

TULSANS DEFENDING DEMOCRACY

WWW.TULSANSDEFENDINGDEMOCRACY.COM

" that we here highly resolve... that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish...."

Abraham Lincoln, from the Gettysburg Address, Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, November 19, 1863

April 7, 2006

BEFORE THE CITIZENS' COMMISSION ON CITY GOVERNMENT City of Tulsa, Oklahoma

Position of Tulsans Defending Democracy Regarding At-Large Representation

Introduction

Our group was formed in late October of 2005 to oppose the initiative petition drive of Tulsans for Better Government to reduce the number of individual city council districts from 9 to 6 and to add 3 at-large councilors to Tulsa's City Council. It is multi-racial and bi-partisan. It is made up of liberals, moderates and conservatives.

My name is Greg Bledsoe. Let me briefly tell you who I am. I have lived in Tulsa since 1971 when I came here to college. I began my legal career in 1979. I work primarily as a plaintiff's civil rights and employment lawyer. In 1987, Jim Goodwin recruited me along with Louis Bullock and several other lawyers, to represent some of the plaintiffs in the voting rights case that was filed against the City of Tulsa by the NAACP over the at-large City Commission form of government.

Because people who fail to study history are often doomed to repeat it I think it is important to give you some history of Tulsa and how the present charter came to be.

Tulsa's Racial History

I will assume most of you know something about the sorry history of racism in Tulsa, but let me briefly summarize.

Tulsa has one of the most miserable racial histories of any city in America, even worse than many in the Deep South. As we began to marshal the evidence in the voting-rights suit it was clear to us that a significant motivation for the creation of Tulsa's at-large city commission form of government was to prevent any possibility of African Americans having any voice in Tulsa's city government. The principal mechanism for carrying out this exclusion was the at-large election system. Present-day African American Tulsans know this, believe this or at least feel this in their soul. For many African Americans in Tulsa and in the rest of America "at-large" is a racist code word for "Jim Crow." We were prepared to prove this if the case went to trial.

Early African Americans in Tulsa were forced to live in a ghetto-like enclave. There were not just the restrictive covenants, so common in most deeds, that prevented black residency in most parts of Tulsa, but by 1916 there was an apartheid-like city ordinance that required blacks to only reside in a certain area of the city (unless they were domestic servants). Generally this was the area just north and east of 1st and Main. Thus, Tulsa's present housing patterns and much of the reason for North Tulsa's racial

character were set in motion-- something that cannot be ignored when the geography of present-day district representation is evaluated. Indeed, despite the fair housing laws, it is still a challenge for even affluent African American families to buy a home in mid-town or south Tulsa. Even today most political and social scientists regard Tulsa as one of the most segregated cities in America. The City of Tulsa has the following racial breakdown as of 2004: African American-16.6%, Native American-4.8%, Asian-2.1%, Hispanic--9.9%, other Non-White-9.3%, (Total non-white = 42.7 %); White-57.3%.

During our research, it came as a surprise to me that Tulsa had a large number of African Americans at the time of statehood in 1907. Many of these individuals were Creek and Cherokee freedmen (African American former slaves of Native Americans). Many of these African Americans were voters and were active participants in the political life of Indian Territory and early Tulsa. Almost all were Republicans--as they were allied with the party of Lincoln, and against the party of slavery and segregation.

With statehood, their rights were in jeopardy with the election of a Democratic governor and legislature that campaigned on the express promise to disenfranchise blacks and segregate them as much as possible. Because the federal government was still in the hands of the Republicans, their rights were not totally extinguished. In fact, initially there were many appointed African American federal employees in eastern Oklahoma and Tulsa. This ended with the election of Woodrow Wilson and a Democratic Congress in 1913. The wholesale loss of their federal employment and protection also meant the loss of any voting rights as Oklahoma quickly adopted grandfather clauses that essentially disenfranchised most African Americans in Tulsa.

Nevertheless, blacks in Tulsa created a thriving and viable community in the black enclave, the Greenwood District. Many African Americans went off to serve in the army and fought overseas during World War I. When they returned, they invigorated the Greenwood District with their new world view. It became known as Black Wall Street and was regarded as the most progressive and economically advanced African American area in all of America.

This all ended in June of 1921. White resentment of the black success of Greenwood was fanned by the sluggish postwar recession in which many whites were out of work, labor agitation by radicals at the refineries, corrupt city and county government officials and a general lawlessness in what was a wide-open oil town. Tulsa had a white riot--the white mob burned Greenwood to the ground and killed at least 300.

