that you take pause and ensure that the presenter is creditable, and most importantly you are not participating in the further erosion of our Democracy.