

The question: “Why don’t more blacks and other people of color get involved?” Well, some are getting involved.



The principles of our democratic society can be traced back as far as the political philosophy espoused by John Locke in his “Two Treatises of Government” around 1690. Among the principles Locke articulated was, government by consent of the governed, and the right to rebel.

As he defended his philosophy against those who said the right to rebel would lead to anarchy he said, when people are made miserable they will rebel under any form of government. People do not revolt upon every little mismanagement of public affairs, he added (or as the Declaration of Independence has it, “for light and transient causes”). He further said, management by consent coupled with the right of people to rebel is the best fence against rebellion. The more the channels of free communications and consent are maintained in a society, the less the need for revolution, said Locke.

It is important to note that this argument was a theory articulated around 1690 but has subsequently become a fact verified in the experiences of British and American forms of government. Democracy as exemplified by these two nations has proven to be the most enduring and strongest political societies the world has ever seen. Our declaration of independence and elements of our constitution comes straight out of the Lockean political philosophy. Obviously Thomas Jefferson, who wrote the Declaration of Independence subscribed to the philosophy, and so did many of his contemporaries in the colonies.

The question before us now is, how does the likes of Greg Taylor, a descendant of slaves, square up with the basic tenants of Democracy more than three centuries after John Locke? And, why is it important that he adhere to the principles articulated by Locke as he serves the people in Renton, WA and the region?

Once upon a time black people who dared try to vote in some parts of the United States of America would be given reading tests, required to recite the constitution of a given state, be beaten nearly to death, castrated or hanged, or both. Well times have changed; to a large extent.

In spite of the fact that the United States has achieved a landmark with the election of a black man as President of the United States, via the democratic party and millions of Americans, oppression remains, and not just with blacks. However, the human spirit can’t be conquered, as evidenced by wave after wave of immigrants having achieved success in the United States after leaving their homelands.

Also people like Greg Taylor are getting involved and finding support from a wide variety of supporters, including immigrants, as he work to support all ethnic groups.

I had heard about Greg Taylor several times before I met him. Some people had mentioned his name in terms of him running for city council in Renton, WA and others had spoken of his work around equity issues. So, when King County’s Caren Adams invited me to participate in an equity group I finally had the opportunity to meet Greg Taylor. Of course he spoke all the right words around equity issues; many do, especially some bureaucrats. But often bureaucrats have to protect their jobs so they haven’t always been able to say or do what needs to be said or done to achieve equitable results in their institutions.

Even though their hearts may be in the right place some elected officials also feel restricted, not necessarily because of their responsibility to their constituents but sometimes because of their loyalty to a given

faction they need to please in order to move ahead in the group and maintain the group’s support.

I have attended many meetings with bureaucrats and elected officials to move forward on the diversity and equity agenda. Talk is cheap, but it takes guts for a bureaucrat or an elected official to stand on equity issues, and much more courage to go against the status quo around any issues. For some folks it’s much easier to talk a good game then settle back doing very little, all in the interest of being a good team player. Meanwhile the principles of democracy are derided. I have seen so many “team players” in institutions that I had no reason to believe Greg Taylor would be any different.

Frankly, I am not suggesting that he should be different, because for some folks losing a job or a position as a result of not being a team player could mean the kids don’t go to college or car payments don’t get paid. We just can’t judge people too harshly for not challenging the status quo. They need to keep their positions and their jobs, but it certainly is refreshing when one does step out on higher principles other than self, that is, before they need our help to keep their jobs. This is precisely why in Kent we organized groups like PAID (People Advocating Involvement in Democracy) the Community Network Council (CNC) and Kent Black Action Commission (KBAC). We want people to keep their jobs and positions, and still have someone dealing with the inequities in the institutions.

Taylor is on the right track by breaking down barriers inside and forming organizations and supporting existing organizations outside the institution.

Greg Taylor has found a space inside the system where he can exercise his philosophy of “Servant Leadership.” Although leaders generally have a high minded self awareness, one characteristic of a servant leader is they are about serving the needs of the people and helping to bring those needs to the forefront.