Tulsa has the dubious distinction of having had the most deadly race riot in American history until the 1960s. An embarrassed white establishment, until very recently, suppressed this sad history. It has been chronicled by the Tulsa Riot Commission report, which establishes that state, county, and city officials conspired to systematically deprive African American Tulsans of their personal and property rights.

Within a few weeks of the riot, using it as its springboard, the KKK began holding mass rallies in Tulsa. Their candidates swept all municipal offices in the city elections of 1922. Many, if not most white Protestants in Tulsa during the 1920s had some affiliation with the Klan. This included most judges, law enforcement officers and county and city officials. Not until the stock market crash in 1929 was the power of the Klan broken.

Little changed for African Americans with respect to their rights as citizens in Tulsa for the next several decades. They made begrudging but significant headway in rebuilding their community in the Greenwood District. This was with no help from (and

indeed in spite of) white city officials- all elected at-large. The law officially segregated the Tulsa school system until the mid-1960s. It took a class action race discrimination suit, with forced busing, in the late 60s and early 70s to begin to remedy the lingering de-facto discrimination in the schools. Even today, most of Tulsa schools have become re-segregated based on housing patterns and school choice. As late as the 1950s African American men could not be seen in the company of white women without being arrested and prosecuted for “lewdness.” In 1964, African American children and their parents were arrested and prosecuted by City officials for trying to eat in a public place.

History of Charter Change in Tulsa

With the advent of statehood, as a city of 8,000 inhabitants, Tulsa adopted the City Commission at-large form of government in 1908, with a mayor and four commissioners that combined executive and legislative functions. Immediately prior, it had a mayor and 8 aldermen, elected from 4 wards representing the four geographic quadrants of the city. Almost from the beginning, and particularly after the large population increase over the next decade, it was recognized by many that the City Commission at-large system was structurally defective and not representative. Because of these deficiencies, the real government was often effectively and benevolently in the hands of the Tulsa Commercial Club (the predecessor of the Tulsa Metro Chamber of Commerce).

Before the successful change of the City Charter in 1989 from the At large City Commission to the Strong Mayor/Council with the 9 individual districts, there were four other **unsuccessful** attempts at changing Tulsa’s government structure.

- **1954-** City Manager-6 Councilors & mayor, all elected at-large, non-partisan, 4 year staggered terms. This proposal failed by a vote of 15,448 to 24,846;
- **1959-**Strong Mayor/Council-9 members, 4 by district and 5 at-large, partisan, 4 year terms. This proposal was defeated by a vote of 15,424 to 20,679. There was strong opposition to the proposal from organized labor and city employees and a heavy turn out on the north and west sides, with light turn out in southeast Tulsa. The labor groups opposed the charter, in part, because they advocated a council made up of 6 districts with 3 at-large ***“to give regions outside of the southside a greater representation in city politics.”*** African Americans were not a significant factor in this election as most of them still remained unregistered and outside the mainstream political life of the city. The civil rights movement and the 1965 Voting Rights Act had not yet activated their participation.
- **1969-**Proposed by Mayor Hewgley-Strong Mayor/Council-9 members, 5 elected by district and 4 elected at-large, 4 year staggered terms, partisan. This proposal failed after a recount by a vote of 11,780 to 11,843 (a difference of 63 votes). There was strong opposition from labor, the African American Community and the “liberals” over the composition of the Council because the City Commission bowed to pressure from the city’s newspapers and refused to adopt the recommendation of its charter committee for an 11 member Council, 8 by district with 3 at-large. These groups cried foul—State Representative Ben Hill led the opposition in the black community and a group called League of Concerned Democrats vowed to circulate an initiative petition to change the new charter, if approved, to an 11 member council, exclusively elected by district. Persons claimed that the at-large councilors were intended to ***“dilute the power of the district representatives.”*** Others argued that the council must be representative to be truly legislative and that it had to be representative of all sections of the city.

- **1973**-Proposed by Mayor Robert LaFortune-Strong Mayor/Council- 11 members, 8 elected by district and 3 elected at-large, Mayor 4 year term, council 2 year term, partisan. This proposal was similar to the proposal from 1969, but with the 8/3 council plan rather than the 5/4 plan from 1969. The *Tribune* supported the change, while the *World* vigorously opposed it, in part, because of what it called the potential for ward politics allegedly caused by district representation. Current and former City Commissioners were split, with those that opposed the change claiming, ***“district-elected councilmen could divide the city.”*** The Chamber also split, with many past presidents opposing the plan. The liberal and black community strongly supported the plan while labor, policemen and firemen opposed it based on civil service issues rather than the council structure. At the heart of the opposition was the unspoken realization that many unrepresented segments of the community, including a much more politically active African American segment, would actually have a real voice at City Hall with 8 individual districts. There actually would be at least one councilor elected by African Americans. There also would be councilors elected from the east and west sides. This proposal was soundly defeated by a vote of 14,936 to 48,282.

