



Statement to the Essex County Board of Supervisors

February 5, 2015

Good morning. Thank you Chairman Douglas for the opportunity to speak. My name is Peter Bauer and I am the executive director of Protect the Adirondacks.

It was very strange to read the original Denton Publications editorial that called on other news outlets to blacklist Protect the Adirondacks and not report on our actions and for us to be abolished.

We had always thought that newspapers upheld free speech and covered all newsmakers, not just the few who they favored. We were gratified that other news outlets soundly rejected this call and denounced Denton.

In talking with leaders at Denton Publications they assured us that they did not mean what they wrote, that they had no intention of blacklisting us and that they did not support us being abolished.

Denton Publications, as you know, soon recanted that editorial, announced reforms in how they will editorialize in the future, and stated to other news outlets that their editorial was simply not fair and that they believe in fair play.

As Denton was walking back its calls for PROTECT to be silenced and abolished, it was an even stranger thing to learn that the Essex County Board of Supervisors had endorsed that controversial editorial.

The thing that was really strange was that unlike a newspaper, elected officials swear an oath to uphold the US and NYS Constitutions, which protect free speech of groups like Protect the Adirondacks.

If you were all looking to denounce PROTECT, you picked a poor vehicle for doing so. By endorsing the Denton editorial you endorsed a call that Protect the Adirondacks be silenced and abolished. We have hundreds of members who live and pay taxes throughout Essex County. We have five Board members who live here, two who run their businesses here, and you all, whether you intended to do this or not, called for these County residents to be silenced and to go away.

Protect the Adirondacks!

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In the Adirondacks it's important that all voices be heard. It's important that no voices be silenced. It's especially important that voices of dissent and voices that seek to hold government accountable are not silenced, but that their freedom to speak is protected. Government leaders should be in the business of protecting the rights of public watchdog groups, and not trying to run them out of town.

The work of PROTECT goes beyond our legal actions. We manage the largest water quality monitoring program in the Adirondacks, actively monitor Forest Preserve management in all corners of the Adirondacks, advocate for clean water and wildlife protections and sustainable forestry, work on various invasive species actions. We undertake research and intervene in major private land developments across the Adirondacks. And, of course, we do on occasion engage in legal actions, similar to the Essex County Board of Supervisors.

We could only do the work that we do in a free and open society. We could not do what we do in many places around the world. The freedoms of the United States and New York State civil society are vital to our ability to make our voices heard. We take being heard seriously because many of the things that we work to protect have no voices. The trees can't speak. The forests can't speak. The rivers and wetlands and lakes and streams have no voices. The mountains can't speak. The birds and other wildlife have no voice.

That's why it's important that Protect the Adirondacks be heard and that any call for PROTECT, or any other group, to be silenced, must be rejected.

In his great "I Have A Dream" speech Martin Luther King evoked the famed High Peaks of Essex County when he called out to "Let freedom ring from the mighty mountains of New York."

So here today, in the shadows of some of those mighty mountains, I ask you all to let freedom ring, and to affirm that Essex County is indeed a place where everybody gets a voice. Where everybody gets to be heard. And where nobody and no organization should have to endure calls from government leaders to be silenced or to go away or to crawl down some hole.

The resolution that the Essex County Board of Supervisors passed last month calling for Protect the Adirondacks to be silenced and abolished was shameful.

Thank you for giving us time today on your agenda.