

# NT Common Council: Resolution to have Ortt clarify LGBTQ views causes stir

BY MICHAEL DEPIETRO

Interim Tribune Editor

A resolution to formally ask newly appointed New York State Senate Minority Leader Sen. Robert Ortt to clarify his views on LGBTQ rights was a hot-button issue at Tuesday night's Common Council meeting in North Tonawanda.

As the council delineated matters inside City Hall, a number of pro-LGBTQ supporters were demonstrating just outside. The issue at hand was first sparked in late June when it was revealed Ortt had used campaign funds to make a donation to the New Yorker's Family Research Foundation (NYFRF), a nonprofit organization that has reportedly, in the past, supported anti-LGBTQ measures, including the promotion of conversion therapy.

NYFRF's website (as of Aug. 5) includes passages such as "The Bible forbids homosexual behavior," "Sexual behavior is a choice," and "When a man claims to be a woman or a woman claims to be a man, such claims are dishonest."

The resolution was first proposed July 21 by Alderman-at-Large Austin Tylec. There, Tylec said several community members and local LGBTQ groups, such as Stonewall Democrats of WNY, had reached out expressing outrage by the news.

Not long after, on July 24, Ortt drew further criticism when he cast a "nay" vote on a bill in the State Legislature that would require single-occupancy bathrooms in public spaces to be designated as gender-neutral. The bill, which was passed 53-7 in the State Senate, is meant to provide people with protections from harassment and discrimination regardless of gender identity.

During the July 21 council meeting, some board members, including Council President Eric Zadzilka, were against including the resolution on the following week's agenda, claiming it was politically motivated.

In a contentious exchange between Tylec and Zadzilka, Tylec said, "We have called out elected officials before," and cited recent times when the council has approved measures condemning Gov. Andrew Cuomo, first for bail reform, and more recently for an executive order that allowed the state to seize and redistribute ventilators to New York City during the height of its COVID-19 outbreak.

Zadzilka said those measures were for, "Public safety and the greater good of the community."

Tylec responded, "I think conversion therapy is a threat to public safety."

Zadzilka also took issue with Stonewall Democrats being on the resolution, referring to them as a political group. Tylec disagreed with the label, calling them an LG-

BY MICHAEL DEPIETRO

Interim Tribune Editor

North Tonawanda City Clerk/Treasurer Matthew Parrish announced his resignation on Tuesday with an effective date of Aug. 9. Alderman-at-Large Austin Tylec communicated the announcement on Facebook about an hour before the North Tonawanda Common Council's meeting.

During the meeting, Parrish read the following statement:

BTQ rights organization, but said he would remove the offending language nevertheless.

According to the Library of Congress website, "The National Stonewall Democrats is a grassroots network connecting LGBT Democratic activists with chapters across the country."

By Aug. 4, Tylec's resolution had made it on the agenda with the Stonewall Democrats name removed. At the meeting's onset, a response was read that had come from Ortt's office, but had not been penned by Ortt himself. The message, signed by Andrew Dugan, an Ortt spokesperson, read:

"Sen. Ortt supports the rights of all New Yorkers to live their lives free of discrimination, including individuals in the LGBTQ community. Using his support of pro-life values to insinuate otherwise is plainly wrong. Senator Ortt respects people with different values and beliefs."

Tylec expressed dissatisfaction that Ortt hadn't responded himself. He said a staff letter was an insufficient response to the issue.

Another response came from NYFRF, which said the group opposed Tylec's resolution as it "mischaracterized the nature and purpose" of the organization. Elsewhere it read, "Our Statement on Sexuality available at <https://www.NewYorkFamilies.org/Statement-on-Sexuality> includes the following language: 'Persons with same-sex attraction or gender dysphoria are made in God's image (Genesis 1:26-27), are deeply loved by Him, and should be treated with dignity and respect. ... The Bible calls Christians to love our neighbors (Mark 12:29-31) even when we disagree with them. Our organization condemns violence, bullying, and hateful rhetoric directed at any person. These are not just words on a page; rather, they are words that we live by.'"