The 1987 NAACP Voting Rights Case

In the spring of 1987, Finance Commissioner Gary Watts began a series of meetings with local citizens of both races to discuss changing Tulsa’s at-large representation system in light of the January federal court ruling that Springfield, Illinois’ at-large system violated the Voting Rights Act. Watts said publicly that he would not support battling a discrimination suit if the city were sued. Led by Dr. Charles Christopher and Jim Goodwin, it included Charles Norman, Professor Judith Finn, Mike Hackett, Ann Patton, Street Commissioner J.D. Medcalfe, Louis Bullock, Manyard Ungerman, Waldo Jones, Eric Rollerson and several others. Some meetings even included attorneys from the national NAACP. In May, this group announced plans for a “friendly” lawsuit to force charter change.

Commissioner Watts and his ideas were attacked by the *Tulsa World* and in particular Ken Neal. The *World’s* editorial board demanded that the unrepresentative and inefficient at-large city commission form be defended at all costs. Claims that the at-large system was a vestige of race discrimination or that that was its effect were dismissed as ludicrous. Mayor Dick Crawford, while stating he was interested in charter change prior to any suit, decided to defend the at-large City Commission system if any suit were filed.

As this process appeared to be bogging down, in July of 1987, invigorated by the 1982 amendments to the Federal Voting Rights Act and a decision from the federal court regarding Springfield, Illinois, the national NAACP, joined by its local chapter and prominent African American Tulsans filed suit against the City. The plaintiffs began to marshal the evidence to not only prove that Tulsa’s at-large system had the effect of discriminating against African Americans, but that there had been historic intentional racial discrimination in the establishment and perpetuation of Tulsa’s at-large representation system.

In spite of Crawford’s decision to defend the suit, the Tulsa Metro Chamber formed a task force (co-chaired by Howard Barnett and C.S. Lewis) to study charter change. In October of 1987, it recommended a change in Tulsa’s government to a strong mayor/council form in response to the suit. The recommendation stated in part:

The Task Force believes that ***providing representation and allowing all citizens a voice is a necessary and desirable goal of any form of government.*** The mayor/council form can be structured in such a way as to meet the requirements of the Voting Rights Act. It is important, however, to distinguish the need for change in the form of government from the problems presented by

the NAACP lawsuit—as in 1969 and 1973, the compelling reasons for the change are the inefficiency and other shortcomings of the current system, only one of which is a lack of representation. *Thus, the NAACP lawsuit should be viewed as a catalyst and an opportunity for change, but not as the driving force behind that change.*

The message that must be understood is that the community must now address its form of government. The lawsuit demands it and the problems in our current form of government require it. The community must come together and examine the issues and achieve a consensus for a change to a better and more appropriate form of government, i.e. one that is more efficient, as well as more representative

The Chamber went on to state that council representation should be primarily by district. The Chamber also recommend **“several at-large representatives”** to be nominated and elected **by regions**, combining two or more districts. It left the number vague, but suggested an 8/3 council structure in an 11 member council, similar to the 1973 proposed charter, but with regional or “super districts.” Our investigation has disclosed that the at-large regional super district proposal was an internal Chamber political compromise engineered by Chamber progressives to get the ball rolling in the direction of real representative government. It was quickly abandoned when the Chamber task force was expanded.

In February of 1988, growing out of this task force, four groups jointly formed a charter drafting committee to recommend charter change in light of the NAACP suit. This group, drawn from the Metro Chamber, the League of Women Voters, the Tulsa Labor Council and the Greenwood Chamber was also co-chaired by C.S. Lewis and Howard Barnett. Jerry Goodman, now a Judge of the Oklahoma Court of Civil Appeals, but then as Metro Chamber President, took the lead on promoting charter change so that litigation could be avoided and a more representative and structurally efficient city government could be established.

Roger Randle also defeated Dick Crawford for mayor in April of 1988. While Randle took a cautious position during the campaign regarding charter change and the NAACP suit, it was clear that he was much more supportive of the goals of the “friendly” suit and for moving to a strong mayor/council form of government that would provide all of Tulsans a fairer form of representation and better administrative efficiency.

