

**February 15, 2018**

**Public Hearing Comments on School Naming Committee Recommendation**

**Jerry File**

Alexandria School Naming Committee

Chair Gentry, Vice Chair Anderson and members of the School Board, good evening, I am Jerry File and served as a member of the School Naming Committee. I was born in Alexandria, attended Mt. Vernon Elementary School, graduated from George Washington High School and the College of William & Mary qualified to teach school in Virginia. I served as a Marine Corps officer for 10 years participating in the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962 and the Viet Nam War in 1967. Later as a Marine Corps recruiting officer for the colleges in Virginia, I fostered racial and gender equality by achieving record results for our officer programs at historically black colleges and women's colleges. For example, I recruited the Student Body President at Hampton Institute, the Senior Class President at Virginia State University, and 1 of the only 6 black cadets enrolled at newly integrated Virginia Military Institute along with women from Mary Washington, Radford, and Madison College. At the rank of Major, I left the Marine Corps to pursue a career in the Investment Securities Industry for 43 years in the Washington, D. C. area always residing in Alexandria. I believe I have continued to foster racial and gender equality through my volunteer service with the Alexandria Jaycees, as President of the then newly integrated Alexandria Boys & Girls Club, and as President of the Alexandria Sportsman's Club which promotes athletics at the city's 4 high schools. My 2 children and my sister's 3 children attended Alexandria public schools and my son's 4 children attend public schools in Atlanta. In my view, education is the most important service of our government after public health and safety.

As a member of the School Naming Committee, I have been inundated with calls from Alexandria voters complaining the published choices of the Committee are racist, sexist, contrary to long standing School Board policy, and against the wishes of the voting public.

Of the 6 choices, 4 are black, 2 Hispanic, 0 white, and only 1 of whom has ever lived in Alexandria! The choices fail to reflect the demographics of the ACPS as well as the new school itself. The choices also fail to reflect the "diversity" and "inclusivity" espoused by the ACPS.

The results of the Committee clearly ignore or flout the stated long time policy of the School Board as Michelle Obama, Ellen Ochoa, and Sonia Sotomayor are accomplished women, yet are neither Presidents, distinguished Virginians, nor noteworthy Alexandrians as required. In fact, Sotomayor, an Ivy League graduate, has never attended a public school in her life!

Why was California's astronaut Ochoa, chosen over Alexandria's astronaut Air Force Colonel Guy Gardner, a George Washington High School graduate, distinguished U S Air Force Academy graduate and Viet Nam war veteran who was awarded 3 Distinguished Flying Crosses during enemy combat? He flew 2 space missions during his 11 years as an astronaut, headed the USAF Test Pilot School, and after earning a Masters Degree in Education from Virginia Tech, taught math and physics in Virginia public schools.

If you want an inspirational Hispanic, why not Alexandria's Viet Nam Medal of Honor recipient, U S Army Captain "Rocky" Versace, who grew up in Del Ray and whose statue is the centerpiece of Alexandria's Viet Nam War Veteran's Memorial located on the grounds of our Mt. Vernon Elementary School. His Hispanic mother was a noted children's author whose work inspired the popular television series, " The Flying Nun", starring Sally Fields. According to fellow American prisoners of war, "Rocky's" last words, before his execution as a prisoner of war by the Communist Viet Cong, were the singing of "God Bless America".

For a heroic woman's name, I personally favored Alexandria's Sarah Kemp Brady. She grew up in Parkfairfax, attended George Mason Elementary School, and graduated from Hammond High School. After William & Mary, she returned to Alexandria to teach in a newly integrated, elementary school for 3 years. She later achieved national prominence for her inspirational national leadership during 7 years, 3 Presidencies, and 6 Congressional votes to overcome powerful Congressional special interests as well as the influential National Rifle Association to enact passage of the "Brady Bill". This law enhanced the personal safety of all Americans regardless of race, creed, color, gender, education, or economic circumstances. While Katherine Johnson helped put an astronaut in orbit, Sarah Brady's determination provided additional protection to our nation's school children as well as over 300 million other Americans.

As a member of the Committee, I was shocked and dismayed by the bizarre results and believed that the results would generate much public criticism by the voters. As an Alexandrian , I was offended by the results and believed the Committee members were either too busy with other activities to perform sufficient study of Alexandria history, too biased on having an Hispanic woman, or simply chose to believe the accomplishments of Californians, New Yorkers, or Midwesterners were far superior to similar accomplishments of Virginians.

Personally, I am biased toward Alexandria and believe the Committee made a number of ill suited choices and I hope the collective wisdom of our elected School Board will overcome the rogue results of the Naming Committee.