

The Salt Lake Tribune

Editorial: Spending time with children not counter to progressive principles

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September 8, 2007

Several months ago, I had what I thought was a confidential discussion with former Salt Lake City mayor Ted Wilson over dinner. He told me that if I were not going to run for re-election, his daughter Jenny was likely to run.

I discussed the time demands for the mayor and expressed concern that Jenny would either not be able to spend much time with her children, ages 2 and 5, or put in the time necessary to fulfill the duties of mayor. I later privately expressed to Jenny the same concern.

I made clear that my view applied equally to fathers and mothers. When my son was young I would not have committed to a job that took me away from home on so many evenings and for many days each year.

As mayor, I often spend one or two evenings a week in City Council or Redevelopment Agency meetings. I attend evening community council meetings, evening One-on-One-With-the-Mayor meetings, Saturday-Morning-With-the-Mayor meetings, early-morning community council chair and cabinet meetings, and out-of-town meetings of the U.S. Conference of Mayors and the Mayors Innovation Project.

I also host dozens of mayors from throughout the country at the Sundance Summit for three days each year and attend evening community events, sometimes several of them, each week.

I have been called out of town to work on crucial issues, such as requiring screening of all checked luggage at airports (including meetings with the secretary of transportation, the Federal Aviation Administration administrator, and the U.S. Conference of Mayors), obtaining federal funding for the university light rail line and other city projects, and obtaining railroad "quiet zone" authorization from the Federal Railroad Administration.

Most weeks I am at the office six and sometimes seven days, and often work until late at night, as do many of my colleagues in other cities.

I never intended to make this a public issue. I was shocked when I read an account of my conversation with Ted on the blog published by Jenny's stepmother (the editor of City Weekly). I was also surprised when I was contacted by a journalist who informed me that she had been contacted by Jenny's campaign because they wanted to exploit my private conversations for political purposes.

When asked, I stated clearly that my concerns are about parenting, by fathers and mothers, and that my view is that if people choose to have children, they ought to spend a lot of time with them. (Is this such a shocking view?)

Of course, the media have chosen to deceptively make it appear that I am speaking only about mothers, making it seem as if this is all about sexism and women's rights. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Denise Knighton ("Stay at home," Public Forum, Sept. 3) and James F. Oshust ("Stupid is . . .," Public Forum, Sept. 3) have completely mischaracterized my position on this issue, even to the point, in Oshust's case, of fabricating a quotation. I have never said Jenny Wilson should exit the race, nor have I said she should "just be a mom."

Also, as I have stated repeatedly, the views I have expressed on this issue are my personal beliefs. The ultimate decision as to whether a parent of young children should run for a demanding public office is up to the candidate and his or her family.

I have always been an avid advocate of gender equality and of expanded opportunities for women in the workplace. To recklessly and dishonestly mischaracterize my view on this issue is as outrageous and demeaning as what I am falsely accused of stating.