



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Speaking Truth While in Power

Over the last three years we have seen an increase of diversity in our elected official and administrative leadership pool throughout Sonoma County. Many of these leaders broke barriers as the “first” in their respective roles across city and county government in a county that has been a formal establishment for over 170 years. For many members of the community, seeing folks who looked like them in leadership, elected to office and sitting in mayoral ranks was a sign that times were finally changing.

The joy and excitement swiftly shifted with the reality of everyone not fully being thrilled at their groundbreaking feats. Met with disrespect, being undermined, chastised, confronted with microaggressions and overt and covert racial bias; these leaders have had to continue to prove that they are good enough to hold their roles.

After the departure of six Black County officials over the last 18 months, the NAACP Santa Rosa - Sonoma County Branch continues to ask - *“At what point are we going to move from being shocked at these experiences and move into taking accountability for the conditions under which these circumstances continue to exist?”*

Mayor Rogers sharing her truth during her speech at the Petaluma Blacks event should not have been front page news. That should not have warranted a barrage of aggressive phone calls and sharp toned emails to well over 20 leaders of color in the community to essentially “verify” her truth. She said what she said. Bravely.

What should have made the news was the continuation of these types of microaggressive behaviors in 2023. It has become normal to disrespect leaders of color in Sonoma County and that should be accepted as truth. The investigative journalism that should have taken place was an inquiry to all of the silent leaders on the Board of Supervisors and all other City Councils on what they plan to do to move from the comfort of saying they are an ally toward showing up as an accomplice to mitigate the passive permission that allows such conduct. Their silence or need to speak with Mayor Rogers first before they can show up for her and so many others, simply models the problem at hand.

Those who have the privilege of not encountering race based microaggressions and bias are the very ones who need to set their fragility aside and stand up to addressing the need for institutional cultural shift that needs to take place across a number of government entities. With so many self-proclaimed allies, I am deeply disappointed in the silence. Silence breeds permission. Permission to continue with the status quo even as it brings harm onto others. Ultimately, silence is complicity.

Frankly, the County needs to fully fund the Office of Equity. It is pointless to have a pillar of Equity when it is underfunded and understaffed to do the work it has been outlined to do both internally and externally in the community. Where is the story on this?

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