

Mayor takes heat for booting a citizen

Meeting action seen as 'heavy-handed'

April 25, 2001

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Troy -- David Easterbrook, whose daughter was killed by a drunken driver, has campaigned in courtrooms, high school auditoriums and on local radio shows to shine the spotlight on alcohol-related deaths.

But his strangest speaking engagement came Monday night at a Troy City Council meeting, when police escorted Easterbrook out the door -- at the request of the newly elected mayor.

"If you're going to jerk emotional strings and think that allows you special attention, you're wrong," Mayor Matt Pryor said Tuesday, referring to Easterbrook's mention of his daughter's death in 1997.

The disagreement between Easterbrook and Pryor came at the end of a 90-minute hearing for Champps Americana restaurant, which was fighting a month-long suspension of its liquor license. Champps was cited for three violations last year and appealed the suspension last week in Oakland County Circuit Court.

Troy residents, however, aren't buzzing about the council's 4-3 vote to pare two weeks off the license suspension, which begins May 1. Nor are they talking about Champps's decision to drop the lawsuit in light of the reduced suspension.

Instead, e-mail messages that flooded council members' in-boxes Tuesday wondered whether Pryor, who was elected April 2, had broken a campaign promise to improve communication.

When Easterbrook stood for a third time Monday night to urge the council to stick to its original suspension, Pryor said his time was up.

"How can I be out of order when this attorney for Champps has talked for an hour?" Easterbrook asked Tuesday.

Then, as Easterbrook continued to speak, Pryor asked Troy Police Chief Charles Craft to show him the door.

"I feel bad that it reached the point where Mr. Easterbrook was interfering with an orderly hearing," Pryor said.

Pryor said that council rules allow audience members to comment twice and only for 5 minutes each time. However, some who were at the hearing say Easterbrook didn't use his full 5 minutes either time he was allowed to speak.

Council members noted that other residents were allowed to speak for 15 minutes on an issue.

"In his campaign, he spoke of a commitment to openness, and in his campaign material, he said he would have a softer, gentler approach," said Councilman Martin Howrylak, adding that he had received more e-mail messages and phone calls regarding Pryor's action than on any other issue. "He appears to be heavy-handed."

Howrylak, who voted to uphold the 30-day liquor license suspension, said he's willing to chalk up Pryor's action to a beginner's mistake.

Easterbrook, however, is irked by more than just his removal from the meeting.

"This is the most gutless, spineless city council I've ever seen. Under the threat of a lawsuit, they back off on the alcohol industry," Easterbrook said Tuesday. "It's a kick in the face to the families who have lost people to drunk drivers."

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