

To the City Clerk of Valdosta,

2/9/2021

Our coalition of organizations is contacting you today in order to file a formal ethics complaint against Scott James Matheson, Mayor of Valdosta. We contend that Mr. Matheson has violated a number of ethic standards articulated in the City of Valdosta's own Code of Ethics for elected officials (see attached copy). He has also demonstrated that he is incapable of, and/or uninterested in, representing all citizens of Valdosta equally. Because of this, we are calling for his immediate removal from office.

As for why we make these claims, we offer the following.

Each weekday morning on his three hour-long Conservative talk radio show, one that is self-described as heard "around the world," Mayor Matheson combines and conflates his roles as the Mayor of Valdosta and Conservative political pundit. In short, the Mayor's weekday conservative talk radio show serves as bully pulpit for Scott James Matheson to present himself both as the Mayor Valdosta and as a spokesperson for the City. He then, in that capacity, regularly disseminates inaccurate, divisive, and inflammatory claims that often demonize local citizens and political viewpoints that differ from his own.

As for how he combines the roles of Mayor and Conservative pundit, each weekday he makes his listening audience well aware, repeatedly, that he is "the Mayor of Valdosta, Georgia." In self-referential statements like "as the Mayor," "as part of the Mayor's job," and "in the life of a Mayor,"... each day Mr. Matheson spends large amounts of time also informing his listening audience of his itinerary, as "the Mayor," for that day. Most days Mr. Matheson also reviews, in detail, what he did as "the Mayor" the prior day. In fact, with the exception of time for guests, much of the content on the Talk 92.1 morning show is Mr. Matheson speaking as "the Mayor." Because of that, he regularly presents divisive and regularly inaccurate political views, and makes inflammatory comments, as if they reflect the official position of the office of the Mayor and the City of Valdosta.

For example, over the course of just a few recent shows Mayor Matheson claimed the following.

* On 1/12/21 the Mayor, and his co-host Jack Ring, claimed that the recent large Democratic voter turnout and Senate victory in Georgia was a process where votes were essentially purchased given the financial support Democrats provided for campaign canvassers. Or as he put it, "they don't even canvas, they don't even go to a house, they hop on a bus, they go down they vote, they come back, and they cash a \$75 check." The Mayor and co-host continued to state that people were simply paid \$75 dollars to "go find 5 friends" and take them to the polls, which according to the Mayor was not "canvassing" and "such a grey area they don't even prosecute" it, suggesting that local Valdostans, simply mobilizing people to exercise their right to vote, were possibly engaged in criminal activity. The Mayor then claimed that the canvassers then

“go cash the checks at the same liquor store” (as he chuckled), further disparaging local canvassers and suggesting that they had been recruited at a liquor store.

* On 1/12/21 the Mayor also remained silent while his co-host emphatically stated that “suppressing the vote needs to be done because a lot of people who aren’t allowed to vote are voting because we are making it too easy.” Neither the Mayor nor his co-host provided any reference to any evidence to back up inflammatory claim of voter fraud, a common theme on his show as of late. The Mayor then stated that “Jack has long thought that you should have to test at the front door” before people could vote, as he chuckled, again intimating that voting should be limited and/or actively suppressed.

* On 1/19/21 the Mayor whole-heartedly agreed with one of his regular callers (“the Colonel”) who claimed that Covid 19 virus spikes in Arizona and California were the result of us “letting in tens of thousands of unchecked migrants in from disease ridden nations” without providing any evidence whatsoever to justify such a serious claim. Or as the Mayor put it, spikes in Covid rates are the result of “large, massive, unchecked migrant populations.”

* On 1/21/21 the Mayor stated that the nation needed to “put blinders on” and just “move on” relative to the violent January 6th attack on the U.S. Capitol that left five people dead, including a Capitol police officer.....When repeatedly asked to issue a formal statement about whether he was suggesting that the crimes committed on that day should be overlooked, the Mayor has repeatedly refused to answer or comment on his statement.

* On 2/2/21 the Mayor reinforced the unsubstantiated and divisive narrative that there was widespread voter fraud in the last Presidential election by agreeing with his co-host that “Federal Judges” across the country simply didn’t want to consider legitimate voter fraud claims.