During the late spring and early summer of 1988, the joint citizens committee began a series of public hearings throughout Tulsa. The committee made the following statement when it began this process:

“Representation is a key element of our state and federal governments. We believe that a body which is representative of the different sections of a community will create better legislation. If the United States House of Representatives were elected by the nation as a whole, as the Tulsa City commission is elected by the city as a whole, it is highly unlikely that Oklahoma would have even one representative, much less six.”

Howard Barnett, committee co-chair, also made the following relevant comments on behalf of the committee:

“The NAACP lawsuit basically concentrates on the nonrepresentational aspect of our form of government. While ... we believe that providing a representative form of government in keeping with our American political

heritage is necessary and appropriate, this is only one of the good reasons we think our form of government should be changed to a mayor/council form.

...[W]e hope the lawsuit can be a catalyst to change to a better and more efficient form.

While we are not strictly motivated by the lawsuit, our group strongly feels that Tulsa should solve its problems other than in the court room. To this end, we would hope to have a charter ready for a vote of the people long before a lawsuit goes to trial or creates the aura of a crisis situation. Because we believe that there are so many good reason to change the form of government and also believe it is possible to change the form to accomplish needed efficiencies and satisfy the requirements of the Federal law on which the NAACP's lawsuit is based, we think we can have a happy marriage of legal requirements and practical need. Hopefully, we can achieve this political solution without having to go through a potentially messy lawsuit.

...
Won't a mayor/council form create the possibility of ward politics?

If . . . by "ward politics" you mean that a representative of a district will do just that—represent the interests of his district first—then, yes, we may have ward politics. But isn't that the nature of all representative bodies? The House of Representatives or our own state legislature must create compromises that serve the interests of a majority of the representatives for the legislation to pass. What this means is that each district usually gets something. While there are not guarantees of this, we believe that the election of the mayor and city auditor at-large, which is presently contemplated though not firmly decided, would have the effect of balancing any clear "ganging up" of some districts against certain other districts.

More importantly, our committee believes in representative government. While it is not perfect, we think it is the fairest way to allocate limited governmental services and resources. By everyone having a representative that is looking out for his or her interests, we are assured that all parts of the city will be heard from and that at some level those interests will be taken into account."

By July of 1988 and after numerous public hearings in all parts of Tulsa, the citizens' committee representation sub-committee, chaired by League Chair Noble Manion, recommended that the council structure should be made up of 9 councilors, to be nominated and elected from single member districts. **It recommended against regional or super districts and also recommended against "at-large" districts.** While it cannot be confirmed that this ultimately became the recommendation of the entire citizens committee (this document cannot be located), based on several conversations with the participants, including Commissioner Watts, by August of 1988, this structure became the assumed council make up as the City Commission received the committee's recommendations and began work on a new charter.

The reason for this is straightforward. Based on housing patterns and population distributions, nine single member council districts were the minimum necessary to assure at least one black majority district. This had also been the minimum number advocated by the plaintiffs and their attorneys during the committee review process. All concerned rejected at-large or super districts because this would still leave the city vulnerable to suit under the Voting Rights Act and many thought that a council made up of more than nine members would be cumbersome

and inefficient.¹ In a management conference of the City Commission on August 26, 1988 Commissioner Medcalfe stated that there should be nine council districts with no at-large districts. Commissioners Dick and Watts agreed. This structure ultimately became the proposal put forth to the voters in February of 1989.

The 1989 Charter Change

Between August and November 1988, the City Commission, lead by Mayor Randle and Commissioner Watts, worked on a city charter that established a strong mayor with a nine (9) member council elected by district. In December, the commission voted to call an election for February 14, 1989. The new charter received the unanimous support of the City Commission, including the City Auditor. It also received the support of the members of the joint committee and both major newspapers. Unlike 1973, Labor, policemen and firemen also supported the change. The only opposition came from a small group of citizens that included former mayoral candidate Tom Quinn. Their disorganized opposition was centered on the supposed ‘dictatorial’ powers of the strong mayor rather than the council structure. They unsuccessfully filed a ballot title challenge in District Court. The charter change passed overwhelmingly by a vote of 33,373 to 14,213. New elections for the strong mayor and the nine council members were set for April of 1990.

