**For Release Wednesday, April 3, 2024**

**Capitol View
Commentary by J.L. Schmidt
Statehouse Correspondent**

**Nebraska Unicameral Makes Headlines for the Wrong Reason, Again**

“If you can’t say something nice, don’t say nothing at all.” – Thumper

“The tongue of the wise makes knowledge attractive, but the mouth of fools blurts out foolishness.” Proverbs 15:2 CSB

Nebraska’s unique one-house Legislature is back in the national spotlight again, for all the wrong reasons again. Last year it was a session-slowing filibuster accomplished by a couple senators who were upset with a bill restricting access to medical services for transgender youth.

This year, it’s a move seeking to censure a senator who personalized a reading from a book about a violent rape by inserting the names of several of his colleagues. One of them just happened to be involved in last year’s marathon filibuster.

A censure resolution was filed against State Sen. Steve Halloran of Hastings for his antics during debate on a bill that would ban some library books. The bill failed to win first-round approval when the smoke had cleared and the dust settled.

Halloran, during floor debate broadcast to the public, read the graphic account of a rape from a book many want to see banned while interjecting the name “Senator Cavanaugh” several times during the reading, which included a demand for oral sex. Senator Machaela Cavanaugh of Omaha and her brother John both serve in the current Legislature. Machaela earned national headlines last year with her relentless filibuster.

Some senators labeled the Halloran speech as aggressive and hurtful. Halloran said his comments were an attempt to make people listen to his speech and that any outrage should not be directed at him, but at the profane book he read, which is available in some school libraries.

**For Release Wednesday, April 3, 2024 – Page 2**

Sorry Senator Halloran, what you did was hurtful. In fact, it was not only unnecessary, but it was also foolish. You should’ve listened to Thumper. You have certainly given face to the verse from Proverbs.

The chair of the Legislature’s Executive Board, State Sen. Ray Aguilar of Grand Island, said he had personally launched an investigation under the Legislature’s workforce harassment policy against Halloran. The investigation must be completed within 45 days.

But Sen. Cavanaugh and Sen. Julie Slama of Sterling — who both said they have been victimized by sexual violence — said the legislative investigation was inadequate and wouldn’t allow the Halloran comments to be addressed until after the 2024 session ends later this month.

The Legislature has three options to punish a lawmaker under its policies: to issue a letter of reprimand, to censure the lawmaker or to expel the lawmaker. A censure is a statement of “extreme disapproval” of a senator’s conduct or actions.

“We don’t need an investigation,” Slama told the Nebraska Examiner. “It only serves to slow walk this and sweep it under the rug.”

I agree. Halloran is term-limited and will leave office when his successor is sworn in next January. But the Legislature and all Nebraskans deserve better. Get this thing done sooner than later. If he is somehow exonerated, so be it. I doubt he will be, the video evidence is pretty damning.

Halloran said that constitutional questions have been raised about the free speech protections for state senators when giving floor speeches. He said he has talked to the attorney general about getting a legal opinion on that issue.

Sure, and walking into a crowded theater and screaming fire should probably be litigated. But it is also a stupid thing to do.

**For Release Wednesday, April 3, 2024 – Page 3**

Halloran has made it clear he isn’t going to resign, as some have called for. Sadly, any apology he has issued so far has been lame. He needs to do that with the same boldness in which he read from the book.

I don’t know what you were thinking senator, if you were even thinking. But you’ve gone too far.

If you survive the censure vote and are adamant about not resigning, at least listen to Thumper. “If you can’t say something nice, don’t say nothing at all.”

--30--

*J.L. Schmidt has been covering Nebraska government and politics since 1979. He has been a registered Independent for 25 years.*