

Items 24-0458 and 24-0426: Rule 35. Pledge of Allegiance

Common Council - Organizational Meeting

Wed, Apr 17, 2024, 6:00PM

Mayor Jake Woodford 12:03

All right onto 24-0458 rule 35 Pledge of Allegiance. Just make note of the revision that was included in your in your document. All right, we have a motion and second to approve. Any discussion? Alder Van Zeeland?

Aldersperson Katie Van Zeeland (District 5) 12:31

Thank you, Chair. I'm sorry, I forgot to do this as I was providing poor technical assistance. But just a reminder that Alder Doron did provide us with those comments. So please keep them in mind. Thank you.

Mayor Jake Woodford 12:45

Alder Hartzheim.

Aldersperson Sheri Hartzheim (District 13) 12:47

Thank you, chair. I think it's important that we continue doing what we voted in as a rule last year, but I do appreciate the amendment as presented here because it takes away the issue of any off-site areas where we have issues with potentially not having a flag. Thank you.

Mayor Jake Woodford 13:04

Alder Meltzer.

Aldersperson Vered Meltzer (District 2) 13:07

Thank you. Just to follow up from last night, what have we found out about flag code? And can we have a flag in the other end of chambers?

Mayor Jake Woodford 13:15

The flag is right where it needs to be according to the code. And so we can add other flags, but procedurally speaking, if we're to follow the flag code and giving the Pledge of Allegiance, this is the flag that we will face according to the flag code.

Aldersperson Vered Meltzer (District 2) 13:35

Thank you.

Mayor Jake Woodford 13:38

Alder van Zeeland?

Aldersperson Katie Van Zeeland (District 5) 13:42

Thank you, chair. I made a comment yesterday that I felt really went unnoticed, and so I feel like I need to bring a little bit more attention to it. My issue with continuing the Pledge of Allegiance in the committee meetings has to do with the inability to do it in a respectful manner with people coming and going in the gallery. I know we can't close the door. I don't know what other options there may be.

Aldersperson Katie Van Zeeland (District 5) 14:13

And I know that this is something that my head is telling me I should just be okay with that, politically, I'll end up in the newspaper about being against the Pledge of Allegiance even though that's not my intention, but being raised in a Catholic school family where we worked in military funerals, and those things happened at recess, and they taught us how to be reverent during those times, I just can't in good conscience vote to continue it the way that it is. If people have other alternative ways to do it that I think can give it the reverence that it deserves, I would love to hear them; otherwise I think that I could never look my grandpa in the eye and tell him—the Legion Grandpa—that I did what was right for politics instead of doing what was actually right. Thank you.

Aldersperson Denise Fenton (District 6) 15:16

Point of order, chair.

Mayor Jake Woodford 15:21

Alder Fenton.

Aldersperson Denise Fenton (District 6) 15:22

Thank you. Um, so item 24-0426 the vote on that would supersede any vote on 24-0458? Is that a correct statement?

Mayor Jake Woodford 15:41

Clerk Lynch?

Clerk Kami Lynch 15:44

Yes, that was the intention of listing the amendment to just the language of the rule as currently written before the proposal to delete the rule in its entirety.

Aldersperson Denise Fenton (District 6) 15:54

Thank you.

Mayor Jake Woodford 15:58

Alder Schultz.

Aldersperson Alex Schultz (District 9) 16:03

I know we talked about this a lot last night. I'm just reiterate that I don't think anyone in this chamber feels like we shouldn't be saying the Pledge of Allegiance when it's appropriate. And when it's appropriate is that it essentially could be at every meeting. The challenge that some of us are having is that it's not always easy, given who might be entering the room at the time the pledge is being spoken, who might be sitting at those desks and have to get up and speak to the and salute the flag, or if you're actually not in this chamber, the challenges that are faced when individuals are looking around to find something to salute to. For that reason, I think it's entirely appropriate to recite the pledge when we have ourselves in this room and this chamber for this meeting. But I think at other times, I don't necessarily think it's—I don't think it's necessary, and I think it actually challenges us to give it the respect it deserves when we're speaking, and so I would encourage us to defeat this.

Mayor Jake Woodford 17:02

And I just want to be clear, again, that what we're—these are separate items that we're talking about here. So the first is regarding the location of the meeting, striking out "regardless of location" and clarifying "taking place within Council chambers." That's the item that's before you now. So we're not on to the next item which pertains to deleting rule 35. So just want to make that clear for further discussion. Alder Hartzheim.

