

Mary Savala: Hey, public officials, treat your constituents with respect

By
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The election is over, but hey, public officials, please don't forget the pledges you have made to the public to represent all of us. You talked about concerns for the prosperity and health of our community. We like to believe that you want to be there for everyone in your jurisdiction. Don't forget us now that you are in office.

A lot of us take very seriously our responsibilities to inform ourselves about education, public policy, public expenditures and the impacts of development on our lives. We know you can't govern without us. The Freedom of Information Act guarantees we can see all the information with which you are provided for your decision making. The Brown Act guarantees us you will have open, public meetings with plenty of notice of where, when, and what about. You have to listen to us in public comment during those public meetings. How about having respect for the spirit of the law as well as the letter?

We are concerned when you speak of running government or schools like a business. You're not operating a business answering to investors, but rather a deliberative body making law in the public interest. It's the public finances you are spending — whether they be federal, state or local revenues.

Don't shut us out with unreasonable limitations on our time to speak to you in public meetings. Don't short cut the public discussion by making your decisions in closed session disguised by the cover of possible litigation. Please don't curtail our right to speak out in public meetings by giving us two minutes to express an opinion about spending millions of dollars on our children's education, on public works projects or on public infrastructure subsidies to private development. Don't move public discussion to the end of the agenda after we've all been exhausted and gone home.

How about giving us priority at your meetings instead of making us stand in line behind developers, lawyers and staff?

Please stop texting and reading during public comment or conferring with your neighbor or staff. You can't talk or text and listen. Please respect the time and effort we have taken to be there for you. We know we can be repetitious, sometime outright off-the-wall, perhaps even awkward and lacking in background, but we are sincere. We have taken the time and effort to be there and you work for us.

And, speaking of respect for the public, don't limit our input at public meetings and then turn around and give extraordinary amounts of time to special interests because they have been kind to your campaigns for public office. It's really tacky to be so blatant about your debt to certain influential interests.

If you stop and think about it, many of us have experience and education that supplements the resources from staff that you need to make informed decisions. Please take that free expertise and respect its gift to you.

Please stop releasing volumes of information on land use planning or other huge public policy decisions without adequate time for the public to digest and speak responsibly about them. We expect you to rebel and refuse to be pushed into making decisions when you or the public are not given complete information or adequate time for important decisions.

Case in point: The City of Fresno General Plan Update, wherein the City Council and the public have been given huge amounts of updated information over the Thanksgiving Holiday to review and absorb before the Council's final hearing Dec. 11. The only reason for short notice and the compressed time frame given to the public is that city staff

needs to move on to other projects.

As a sign you understand and respect our concerns, please, City Fathers, stop this rush to approve the General Plan Update. Take the advice of the General Plan Citizens Committee and others to give the public and yourselves a least a month more to process all this information and to make sure our General Plan guides the city in a healthy and prosperous way.

Officials, please take seriously what we've said here. We are a great country because we are a democracy where the supreme power is vested in the people.

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