Tylec recalled some of the more problematic statements on NYFRF's website and also noted that they hadn't addressed the topic of conversion therapy.

"It's against the law," Zadzilka interjected at one point.

"Right. Because politicians, some in Sen. Ortt's position, voted

## North Tonawanda clerk/treasurer resigns

"Honorable council, I respectfully request that you accept my resignation from my position as North Tonawanda city clerk/treasurer effective Sunday Aug. 9, 2020, at 9 p.m."

"Recently, I was presented with an opportunity to take a position elsewhere. This opportunity was unexpected and came about very quickly. It's not an easy decision to make because my heart is, and always will be here

against that type of thing," Tylec replied. "So it again circles back to the idea of what these policies mean and how they affect our community throughout the state."

Zadzilka said, "Do you have an objection to 'Persons with same-sex attraction or gender dysphoria are made in God's image (Genesis 1:26-27)' Does that sound like they have hate?"

After some back and forth, Tylec said, "I don't know. I just know that they have homophobic views, anti-LGBTQ views, and if we're going to talk about equality, we should be piecing together all types of people. Which we are hopefully going to do as we continue our agenda."

When Tylec's resolution came up later for discussion, he said, "It came up for discussion, Tylec said, 'It's as simple as getting a response from our senator. Community members have reached out, other elected officials have reached out, and again, these elected officials affect our community and I think our residents deserve the respect to get that response.'"

"We did get a response," Zadzilka interjected. "Sorry you didn't get a response you were looking for, but we got a response."

Tylec replied, "We got a response from - I don't know who that individual was from Sen. Ortt's office - but Sen. Ortt is a great guy (at) baseball games and parades. ... So, it's surprising that he's let it go this far. And me, as an elected official - you know, like all of us sitting up here - we're a voice for the community. The community has reached out; they're asking for something like this."

Alderman-at-Large Robert Pecoraro interjected, asking why Tylec or the demonstrators outside hadn't personally visited Ortt's office to speak with him.

"I'm really surprised they're here at North Tonawanda City Hall when they should be in Lockport where (Ortt's) office is," Pecoraro said.

"I'm almost a messenger in this scenario here and I don't understand why we have let it get so out of control," Tylec said.

He made the motion, but it did not get a second.

"So it's dead," Tylec said.

in the City of North Tonawanda.

"After much consideration, I have determined that is in the best interest for the future of my young family to vacate my current seat and accept the position that has been offered to me."

"It has been my distinct honor and pleasure to serve the residents North Tonawanda as your clerk/treasurer throughout the course of the last two years. This has truly been an amazing experience

to sit as an elected official in a wonderful community such as this and I will be forever grateful."

According to the Niagara County clerk's office, Parrish will be taking the position of Niagara County deputy county clerk following the retirement of Wendy J. Roberson last week. Parrish will begin the new position on Monday.

Interestingly, later in the meeting, "A Resolution Against Hatred Against LGBTQ Communities" was presented by 1st Ward Alderman Robert Schmigel. The proclamation read:

"Whereas, during the Common Council session on Aug. 20, 2019, the council voted unanimously rejecting the 'perpetuation of hatred and bigotry in our communities, condemn acts and statements of hate and intolerance, and reinforce our commitment to eradicating racist practices and acts of malice that propagate hate, incite fear, and promote violence in our communities.'

"Whereas, during the Common Council session on July 21, 2020, the council voted unanimously approving the Proclamation of Hatred, which resolved the elected leaders from the City of North Tonawanda encourage others to be empathetic toward those of different creeds, color, and life experience.

"Whereas, North Tonawanda is a diverse city, made up by residents of every race, religion, nationality, creed and sexuality,

"Whereas, all residents of North Tonawanda deserve proper representation through all facets of government at every level.