Aldersperson Sheri Hartzheim (District 13) 17:32

Thank you, Chair, I have a response to what Alder van Zeeland stated so would you prefer that I wait until we take the next item up in order to approach that?

Mayor Jake Woodford 17:45

To remain in order, let's focus on the item at hand and resolve that issue and then we'll get on to rule 35 after.

Aldersperson Sheri Hartzheim (District 13) 17:55

Thank you. I do think it is important that we continue this particular item so at the very least we can get to the next item to vote about it. Thank you.

Mayor Jake Woodford 18:05

Any further discussion? Hearing none, we have a motion and a second to approve. Please cast your votes. Motion passes 11 to three. Item has been approved.

Mayor Jake Woodford 18:41

Moving on now to item 24-0426 rule 35 Pledge of Allegiance, and this one pertains to deletion of rule 35. Need a motion. We have a motion and a second to approve. All right. Alder Fenton.

Aldersperson Denise Fenton (District 6) 19:07

Thank you, Your Honor. I think what Alder van Zeeland said is absolutely to the point. We are—people are moving from meeting to meeting when we're in committee meetings. We—it is not the—I don't want to say "ceremonial", but it's not the organization that we have during a Council meeting. And I would just in considering this, I would like to remind all my colleagues, that we are not breaking with decades of tradition here by ceasing to say the Pledge of Allegiance at every committee meeting. This was a rule change that was put in last year. I suspect that the rule change was put in, was initiated, to call out certain people, and I—somewhat like the invocation, we have tried this for a year. It has not—it has proven to be awkward, particularly since we can't move the flag and we have video where we see nothing in chambers but people but the backside of people and don't hear it on video. So I think we've had our trial, and we found that it is not a way to show respect but just another ritual that becomes rote. And I—without any disrespect to the flag or any disrespect to the country, I don't find it necessary. Thank you.

Mayor Jake Woodford 20:43

Alder Hartzheim.

Aldersperson Sheri Hartzheim (District 13) 20:46

Thank you, chair. What do Aldersperson Siebers, Aldersperson Meltzer, Aldersperson Firkus, Aldersperson van Zeeland, Aldersperson Hayden, Aldersperson Alfheim, Aldersperson Wolff, Aldersperson Hartzheim, Aldersperson Croatt, and Aldersperson Doran all have in common? We all voted to institute this rule last year because we found it important.

Aldersperson Sheri Hartzheim (District 13) 21:09

I understand that minds may have been changed during this previous year this past year, but mine has not. And I encourage us to continue this despite all the flimsy excuses that been give—have been given today. Aldersperson Fenton says "Well, we're facing away from the camera, and nobody can hear us." That's no different than we say then when we say it in full Council. Aldersperson van Zeeland states that there is not proper decorum when people are moving in and out of meetings, etc. on committee nights. I find that to be a flimsy excuse as well.

Because no matter what, if someone walks in and we're all saying the pledge, they immediately know we're saying the pledge, and they'll get right into it.

Aldersperson Sheri Hartzheim (District 13) 21:54

I—for a fun job, I work as a usher at the ballpark, and when someone is ready to sing the national anthem, not everybody in the ballpark is paying attention. But as soon as the anthem starts, everybody's paying attention. So it doesn't have to be this "Well we're not using proper decorum." I believe we are using proper decorum, and people will get the hang of it as they go. And I think that's been proven as we look at all of the countless numbers of committee meetings that we have—already have on our video stream.

Aldersperson Sheri Hartzheim (District 13) 22:36

I believe that all these people last year who voted to institute this rule probably had the same idea that Alder Fenton has that this was instituted as some sort of gotcha. And yet they still voted to approve this. And I would like everyone to continue to do so. Thank you.

Mayor Jake Woodford 23:02

Alder van Zeeland.

Aldersperson Katie Van Zeeland (District 5) 23:04

Thank you, chair. My apologies for speaking out of turn. I had our old agenda up. So my apologies for speaking on this beforehand. I don't think that necessarily this was done as a gotcha. I think that the pledge of allegiance is a ritual. I think a ritual is very important to the people who practice them. I think that we all have an idea of how that ritual should be carried out. And I did vote for this because I thought that we would be able to carry out in a way that would be with my values, and it's not right now. And I'm just going to choose to ascribe that same way of thinking to my colleagues. Thank you.

