

## **Dissenting Report From the Appeals Committee Re Lynchburg City**

Earlier this year, the Lynchburg City GOP Committee, Chaired by Veronica Bratton, determined a method of nomination of City Council Candidates for the 2026 election. In part to challenge “Helmer’s Law” which was viewed by many as a ban against party run nominating processes, and in part because of preferences, the Lynchburg GOP chose a “firehouse primary” as their method of nomination.

There were several hiccups in the process, among them the concept of whether or not ranked choice voting was an acceptable method of vote tabulation. After multiple rounds of negotiations between RPV Chair Jeff Ryer, RPV General Counsel Chris Marston, and elements of the Lynchburg GOP, it was decided to change the original call so that plurality vote would determine the winner and not “ranked choice”. However this was not determined until after early voting had already begun, so some ballots may have been different than the final ballot which was accepted.

10 candidates filed to run in the Firehouse Primary. The top 3 vote getters would win the GOP nomination. The candidates were as follows:

Veronica Bratton

Council Member Marty Misjuns

Mayor Larry Taylor

Council Member Stephanie Reed

Farid Jalil

Chris Boswell

James Watkins

Ryan Thomas

Zach Melder

Greg Barry

There were 2 slates of candidates – the 1<sup>st</sup> slate being Bratton, Misjuns, and Watkins. The 2<sup>nd</sup> slate being Reed, Taylor, and Boswell. The other 4 candidates were running on their own merits or platforms.

In keeping with Helmer’s Law, there were provisions for early balloting which included reaching out to overseas military service members. And others who are included in the protected list of voters who may require special requests.

I acknowledge that one person on the Firehouse Primary Board of Elections, Jeff Helgeson, acted in ways which were inappropriate at best, and against decorum and in a way which could be perceived as

intimidating to some voters. It also should be noted that Mr. Helgeson was the exception rather than the rule of what occurred in the run up to the election and on the day of election (May 30 2026).

It is our understanding that a series of improper signs were placed – which Chairman Ryer requested be removed. Those signs were removed the night before May 30, and placed in safe keeping. Miraculously those signs or signs similar re-appeared the next morning, and at the specific request of Chairman Jeff Ryer, and 5<sup>th</sup> Congressional District Chair Rick Buchanan, were again removed and put into safe keeping. The signs did not reappear – and these signs were gone early into the process of voting on May 30.

There also were handouts which improperly suggested that of the 10 candidates on the ballot – voters could only choose one of 7 – excluding Reed, Taylor, and Boswell. This was also clearly improper as the RPV Party Plan clearly states that the Lynchburg GOP not can any GOP Committee endorse candidates before the nomination process is finished. It seems that the intent was to say that of the 10 candidates who filed for the ballot on May 30, that 7 had gone through a review by the Lynchburg GOP and the 3 candidates listed above in this paragraph did not. It was also understood that Mr. Helgeson – while he was acting as Vice Chair of the Board of Elections, was handing out literature for the Bratton/Misjuns/Watkins slate. Approximately 1600 people participated in the Firehouse Primary. There were 119 “provisional ballots” filed, and of those 28 were tossed out for a variety of reasons.

The final results were as follows:

Bratton 732

Misjuns 727

Taylor 683

Watkins 650

Boswell 623

Reed 609

Thomas 360

Melder 339

Berry 90

Jalil 86

There were 3 appeals filed, which ended up being merged into 1 appeal – the basis of these appeals was that the firehouse primary was done in violation of Helmer’s Law,

That the actions of Mr. Helgeson and other elements of the Lynchburg City Council were so egregious that not only must the results of the election be tossed, but that there must be other sanctions as well. These include the dissolution of the Lynchburg City GOP.

**Some history.** There has long been a series of feuds in the Lynchburg City GOP and on the Lynchburg City Council. The current drama started in 2022/2023 when after Stephanie Reed was elected, she and Council Member Chris Faraldi wanted to be Mayor and Vice Mayor. Instead of working with Council Members Helgeson and Misjuns, Reed and Faraldi went to the 2 Democrats on the Lynchburg City Council and got the Democrats to vote for Reed for Mayor and Faraldi for Vice Mayor.