The NAACP lawsuit was dismissed as moot and in March of 1990 the Federal District Court awarded the plaintiffs attorneys’ fees in excess of \$116,000. The court determined that the plaintiffs were the catalyst that caused the charter to be changed and determined that they were the prevailing party in the lawsuit. The City additionally paid more than \$180,000 to its own outside defense counsel. These fees were very small compared to the several millions of dollars of costs and fees incurred in the Springfield, Illinois and Dallas voting rights cases in which the plaintiffs also prevailed.

The Present Controversy and TBG’s At-Large Proposal

Some controversy on the City Council emerged in 2003 and 2004 with the election of Dist. 2 Councilor Chris Medlock to fill the unexpired term of Randi Miller, who became a Tulsa County Commission in January of 2003 and in connection with planning and zoning issues. In particular, the rezoning of the southwest corner of 71st and Harvard for a bank became the focal point for heated debate. Many individual citizens and homeowners groups felt that the City Council had been improperly influenced by campaign contributions from those associated with the bank. They filed suit over the zoning issues and determined that they would enter the election process to make sure their concerns were addressed. In the spring of 2004 two incumbent city councilors were defeated (David Patrick, Dist. 3 was defeated by Rosco Turner & Art Justis, Dist. 6 was defeated by Jim Mautino), Jack Henderson replaced the retiring Joe

¹ Indeed a Voting Rights suit against the City of Dallas, which had an 8/3 council make up (8 individual districts and 3 at-large) had been filed in 1988 by African Americans and Hispanics. This suit, after two years of litigation and hundreds of thousands of dollars of attorneys’ fees, resulted in a federal court finding that Dallas’ mixed at-large system violated the act. *See Williams v. The City of Dallas*, 734 F. Supp. 1317 (N.D. Tex. 1990). The first 19 pages of this 166 page opinion is included with our materials. The racial history of Dallas, like Tulsa, was miserable. Of particular interest to the present controversy is the finding by the Dallas federal court that it was not possible for black or Hispanic candidates to raise the large amounts of money needed for an at-large council race. The court also found that the claim that at-large seats were necessary to preserve a city-wide view did not justify the 8-3 system. Historically, all but one at-large councilor had been white, had come from the affluent part of north Dallas and had generally represented that area’s interest.

Williams in Dist. 1 (Williams had voted for the 71st and Harvard change), and councilors Chris Medlock (Dist. 2) and Sam Roop (Dist. 5), both opponents of the change, were re-elected. This “Gang of Five” immediately formed a “reform” alliance to counter-balance the other four councilors who they regarded as too sympathetic to special interests controlled or supported by developers, financial institutions, the *Tulsa World* and other traditional political players, including the Tulsa Metro Chamber. They were also concerned that the remaining incumbent councilors were trying to effect procedural rules changes that would thwart their majority.

The mainstream media often portrayed this new majority faction on the council, including the *Tulsa World*, as ill informed and unnecessarily confrontational. Many others, including neighborhood activists and homeowners thought that they were raising issues and asking questions that were valid and long overdue. They asked questions and raised issues about board appointments, water policies and annexation issues. They generally advocated for more openness in city government and changes in various boards and policies that would cutback on the influence of traditional development oriented groups and increase the influence of individual citizens and neighborhoods.

This lively debate culminated in July of 2005 when these traditional groups unsuccessfully attempted to recall two of the councilors, Medlock and Mautino. This divisive effort was soundly defeated despite the proponents having raised and spent more than \$80,000 on the campaign.

After the recall defeat, a consistent drum-beat of several editorials over the next several months began in the *Tulsa World*. They advocated a return to some form of at-large representation system to supposedly “stop the bickering” on the City Council and lessen the influence of certain councilors who were supposedly only concerned about parochial interests. The *World* claimed that its long predicted “ward politics” had arrived and that this must be eliminated. It asserted that certain councilors had lost sight of the overall good for the whole city.

Then in late October of 2005, a group naming themselves Tulsans for Better Government (TBG) formed. It was made up of about 25 mostly mid-town and south Tulsa wealthy white individuals. Several former city officials, including former Mayors Hewgley and Robert LaFortune were recruited to join this group. Many working behind the scenes were the same individuals and interests that supported the ill-fated recall. Its single largest financial contributor was the *Tulsa World* (\$10,000). TBG proposed an initiative petition to amend the charter by the radical alteration of the council structure approved overwhelmingly in 1989 by the voters and that resolved the NAACP voting rights case. Their proposal would reduce individual districts from 9 to 6--causing the carefully crafted African American majority district from 1989 to be clearly diluted. They also proposed that three councilors be elected at-large for four year terms, while leaving the remaining districts with two years terms.

