



BERNIE TOLBERT FOR ERIE COUNTY SHERIFF

May 9, 2017

Ms. Catherine Schwitzer
Ms. Leslie Shatkin

Dear Catherine and Leslie,

I am writing to you for several reasons. First, I want to thank you for your friendship and support in agreeing to serve on the finance committee of my campaign for sheriff. Equally important, I want to address questions you have expressed about old reports recirculated from past election campaigns that I was accused of sexual harassment during my time as Vice-President in Charge of Security for the National Basketball Association.

Let me be as clear as possible about these reports. They are false. I have never been accused of inappropriate physical or verbal conduct. Never. Not in any professional or personal circumstance. Not with anyone.

I am the son of a mother whom I love. The brother of a sister who is my inspiration. The husband of a wife whom I honor and adore. The father of a daughter who is the apple of my eye, and the grandfather of a granddaughter who is my pride and joy.

I have too much respect for the women in my life, as well as for myself, to ever bring shame upon on my family, my neighbors or upon the people of Erie County. And I would never subject friends and supporters like you, who are giving their all to my campaign, to any such embarrassment or anguish.

I try to keep an even-tempered view of things in general and of politics in particular. But I have to admit, I take these false charges personally and they get under my skin -- deeply.

The distortion of what actually happened during my time at the NBA is being used as a political dirty trick. It is part of a pattern of twisting the truth for political gain. The pattern is evident when suicide attempts at the County Holding Center are categorized as "individual inmate disturbances" and when the display of Confederate Flags at political rallies is dismissed as merely "historical."

To be sure, there are facts to consider in this campaign. A string of unexplained deaths in the holding center, including suicides and at least one murder. Unreported suicide attempts in the holding center. A notorious killer- Bucky Phillips - escaping the holding center using a can opener, stealing a car and a gun and shooting down three state troopers. Then there is the rising murder rate in the city of Buffalo spilling into neighboring towns, and an even higher county death rate due to heroin and opioid overdoses. These are the facts about which every Erie County resident should be fully aware and deeply concerned.

As for the lawsuit accusation against me, what are the facts to consider? They are simple.

A former female employee of the NBA sued the organization over a salary dispute. As part of that suit, the employee charged she was denied a raise and a promotion because of a "hostile work environment."

As an NBA executive at the time, I was one of a number of individuals named in that lawsuit. Those in charge of the decision-making process chose to settle the case out of court. I was against that choice and clearly stated my opposition. I wanted to go to trial, but it was not my decision to make.

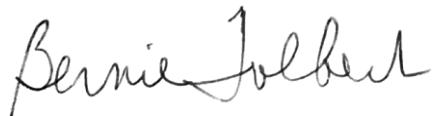
That's the whole story. There is nothing in anyway related to inappropriate conduct or sexist or discriminatory comments or behavior.

The question is how to effectively counter public falsehoods and character assassinations like this.

In my opinion, you tell the truth. You correct the record and expose the lie, which is what I am doing in this letter to you. I believe that you also make a pledge to ensure that the truth you speak is an active truth, that it shapes your life.

So here is my pledge and my promise to you and to all of Erie County. When elected sheriff, I will treat everyone with dignity and respect and will discriminate against no one. It's the way I have lived my entire life and I know it is how you have lived yours. With your continued support, we can make this pledge a foundation principle of the Erie County Sheriff's Department as well.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Bernie Tolbert".