

## Statement of events

By: Representative Susan Lynn

Almost two years ago, some very inappropriate comments were made to me in the legislative parking garage by a freshman member. Very firmly, I told the legislator that he could not speak to me that way. He repeated his remarks as though I should be flattered by his high regard. I told him very firmly a second time that he could not talk to me that way. He again, repeated his remarks. Shortly there after, the legislator who accompanied him whisked him away. I was left with several witnesses who were all astounded by his comments.

The comments were too far over the line, and I did not like it that he did not take me seriously when firmly told not to speak to me that way. I was also concerned that the freshman member had such a low level of decorum, and if left unchecked, it could lead to trouble with other members or staff.

When I sought assistance from Minority Leader Mumpower, he informed me that I was well within my rights to file an ethics complaint. I declined because I didn't think at the time that the situation rose to a level where it was necessary to punish the member but it certainly did rise to a level where he needed to be made aware of his lack of respect for another member, that the member is offended, and that he should understand that we are to treat members professionally.

Leader Mumpower did exactly as I requested; and that was to make the member aware of the proper way to treat fellow members of the General Assembly.

After being informed of his offense, the freshman legislator made a request through Leader Mumpower to apologize. I stated that I would grant his request but that I would not meet with him alone.

During his apology, the legislator tried once more to assure me of the sincerity of his remarks. This upset me and I expressed to Leader Mumpower that this was not really an apology. Leader Mumpower stated to the freshman legislator that this was upsetting me and that he should stop repeating his sincerity over his original "offer".

Due to the high media interest and gossip, it was suggested to us that if we walked to Session together everyone would think that everything was okay. I did not really like the idea but thought it might perhaps work. It seemed to; the media soon gave up on the story.

Three days later the same freshman legislator interrupted my conversation with another member by wrapping his arm around my neck and shoulders and stating "have a nice weekend" while coming in very close to my face with a great big smile. I felt this was a aggressive attempt to show me who had the upper hand. This event truly disturbed me so I called Leader Mumpower and quite upset I stated to him that I wanted him to tell this legislator to not touch me, not speak to me, and not look at me. Leader Mumpower did as I asked.

At the time, I thought by forgiving the remarks and by asking to be treated with respect that I was looking out for the best interest of my constituents.

I was as surprised as anyone to learn that there was a memo chronicling the events. In fact, I was directly asked by a member of the press if there was any documentation of the events and I answered firmly "no" because I had not recorded anything. It is now my understanding that Jason recorded this memo under advice of counsel in the event that a question ever arose as to whether he had handled the situation correctly.

Certainly, with so many witnesses, there is no uncertainty that the events described in the memo are true. As for me, I have no doubt what-so-ever that

the memo describing the events was created two years ago because when the memo was read to me, it actually refreshed my memory as to several small details that I had forgotten until reminded by the memo.

On Tuesday, January 13, as the member in question was being nominated many of us were very angry but I maybe more so. Sitting with my husband and our newly married daughter who both knew about the events of two years earlier, I struggled greatly with the grave injustice.

So I urgently approached Jason and Glen, one row in front of me, and strongly stated "let me object - he is not honorable!" Even though they were witnessing all of their hard work being defeated, they both said, "no, no, you will hurt yourself." My heart broke that they still cared more for one of their members than they did for themselves even at this critical time so I asked them again. I received the same answer and was told to just go back to my seat. My family and I were devastated to watch this scene.

On Thursday morning, during our legislative ethics training, I was absolutely sickened by the incongruity of knowing what I knew so I again asked Jason, Glen, and this time some other senior members like Steve McDaniel, if I should ask a question about harassment. I did realize that this question could raise a flag with press because they had attempted to report the events two years before. All of them told me it was not worth it to risk myself like that. I took their advice. Physically and emotionally exhausted, I slept the entire day on Friday after which I began to feel a little better and to cheer up somewhat.

January 13, the night of the Speaker's election was the first media contact with me about the 2007 harassment episode. It was by email from a blogger/journalist. However, I didn't notice it because when I had looked at my email I was too disturbed by the many comments from angry Tennesseans.

The next contact was on Sunday night. The reporter wanted me to comment on the accounts of an instance of sexual harassment two years earlier; he had blogged about it when it happened and attempted to interview me back then. I stated that I didn't want to talk about it. Monday turned into a frenzy of phone calls from reporters and Tuesday became a nuclear event. To each I stated that I didn't want to comment or be named. On Tuesday, I was physically sick with great stress to the point of calling the legislative nurse due to the reality that an article would actually be written and that my name would be used.

I curiously watched the news to see what the Speaker would say. I expected him to state that it happened, he apologized and that as far as he knew it was over. And truly, if he had said that it would have been over. What a tremendous shock to hear him deny the events and the apology. Essentially, he is calling me and everyone else that witnessed his deeds a liar.

It is very difficult for me to understand why, if a woman wants to be treated professionally, and she needs assistance to make that happen she is somehow turned into the perpetrator.

I think the issue is not so much the events of two years ago; they happened. I think the issue is the Speaker's denial that he said anything wrong and that he apologized. I am not in the wrong and I have done nothing wrong.

I feel that the atmosphere at the General Assembly is generally very happy and friendly. There is always friendly joking but if it ever goes too far with a member being truly offended, and he or she makes another member understand that, the member should respect those feelings and moderate their own behavior.

I have forgiven several events along the way, and I have refused many opportunities to use the situation for political advantage. But I do not appreciate

having my integrity questioned in the whole situation by the Speaker's denial which has made me and everyone else look like we are not telling the truth.

Thank you,

Susan Lynn