Pictured here is Greg Taylor reviewing and contemplating issues presented at a Renton City Council Meeting

Like Bill Boyce, Kent City Council, Angela Griffin, Federal Way School Board member, Tony More, Federal Way School board member, and many other black people and other people of color; Greg Taylor was not elected because of the black vote. There were thousands of whites and other ethnic groups without whose vote Taylor would not stand a chance in Renton, Washington where the percentage of black people is only about 10% of the population.

What greater sign is there that the times have changed all over the nation, than when a people who were enslaved by white America are now voted into political office largely by white America to handle the issues of a free people and democratic institutions?

Sure, institutional racism, sexism, and other forms of institutional oppression continue to exist, but a multitude of laws, Supreme court decisions, policies, procedures and other tools have been created in this country to break down those barriers, and Greg Taylor is choosing to tackle those issues from both the inside and outside of institutions, availing the democratic process to the people who are here now. And that includes white people, people of color, immigrants, and the myriad of other kinds of diversity.

When we talk about serving the needs of the people, what does that look like in just a few of Taylor's activities? One would think that he would be willing to challenge the status quo when needed. He should have the courage to break the ranks of any given faction in favor of voting his conscience on issues, and he should be trying to bring more people into the decision making processes that affect their lives, especially those who may feel disenfranchised; and more. How well is he serving?

Government “...Of the people, by the people, for the people...”

Greg Taylor is finding ways to tackle the internal government issues that suppress people, not just black people or other people of color, but all people. He is the right man inside the system to help community voices be heard so they can let government know the will of the people. At times challenging the status quo has to create discomfort for someone inside the system of government but, paraphrasing Locke, the more the channels of free communications and consent are maintained the less the need for revolution, he said. In western democracy we have come to accept a certain amount of discomfort on all sides as the price we pay for having government of, by, and for the people.



The group pictured here, including the inset, are presenting to the Renton City Council on issues relative to building a new library in Renton. The story of the library issues have been covered for months by newspapers. However, the short story for Synrgy is, this is a group of people applying the principles of government “of the people, by the people, for the people.”

Greg Taylor can be counted on to support the little guy who comes into city hall and wants to be heard, even if that means challenging long established policies, procedures and practices.

Taylor supported the group pictured above. They didn't like how decisions were being made about where the new library in the city of Renton might be built. He worked with the team at city hall, including bureaucrats and elected officials to help the group achieve their goal of having the library issue go to a public vote. The citizens work was apparently effective because 76 percent of the voters agreed with the community group that the library in Renton should remain in its current location over the Cedar River.

One of the things about the democratic process that contributes to its longevity is; when government is making decisions the democratic process provides opportunities for citizens to influence those decisions. However, in a democratic society the

On June 26, 2012, The South King Council of Human Services awarded Greg Taylor the Human Services and Equity Award for an individual in South King County, saying: “...in order to address racial disproportionality in our region, Renton City Council member Greg Taylor has actively engaged new community members in the political process, building bridges to the unconnected and listening carefully to learn about their hopes and interests. In working on local and regional issues, he draws attention to the great assets in our communities...”

citizens must be well informed and must also know their rights as well as know how to exercise their rights. They can then become a viable force in the discussions and debates on a number of issues. As one local public official put it, the government belongs to the people. “It's your government,” she said, and those who step up to participate are the ones who will be heard and have a better chance of influencing the decisions that affect their lives.

After their success with 76 percent of the vote to keep the library over the Cedar River, the group, now calling themselves Renton Advocacy for Resident Concerns, is pictured above giving further input on the structure, budget, and other details of the library, including their proposed role in the entire process. According to Taylor, “...If contractors and consultants can come into council meetings with presentations on such matters, then why can't our citizens...?”

Recently the group announced that even though the decision has been made to keep the library over the Cedar River, the group would remain in existence and begin to listen to and help other citizens address issues and concerns. Were John Locke living today he would say to the Renton bureaucrats, elected officials, Greg Taylor, and especially to citizens, “yes, that's how it should work.”