A few months later, Reed, Faraldi, and the 2 Democrats voted to censure Misjuns and Helgeson.

This is mostly seen as the beginning of the current drama that the Lynchburg GOP has become. Elements of RPV, which include then RPV Chair Rich Anderson, RPV Exec Director Ken Nunnenkamp, RPV Regional Vice Chair Woman Nancy Dye, 5<sup>th</sup> Congressional District Chair Rick Buchanan, and 6<sup>th</sup> Congressional District Chair John Massoud met with several dozen upset Republican Committee Members. The result of that meeting was that tensions cooled, and many of us thought that the drama had ended.

The Appeal Hearing started at 8 30 PM on June 9, and ended at 12 45 am on June 10. It resumed shortly after noon on June 10 and ended at approximately 1 30 on June 10. The Committee was comprised of the following 5 members

4<sup>th</sup> Congressional District Chair Carey Allen

Tim Parrish

Trevor Webb

Caleb Cruvey

6<sup>th</sup> Congressional District Chair John Massoud

The Committee in a series of 3-2 votes on June 10, the Committee voted to toss the results of the election, and voted to dissolve the Lynchburg GOP Committee, and also voted to ban the heads of the current Lynchburg GOP Executive Committee from serving in their positions for the remained of the term of this GOP Committee. The Committee also voted unanimously to remove Jeff Helgeson from the Party or any GOP office for a term of 4 years. The Committee also voted unanimously to commend the efforts of Steven "Doc" Troxel for all his hard work trying to make the Firehouse Primary be a success.

## **Dissention**

The reason for the dissention is as follows. 1<sup>st</sup> off, I am not going to debate the intentions of the Ad Hoc Committee Members – it is my contention that everyone viewed this from their viewpoints of the world, and did so in as fair a manner possible given their life experiences.

Chair Allen, Parrish, and Webb tended to view this as a Party Plan violation issue. Massoud and Cruey tended to look at this as more of a political issue than a Party Plan issue. Cruey was also concerned about the status of some of the signers of the appeal. Cruey believed that several of the signers were not eligible under the Party Play to sign such a pledge and thus the signatures were invalid.

Member Cruey acknowledged missteps occurred and some party plan violations such as the handouts that seemed to approve of seven of the ten candidates and not approve the other three. To an ordinary voter this would imply an endorsement of the seven and that violates article VII of the party plan. Member Cruey acknowledged as well that Mr. Helgeson's actions violated article VII section J pertaining to ethical conduct. While these violations occurred Member Cruey believes that they did not alter the outcome of the race.

Massoud tended to look at this through the lens of politics. Reed lost not because of voter intimidation, but because she sided with Democrats against 2 elected Republicans on 2 occasions listed above. It should also be noted that Mayor Larry Taylor – who was on the same ticket with Reed, was a top 3 vote getter. So whatever wrongs were committed by Mr. Helgeson or whoever, did not stop one of the Reed Slate members from being elected. Maybe Stephanie Reed should not have censured her fellow Republicans and then she would have won the Firehouse Primary.

Massoud also has an issue with tossing out the 1<sup>st</sup> Black/African American Mayor of Lynchburg because of the violations listed above. Massoud believes that doing so could harm Republicans in localities in Virginia for many years to come. The reasons for the removal of the 28 Provisional ballots was questionable as well. Most likely 20 of those should have been included, which would have only helped Larry Taylor but not changed the outcome of the race. Overturning this election would disenfranchise 1600 voters – something RPV should be sensitive about doing.

For those reasons, it is asked that the State Central Committee uphold the results of the election, and reinstate the Lynchburg GOP including its Executive Committee. It is also asked that the State Central Committee agree with the Appeals Committee that Jeff Helgeson be banned from all Party offices for a period of 4 years, and that the State Central thank Steven "Doc" Troxel for all his hard work in trying to make this Firehouse Primary a success.

Respectfully submitted

S John Massoud  
Chairman  
Virginia's 6<sup>th</sup> Congressional District Republican Committee

Caleb S Cruet  
SCC Member 9th District