

Rose, Jimenez must apologize for town hall appearance



Your Turn

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Guest columnists

We are Support Our Schools, a 501(c)(4) not-for-profit organization founded by four moms concerned about what is happening to our public schools. We strongly believe in the power of a true public education. We believe that all children – regardless of their socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity, national origin, gender, sexual preference, disability or religion – are entitled to a modern education in a safe and inclusive environment.

We support our teachers, administrators and School Board as we work together to provide the highest quality education to all children. But we are concerned that not all School Board members and prospective School Board members share our commitment to supporting all students.

On Dec. 3, Karen Rose, in her official capacity as an elected Sarasota County School Board member, and Sandra Jimenez, a declared candidate for the District 5 School Board seat in 2022, both spoke at a “town hall” event at The Hollow in Venice.

This event was sponsored by the Proud Boys, hiding behind the front group Unmask Florida/Unmask Freedom. For those unfamiliar with the group, the Proud Boys are an American far-right, neo-fascist, white supremacy group that promotes and engages in political violence, including significant involvement in the attempted overthrow of our government on Jan. 6, 2021.

Unmask Florida/Unmask Freedom is a Florida not-for-profit corporation incorporated under Unmask Freedom’s name in November by two known Proud Boys. Their exploits in full Proud Boy regalia, while carrying Proud Boy flags, have been detailed in the media. In addition photos evidencing the Proud Boy/Unmask Freedom connections have been visible on the Unmask Florida/Unmask Freedom Facebook page, Telegram, and its webpage.

Ironically the Karen Rose of 2021 is a stark con-

trast to the Karen Rose of 2020.

On Jan. 19, 2020, Rose posted a campaign video on her public Facebook page celebrating the art campaign “Embracing Our Differences” in Bayfront Park. In that video, Rose urged viewers to come visit the exhibit. She then quoted the words of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. and stated that her “dream” was to represent “you” on the School Board and to be “your voice.”

But which is it? Does Rose champion civil rights leaders or does she openly side with the Proud Boys?

During a Sarasota County School Board workshop on Dec. 7, two board members voiced their concerns about Rose’s participation in The Hollow town hall event. This would have been an opportune time for Rose to apologize to the public for her alignment with these groups. Unfortunately, our community did not receive a public apology; instead Rose has continuously doubled down on her decision to align herself with these groups – as has Jimenez.

Rose and Jimenez have moral and ethical responsibilities to our students, our parents and our community. Instead the message that they are sending is that groups like the Proud Boys deserve a seat at the table with the communities they target: in fact, the LGBTQ community, people of color, Muslims, Jews and immigrants have been in the proverbial crosshairs of the Proud Boys for many years.

By recognizing and appearing at a Proud Boy-sponsored event, Rose and Jimenez are normalizing the activities and beliefs of this group; they are telling students – and their parents and guardians – that they unequivocally support this group’s ideology. This is not a partisan issue. This is not a First Amendment issue. This is simply an unfettered endorsement of hate.

We strongly believe that Rose and Jimenez each owe a public apology to all citizens of Sarasota County, and also a very public disavowal of the front groups Unmask Florida/Unmask Freedom and the Proud Boys.

If they are unwilling to make these apologies, then Rose should step down from her School Board seat and Jimenez should withdrawal her candidacy – because both would be clearly unfit to sit on the School Board.

Hate has no home in Sarasota County, and most definitely not on the Sarasota County School Board.

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