

Media Contact: Mike Battistelli at 407-221-4855

Westhaven Voters for Fairness and Civility Urges New Tone in Remaining Election Cycle

FRANKLIN, Tenn., Oct. 2, 2023 — Westhaven Voters for Fairness and Civility, a newly formed group of residents in the Westhaven community, today issued a call for a new tone in Franklin's upcoming election, citing an incident at a private, resident-organized candidate forum held Sept. 27 at Westhaven as the most recent example of the urgent need for a change of election rhetoric and conduct.

Although the candidate forum was for Westhaven residents, one resident who supports Mayor Ken Moore and has long-term ties with the Democratic party invited NewsChannel 5 reporter Phil Williams, a non-resident, to attend the forum.

Despite Williams' claim in a NewsChannel 5 news report that there was "chaos" at the forum, video evidence from inside the room attests otherwise. There was a brief dispute at the door that was handled promptly and professionally. The event was highly attended and well organized.

Westhaven Voters for Fairness and Civility called on Williams to quit harassing and bullying mayoral candidate Gabrielle Hanson. The group urged him to abandon his obsession with influencing Franklin's mayoral race and instead let the voters decide the outcome.

"Mr. Williams is not entitled to an interview with Ms. Hanson, or anyone else for that matter. His biased and unprofessional conduct toward Ms. Hanson only serves to reinforce the wisdom of her declining to participate in an interview with him," said Mike Battistelli, co-founder and spokesman for Westhaven Voters for Fairness and Civility.

The group also called on the candidates and their supporters who speak of unity yet repeatedly refer to opposing candidates as "extremists," "radicals," "divisive" and other pejorative red-flag terms to cease name-calling and focus on the issues that are important to Franklin residents.

"Such personal attacks are smokescreens designed to take attention off the issues and instead stoke fear and loathing of opponents. They are harmful and do nothing to solve the challenges Franklin faces in the coming years, and they are counter-productive to efforts to bring our community together," said co-founder Dave Akel.

"Demonizing those with whom one disagrees is nothing new. Many years ago, a group considered to be extremists, radicals, divisive and even dangerous were attacked in similar ways. Today, we call this group our Founding Fathers, and we are glad their courageous vision for America prevailed in spite of much opposition from so many naysayers," Akel added.

Westhaven Voters for Fairness and Civility noted that a number of self-identified left-wing activists, some of whom do not even live in Franklin but are attempting to influence the election, have in recent days made veiled threats and even posted the addresses on the Internet of Westhaven residents who support Ms. Hanson.

“It appears these activists fear their preferred candidate for mayor cannot win on the merits of his record. We hope the Franklin Police Department will take note of these hateful and threatening social media posts, and hold those responsible accountable,” said co-founder Larry Lebert.

“This is not the kind of behavior that has made Franklin such a wonderful place in which to live and work,” Lebert continued. “We call on Mayor Moore to denounce such threats and name-calling, and show leadership by urging the public to be fair, civil and respectful of everyone.”

Westhaven Voters for Fairness and Civility is an informal group of Westhaven residents committed to free speech, open dialogue, transparency, fairness, truthfulness, respect and decency on the part of candidates and their supporters.

###