



Arizona State Senate

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Majority Leader

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Statement

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Judiciary Committee Vice-Chair Sen. Rick Gray responds to accusations over last week's hearing

"As Vice-Chair of the Senate Committee on Judiciary, I feel it's important to respond to some of the accusations we are hearing through the media related to the disruption of the Committee by activists on February 13, 2020. Out of respect for the African-American Day Protocol Session at 11 a.m., and with the realization that we needed to hear twelve bills and three executive nominations, the Chair decided to start the meeting earlier and moved the Committee start time up to 8 a.m. At the beginning of the Committee, the Chair made it clear that we had a hard deadline, and people needed to respect our time limits. Unfortunately, for critics of SCR 1007, just the opposite happened.

Because of the time restraint a two-minute time limit was given for testimony. This is not unusual for any Committee with a full calendar. During the testimony by someone against SCR 1007, he described the bill as 'racist'. The Chair interrupted and respectfully asked the testifier to avoid such divisive language. As he concluded his remarks, he again used that term, and the Chair told him his testimony was finished.

It was at that point decorum ended. The activists in the audience stood up, moved toward the Committee, started chanting, and refused to leave the room when asked. It was at this point the Chair asked for security, to bring back decorum. Security showed a tremendous amount of patience and eventually, after the arrival of DPS officers, convinced the protestors to leave the hearing. Unfortunately, during that

time we had to recess the committee and wait for security to clear the protesters. This took a significant amount of time.

Mason's Manual makes it clear the duty of the Committee Chair is to maintain order. The Rules of Decorum are posted in the Senate Lobby. It reads "Senate may be cleared of persons interrupting or impairing Senate business." Arizona Statute states, "A person who knowingly disturbs the legislature, or either house of the legislature, while in session, or who commits any disorderly conduct in the immediate view and presence of either house, tending to interrupt its proceedings or impair the respect due its authority, is guilty of a class 2 misdemeanor." This is also disclosed in the posted Rules of Decorum.

Chairman Farnsworth handled this incident as well as any Chair could. He was respectful but firm in maintaining proper committee decorum. The person who testified had finished with his allowed time, but he still claimed that he was being silenced. The other protestors who said their voices were not allowed to be heard acted like they were 'victims' but the real victims were the people who came to discuss this and other bills but were unable because of the time it took to remove the protesters. Because of the selfishness of the protestors, and the need to finish at 11 a.m., our Committee was not even able to allow testimony on all the bills. This kind of selfish disregard for other people is the reason we have stringent Chamber rules that all members have to follow, and all visitors are expected to respect."

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