The effect of the passage of this proposal would be to throw the current council structure into turmoil for at least two years as incumbents jockeyed on how the new districts would be drawn and who would have to run against whom. It would very likely require that Dist. 1 and most of Dist. 3 be combined into a single district and force the two African American council members to run against each other in the new system. Moreover, for the newly created at-large seats, only those persons with independent wealth or the broad ability to raise funds could effectively compete for these seats. More likely than not, only individuals from mid-town or south Tulsa, like the 8/3 system in Dallas, would be elected. There is no reason to think these individuals would look after the whole City any more than those elected from north Dallas. They would work for and support the interest of the areas that elected and financed them. Also like Dallas, there is no reason to think that a new Voting Rights case could not be successfully mounted against the new at-large seats for African American vote dilution.

This council-packing scheme must be called for what it is,-an undemocratic, ill-advised plan to return power to the traditional elite who fear an active and energized electorate. This plan does not have any real support among elected officials. Mayor LaFortune backed away from his support. No sitting City councilor would publicly say they supported it, despite statements from TBG that it had the support of several councilors. Councilor Tom Baker called it ill-advised and disruptive and said he counseled against it. In the past election, the only candidate that supported it, Jeff Stava, was defeated.

This structure would also potentially undermine our strong mayor and the efficiency of that office, by immediately creating three competing power centers for the at-large voter. In terms of creating conflict or competition, such at-large councilors would be natural challengers for incumbent mayors. I can hear it now, "Mayor Taylor, what do you know, I got more votes in the last election than you."

Mayor-elect Taylor has opposed this proposal vigorously and has denounced the recall effort since she began her campaign. TBG put her name on their web site, but Taylor says this was without her consent and she had her name removed. TBG has not denied this contention. Both political parties have come out strongly against the proposal. Both McCorkell and Medlock in the last election also opposed it. In light of the election results who, outside the TBG core group, will stand up and defend this plan?

It is our firm belief that the debate over the last two years has been healthy and should not be suppressed in a vain attempt to restructure the system away from the historic council plan approved in 1989. In 1989 then Police and Fire Commissioner Bob Dick spoke in favor of the proposed charter. Dick said some people are worried city councilors would argue among themselves. "What's wrong with that?" Dick asked. "Why shouldn't we hear differing views on the issues that will arise?" "Our form of government tends to chill a little bit of the public debate over some issues," he said. "There is a tendency that if I need something I may not want to attack the street commissioner or the water commissioner because I may need his or her vote."

The clashing of ideas is the sound of liberty. It's healthy, and ultimately in the best interest of Democracy. Even at it's loudest and most abrasive, it's the sweetest symphony I've ever heard. Resolution is merely the evolution of conflict. My God, ladies and gentlemen, this is America, not China, not Russia and not some banana Republic. As Alexis de Tocqueville said in 1835:

"Scarcely have you descended on the soil of America when you find yourself in the midst of a sort of tumult; a confused clamor is raised on all sides; a thousand voices come to you at the same time, each of them expressing some social needs. Around you everything moves: here, the people of one neighborhood have gathered to learn if a church ought to be built; there, they are working on the choice of a representative; farther on the deputies of a district are going to town in all haste in order to decide about some local improvements; in another place, the farmers of a village abandon their furrows to go discuss the plan of a road or a school.

Citizens assemble with the sole goal of declaring that they disapprove of the course of government. To meddle in the government of society and to speak about it is the greatest business and, so to speak, the only pleasure that an American knows.... An American does not know how to converse, but he discusses; he does not discourse, but he holds forth. He always speaks to you as to an assembly."

Some final questions need to be asked. Why did TBG originally file their petition to have 12 councilors—the existing 9, but to then add 3 at-large? Two days later they withdrew this plan and substituted the current proposal. Why? What was the thinking? TBG has over \$60,000 in the bank and it can only be spent on a petition to change Tulsa’s government. What are they going to do with these funds?

In conclusion, we call on TBG to state now that they will not go forward with their proposal. I know members and supporters of TBG are not racist, they are not bad people, they are trying to help Tulsa, but this plan will not help. If they go forward, we will fight them over the signatures, we will fight them at the ballot box and, if necessary, we will fight them in the courts. Tulsa does not need this fight. We should work together not against each other.

To paraphrase Lincoln: “We are not enemies, but friends. We must not be enemies. Though passion may have strained, it must not break our bonds of affection. The mystic chords of memory . . . will yet swell the chorus of our [great City], when again touched, as surely [it] will be, by the better angles of our nature.”