One of the first signs indicating Greg Taylor had the courage to go against an inequitable status quo, is when he asked me to help form a group of people in Renton to address issues relating to people of color. He further acknowledged some of our community organizing in Kent as a model for other cities and school districts in the region.



It is not very often we find a public official who is actually willing to hit the pavement to contact people, including activists, to form a new group unless they want to control the group. More often what happens is the group is formed by activists like myself, and later, someone (not necessarily a public official) comes around trying to influence and control the group. In a parasitic way they sometimes even present themselves to others as the broker for the group. More detail on this point as the topic of another discussion.

One of the first names I gave Greg to consider as a member of the new group was Ken Curl. Ken was the president of the Renton Black Parents Association years ago. Later Ken was a strong supporter of Kent's own Lawrence Lombard's African American Cultural Center. Ken came whenever called to support any event relating to people of color.

Greg proved himself again, knowing that once formed, he or no one else would be able to control this group, he made contact with people, including with Ken Curl. Ken joined the group that now meets at his Church in Renton.

It's interesting that no one else had organized a group of people of color in Renton. Although public officials should not have to, pulling together people of color to advocate for themselves is one of the most important things elected leaders of any ethnicity can do. This is not a slam on Renton officials because black people and other people of color need to organize themselves (independent of institutions) to advocate for their issues in cities and institutions across the region.

As Taylor was forming the group, now calling themselves the "Communities of Color Advocacy Group," a member participated with the Renton Advocacy for Resident Concerns to speak to the Renton Council meetings about allowing residents more than three minutes to speak at council meetings. Taylor supported the group effort saying, these are folks from our community, if anyone has a right to speak it should be them, and if they need more time, they should have more time, and they shouldn't be rushed or intimidated by the process. Renton council agreed to revisit their three minute rule.

You would think that someone like Greg Taylor would be supportive of the commitments in King County government's "Equity and Social Justice Annual Report." Well, he can cite the 14 Determinants of Equity from memory, since they are first written in his heart. Greg Taylor and many of us agree with the county's position, especially the part suggesting every city in the region needs to focus on equity and social justice. One way to focus on equity and social justice is to facilitate greater access for "the people living here now" to influence government policies, procedures, and practices.

Some people have the impression that once they vote a person into office their job is done. In reality that's not how democracy works; the job is only half done. Now you have to monitor and hold the person elected accountable, and if necessary intervene. In a democratic society we are governed by our consent only, in order to protect our liberties and property, and so we can pursue happiness. When government fails to provide these services go down to city hall, or wherever, and raise hell. That's your right to rebel. Then consider electing someone different. If government doesn't serve you well it's not the "white man's" fault, it's yours.

So, what does Mayor Cooke have to do with it?

I asked Greg Taylor how he became known well enough in Renton to acquire the votes to become elected. He said among other things Suzette Cooke was instrumental in helping him. After he had joined the Renton Chamber she came to ask him to serve on a chamber committee. He declined, but a week or so later, there she was again encouraging him to join a committee. He declined again, but said he was thinking about which committee to join. Cooke sent him the list and said pick one. Finally, he joined. Later, after he had chaired a committee she encouraged and helped him to become Chairman of the Renton Chamber. Taylor said although he was doing other things simultaneously that gave him exposure, Cooke helped to create opportunity for him

Taylor was also involved with the Renton Rotary, the Salvation Army Food Bank, and other community connections that put him in touch with a large number of people, but Suzette Cooke's persistence opened up other doors. He speaks of that persistence in terms of a sense of equity because she didn't have to keep pushing him in the right direction. One way we define equity he said is when someone helps you to do things even though you may not know at the time that's the best thing for you to do. You need to be involved was her attitude and he said he appreciated that attitude.