"Resolved, the elected leaders from the City of North Tonawanda can utilize this opportunity to include everyone, unite the community as one, encompassing those of every race, religion, nationality, creed, color and sexuality."

Before the vote, Tylec said that, while he would ultimately vote for the resolution, he considered it lacking in terms of real substance and action.

"I think this resolution is really a distraction. I think it's redundant and, most importantly, it does not take the type of action that the residents are calling (for). ... So, you know, of course, I'm not going to vote against this. ... I just find it very interesting that something

like this randomly pops up on the agenda without discussion, especially without discussion to the only openly gay councilman or elected official up here," he said. "So, I'd appreciate if these types of matters - similar to anything that has to do with maybe being a veteran, right? I would run it by other individuals up here that really have a perspective from that manner."

On Wednesday, in a post on Facebook, Tylec thanked supporters and demonstrators for their support.

"Unfortunately, after three weeks of discussion on the matter, my fellow council members refused to support taking action on behalf of our community. The Council Majority didn't feel it was necessary to express the concerns of our residents to the Senator as one, unified voice.

"Although our request for answers went unheard by the Council, I still hold hope that the Senator will provide the 62nd NYS Senate District with a response for his actions and his beliefs. State legislators have the power to create change and that is why it's so important to know what beliefs these policymakers hold so the community can determine whether or not they are being adequately represented.

"As an elected official, its important that we respectfully respond to our constituency no matter the issue, because WE WORK FOR YOU."

"Thank you again for your support, I know that the community is not done fighting for this issue and will continue to stand up for the greater good of our community."

"We move forward." - Austin Tylec North Tonawanda Alderman-at-Large.



**WELLNESS PARK PHARMACY**  
COME SEE THE DIFFERENCE

**Local, Independently Owned & Operated Pharmacy Offering Fast & Friendly Service and FREE Local Delivery**



Robert Kendzia  
Owner

**Flu/Shingles Vaccinations**  
with prescription  
**Compounding Available**

**CBD OILS**  
Creams, Gummies, Capsules  
& Topical Applications

**Large Variety with Competitive Pricing**  
PCT Line Available for Pain, Anxiety,  
Inflammation, Insomnia

**8672 Buffalo Ave.**  
**Niagara Falls**  
MON. - FRI. 9-6 • SAT. 9-3  
**260-1918**

[www.wellnessparkpharmacy.com](http://www.wellnessparkpharmacy.com)




**BETTER TV FOR LESS!**

**\$59.99**  
MONTH for 12 months

190 Channels America's Top 120

Add High Speed Internet

**\$19.99**  
/mo.

Subject to availability. Restrictions apply. Internet not provided by DISH and will be billed separately.

1-844-859-7136

CALL TODAY - For \$100 Gift Card Offer ends 7/15/20. Se Habla Español Call 7 days a week 8am - 11pm EST

Savings with 2 year price guarantee with AT120 starting at \$59.99 compared to everyday price. All offers require credit qualification, 2 year commitment with early termination fee and eAutoPay. Prices include Hopper Duo for qualifying customers. Hopper, Hopper w/ Slings or Hopper 3 \$5/mo. more. Upfront fees may apply based on credit qualification. Fees apply for additional TV's: Hopper \$15/mo., Joey \$5/mo., Super Joey \$10/mo.



**WE ARE OPEN!**

Daily hours of operation 10a.m. to 4p.m.  
to allow for extra cleaning before and after hours

CAPACITY WILL BE CAPPED  
AT 25% IN INDOOR SPACES

Visitors please note the following: We are committed to keeping you healthy and safe, but we cannot guarantee you will not be exposed to COVID-19. We rely on you to protect yourself by washing your hands often and avoid touching your face, maintain your distance from others, and avoid touching surfaces.

Old Fort Niagara's complete safety plan is detailed at [www.oldfortniagara.org/visitor-information](http://www.oldfortniagara.org/visitor-information).

**www.oldfortniagara.org**  
**745-7611**