For the audio of these claims please click on this link. Please know other examples of the Mayor’s divisive commentary are available upon request.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UPp7h3V_rdE&feature=youtu.be

Given that the Mayor has ignored repeated requests to address his commentary and divisive claims, it is clear he has no interest in hearing about how he has impacted local citizens (including members of the City Council) and created doubts about his ability to serve all Valdostans. For this reason, it is also clear that he is unable to serve all constituents and should be removed from office immediately.

We also come to this conclusion because Mayor Scott James Matheson has clearly violated the City of Valdosta’s own Code of Ethics for elected officials in the following ways.

* His daily commentary in the public sphere on 92.1 Talk FM as “the Mayor” has failed to **give the public “the appearance of being Independent, impartial, and responsible to the people”** (City of Valdosta Code of Ethics, p.1). Instead, his blending of his roles as Mayor and Conservative pundit reflects that he is in fact, partisan, biased, divisive, and not concerned about all constituents he is charged with serving.

* The Mayor has failed to conduct himself “**so as to not create any question or concern as to the appropriateness legality or sincerity of any actions or conduct as a member of the governing authority**” (ibid.).

* The Mayor’s divisive comments and behavior have also **created serious doubt about his ability to “provide the public with confidence in the integrity of its government”** (ibid.).

* The Mayor’s refusal to address concerns about his divisive comments, when they are brought to his attention, also demonstrates that he is incapable of, or uninterested in, being “**independent impartial and responsible**” (ibid.)

* The Mayor has failed to use the “**power of [his] position**” for the “**wellbeing of constituents**” (ibid.) and is clearly uninterested in the views, experiences, and concerns of constituents that do not agree with his own political viewpoint.

* The Mayor’s inflammatory rhetoric about votes being purchased, “voter suppression,” voting canvassers “cashing their checks at the liquor store,” migrants causing spikes the Covid 19 virus, etc., none of which is based in any empirical fact, has also failed to “**create an environment of honesty, openness, and integrity**” (ibid.), particularly in a racially and political diverse community like Valdosta.

In closing and to summarize, during his tenure.....

* Mayor Matheson’s has repeatedly demonstrated that he is incapable of, and/or uninterested in, representing all citizens of Valdosta.

* Mayor Matheson’s has repeatedly used his Conservative talk radio show, one that excludes alternative viewpoints, fails to correct inaccurate/divisive claims, and one that regularly makes inflammatory claims that negatively impacts citizens of Valdosta, as a platform to speak as the Mayor of Valdosta and for the City of Valdosta.

* Mayor Matheson’s has repeatedly refused to discuss any of his behavior or his divisive claims and inflammatory rhetoric when they have been brought to his attention, behavior and rhetoric that again, regularly implicates Valdostans and creates division in our community.

* Mayor Matheson’s has repeatedly made unsubstantiated claims about voter fraud and purchased votes, while also disparaging Valdostans for voter canvassing and laughing when undemocratic calls for voter suppression (and poll “tests”) have been made by his co-host.

* And as someone who seems to have an endless supply of one-sided, divisive political opinions to offer each weekday as “the Mayor of Valdosta” on his radio station, Mr. Matheson also often remains strangely silent, for months at a time, when confronted with crucial community issues when they arise, like the use of excessive force by police (as in the case of Antonio Smith) or the fact that one-third of Valdostans currently live in poverty according to the U.S. Census?

* In all, Mayor Matheson’s behavior and commentary has clearly violated at least six of the core tenets articulated in the City of Valdosta’s Code of Ethics for elected officials.

With these realities in mind, the members of our organizations and a growing number in the broader community have no confidence that Scott James Matheson is capable of, or interested in, serving everyone he was elected to serve. In fact, his public commentary and behavior painfully reveals what he really thinks and feels about many of his constituents. That is why we are again calling for his immediate removal from office. Given the seriousness of the Mayor’s comments and their impact on the community, please know that if the City is unwilling to address the Mayor’s divisive behavior, our organizations will be forced to explore other legal and economic avenues to remedy this matter.

Thank you for your time and we look forward to the Ethics Committee’s response.



The Mary Turner Project
Dr. Mark Patrick George
(229) 234-2856