That's what's needed out there to get more people of color involved; leaders, people who know what's going on need to reach out to individuals in the community, let them know they are needed, encourage them to get involved, keep coming back, support them when they do get involved, and eventually if they have the aptitude you will involve a Greg Taylor of any color you choose. The difference between Cooke's approach and the approach where some self serving office seeker comes around wanting to represent people of color is that Cooke's approach is more genuine, it takes more time, and you really must believe in the person you want involved. We need people of color involved so they can get the experience of chairing a chamber committee or becoming chair of the chamber, and becoming a city council member. They need to help run this country; they have to help. Thank you Suzette Cooke, you set a great example of how to get people involved.

Consider further a couple of points about the democratic process using a Mayor Cooke scenario from a different perspective.

Several years ago when we formed PAID, (People Advocating Involvement in Democracy) several people said, "there is no need to talk to Mayor Cooke about diversity and equity issues because she is an extreme, right wing, conservative, Republican who can care less about these issues." I was cautioned not to even talk to her. However, my position, and that of my friends was, how do "we" really know what she thinks if we don't talk with her. I set up a meeting with the Mayor and about 10 or 12 PAID members. During the first meeting we discovered that the city had not been collecting data around diversity and equity issues. Among a few other concerns I distinctly recall making the point that organizations that don't collect data around those issues don't really care about equity and diversity. I further said the days when we can be colorblind have not arrived. We had just recently had a similar conversation at Brad Bell's house with several council members.

The Mayor's response to my statement was something to this effect, we don't know now but I will find out, and I will find out why records had not been kept.

The next time we met the Mayor indicated that one reason the city hadn't been keeping data on diversity and equity issues is because it was difficult to collect since the city can't ask the same

questions that schools ask, it costs money to collect the data, and until now it was not an issue, she said.

Some of us understood the Mayor's situation, especially since their Diversity Task Force, which had been established by ordinance back in 1997 as I recall, had now been defunct for many years. Furthermore, it was her first term as mayor.

I also discovered that Mayor Cooke does respond to a group of citizens when she can. Suffice it to say Mayor Cooke has increasingly responded to diversity and equity issues as we have put them before her during her term as mayor. And, why wouldn't she, when the majority of the people she serves are people of color, including a myriad of other kinds of diversity.

During her second term I have seen quite a bit more from the mayor personally, her team, and the council around diversity and equity issues. The details are not to be expounded upon in the context of talking about Greg Taylor's leadership relative to the democratic processes. I do want to make another point about Greg Taylor and Mayor Suzette Cooke however.

We have to admire a person who will stand by someone based on his knowledge of that person rather than sell a person out in the name of loyalty to another group or another cause. General Colon Powell, former Secretary of State in the Bush administration, is sticking with President Obama. Colon Powell broke the ranks because of what he believes based on his experience and knowledge of the situation. Is there a price to pay for that? Perhaps, but whatever the price, some people think it's worth paying in order for them to vote their conscience.

Even as we speak, when people say the mayor doesn't address diversity and equity issues well enough, and even when I point to specific, important acts and achievements by the mayor and her team in the diversity and equity area, often the response I receive is, "she doesn't really care about the issues she is just doing it for political reasons." Well, she's a politician isn't she? What is she supposed to do when a portion of the populace puts issues before her?

All you people out there who are working as advocates for certain causes; regardless of the cause don't wait until the "right" group or the right person gets into office to address your concerns. You have to work with whoever is in office because the institution in which the person or group holds office belongs to the people. It's up to you to hold the office seekers and the office holders accountable in a democratic society. Don't let someone steal your power and subvert your opportunity by threatening to label you, or by telling you who you should and should not talk with about addressing your concerns.

Give whoever is in office the opportunity to address your concerns, and if they do, don't betray them by acting as if you don't know them when people speak against them.

Our country needs both liberals and conservatives and democrats and republicans. That's part of the checks and balances our political forefathers envisioned. But we need to be cautious of energy spent on divisiveness, discrediting, labeling, and activities that's sometimes aimed more at getting into the seat of power than doing what is right.