Mayor Jake Woodford 23:51

Alder Meltzer.

Aldersperson Vered Meltzer (District 2) 23:53

Thank you. At the time when I voted for this, I felt like I was taking the league—the lead of my colleague who is a veteran and who has clarified that he actually was not encouraging us. So, after some of the comments last night, I think that there are some important reflections that I have. The pledge is something that we give voluntarily. It is not something that should be compulsorily demanded of people. So there is something questionable about what is the purpose of requiring committee members to give the pledge multiple times a day when we all gather together and give the pledge at our full, official proceeding where we finalize the votes, is that not enough?

Aldersperson Vered Meltzer (District 2) 24:54

For years and years we didn't do the pledge at committee meetings, and now it has become this big item. Are we not American enough if we stop saying the pledge so many times? Does it make my oath of office less valuable if I don't give the pledge at each committee meeting that I attend? I don't think so.

Aldersperson Vered Meltzer (District 2) 25:17

I think that there are some problems with the expectation that elected officials should be repeating a speech every single time they appear. I think it does really seriously cheapen the oath that we all took yesterday. So at this point, I will not be supporting continuing the Pledge of Allegiance at committee meetings. I think that it is very important for us to say this pledge when we meet for the Common Council meetings. I think it's also very

important for us to live out that oath of allegiance every single day and avoid performative spectacles that turn it into something other than what it's meant to be. Thank you.

Mayor Jake Woodford 26:12
Alder Wolff.

Aldersperson Nate Wolff (District 12) 26:15

Thank you, chair. I've been sitting here and thinking about veterans, specifically homeless veterans, and how much time we've spent in this chamber talking about people who have served this country who are out there suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder or experiencing homelessness. And we haven't really talked about it that much in this chamber, but we've spent about two hours talking about this.

Aldersperson Nate Wolff (District 12) 26:46

I'm the type of person who likes to spend their time focusing on the things that help people rather than showing symbolic gestures that I care about those people. I'd rather go out and help those people. And I would have rather spent two hours talking about how we could help those people rather than talking about a symbolic gesture that is not actively changing the life of someone going through hell.

Aldersperson Nate Wolff (District 12) 27:12

I'm the son of a Marine. I'm the great grandchild of a World War II vet. And I love the American flag, and I love America. I would just prefer to focus my attention on helping the people who need it and not how I can show myself being a good politician in symbolism. I would rather actively go out and make a difference in my community. So I'm going to vote against this because I feel as though it's become a political game rather than actually helping the people of the community.

Mayor Jake Woodford 28:01
Alder Wolff.

Aldersperson Nate Wolff (District 12) 28:02

Let me clarify—I'm sorry. To be clear, I'm going to vote against us saying the pledge at every committee meeting.

Mayor Jake Woodford 28:11

All right. We got a couple more speakers, but I would suggest that there was robust discussion about this last night and again tonight. I'm not hearing suggestions for amendments or changes and so I'd ask that if you have if you have more comments to add, please, by all means add them. But I would encourage the body to get to a vote on this. So with that Alder Hartzheim

Aldersperson Sheri Hartzheim (District 13) 28:39

Thank you, chair. Alder Meltzer asked what the purpose of doing this is. The purpose is to focus each of us each meeting. Just as I mentioned before, when you're at a baseball game and everybody's doing willy nilly and doing whatever they're doing with their families, etc., at one point in time, everyone in that ballpark focuses themselves on what the next task is at hand. That's what we need here in these chambers, and that's why I wish that we will continue this. I encourage my colleagues to vote for—against this rule for removal. Thank you.

Mayor Jake Woodford 29:19

Any further discussion? Hearing none, we have a motion and a second to approve. Please cast your votes. Just waiting for a vote to get in here. Alder Smith.

Aldersperson Alex Schultz (District 9) 30:20

Can we have a point of clarification to make sure that everyone knows what they're voting for on this one once more time. We're voting yes to delete that rule.

Mayor Jake Woodford 30:27

Aye vote deletes the rule.

Aldersperson Alex Schultz (District 9) 30:29

Thank you.

Mayor Jake Woodford 30:37

All right, so the item's tied. The item fails.