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Straws, Bathrooms, and Mascots – Is That Really All We Have Left to Worry About?

**Statement from Alderman Bob Donovan
November 25, 2019**

You can tell a great deal about people and organizations by looking at their priorities. Paging through the agenda for tomorrow's Common Council meeting, I can only shake my head and wonder where we all evidently lost the plot.

At the start of the meeting we will take up Mayor Tom Barrett's vetoes of the amendments the Council made to his proposed 2020 budget. It is a budget in which the Council, without my assent, voted to reduce the sworn strength of the Milwaukee Police Department by 60 positions. And it is a budget in which the Council scrambled for pennies to repave a few alleys and keep our streetlights burning a few minutes longer.

All this will happen, I suspect, with little debate or fanfare. Then we will turn to the real business of the people of Milwaukee. The issues for which we each decided to run for office and to serve.

First, in the report of the Public Works Committee, will be a directive to various City agencies to establish a gender-inclusive bathroom policy in all municipal buildings. This will be followed, in the report of the Public Safety and Health Committee, by a ban on the provision of plastic drinking straws by restaurants – with certain exceptions. And both these come on the heels of a letter I was asked to sign last week asking the Menomonee Falls School District to replace its long-standing mascot which has been deemed offensive to some Native Americans.

While it was not my intention to debate the merits of any of these proposals, I will say that I have long been skeptical of those who claim Native American mascots are offensive in and of themselves. I continue to believe, for example, that Marquette University erred when it chose not to call its sports teams "Warriors" and did so in an undemocratic way that continues to rankle alumni.

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My concern is not these proposals in themselves. It is that none of them represent the primary concerns of my constituents – they don't even come close. I defy anyone to poll the residents of the City and ask them what their priorities are. What are the odds drinking straws, bathroom policies, and team mascots scratch the top 50?

It would be easy enough for me to vote against these proposals and move on. I am afraid, however, that they are more symptom than disease as our challenges become so great that we grasp at trivial things that are within our control rather than struggle to solve weightier problems. This is the definition of constructing a fool's paradise and is no way to govern a great city like ours.

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