Good evening and good cheer to the Commissioners and all attending tonight.

My name is Seamus O’Neill and I live at 308 Charleston Lane in Chapel Hill.

By trade, I am an economist and financial analyst, and as such I have served as an advisor to both Democrat and Republican elected officials and run two companies created with my business partner. Personally, I have little political history. I was born and raised a Democrat, but I have been an economic conservative for most of my adult life. I joined the Republican party only recently.

I am here tonight for two reasons:

First, to express my gratitude to the protesters from both sides who on Sunday, March 31st exercised their Right to Free Speech and Assembly while not interfering with the same Rights of their opponents, and to the deputy sheriffs and other law enforcement officers for their positive engagement with both groups of protesters on this highly divisive issue. By extension compliments to the Orange County Commissioners and to the County Sheriff.

Second, I wish to express my profound disappointment with the Orange County Commissioners for permitting the Orange County Human Relations Commission to invite Linda Sarsour to speak, and to spend almost $10,000 of County resources on her speech and related expenses.

The Orange County Commissioners facilitated, either by act or omission, the speakership of one of the most polarizing and offensive public figures in the country today. For those that are not familiar with the brand of Linda Sarsour - she traffics in some of the most hateful ideas available in the public square – antisemitism, radical Islam, terrorism, and the demonization of women that speak out for their rights. She is smart, well-spoken, engaging, and dangerous to free people everywhere, particularly, Jews and muslim women.

Having said this, Linda Sarsour does have a Right to Free Speech, and I support her Right to propagate her hateful ideas through speech, media and print, but she has no such right to use Orange County as her vehicle. You gave her that opportunity. What occurred was made possible only through the actions of the Orange County Commissioners.

As I stand here today I still cannot fathom how our County decision-makers concluded that extending this invitation was a good idea. One would have thought that somewhere in the chain of approvals, authorizations, budget requests, cost estimates, invoices and check issues someone, anyone would have said “… Whoooaaa! Maybe this is not such a good idea!”

However, if the Sarsour episode was in fact a well thought out event then we are all in serious trouble as we have just witnessed the weaponizing of Orange County Government against its own people.

**Does it have to be this way? No!**

If not, how do we fix it?

The answer lies within our nation’s founding documents, legal traditions, history and culture. Or, simply go with respect and logic:

First Respect –We should not turn the County treasury into a piggy bank for someone’s ugly propaganda.

The Sarsour incident diminishes confidence that we will be treated fairly by the government on other matters.

Loss of trust in our government is the most damaging result of disrespect. We start asking whose side is our government on? What do I need to do to protect myself and my family? This makes us all more tribal! The glue that holds us together starts to dissolve. People will start to seek resolution outside the political process.

Second Logic – Linda Sarsour is the radical Left’s David Duke.

Would you have permit David Duke to Speak? Of course not you say - the idea would be absurd. But why? The logic of your actions regarding Sarsour suggests otherwise. The views of both Sarsour and Duke are highly offensive and unacceptable to the majority of Orange County citizens?

Please note, many options exist for Sarsour’s local fellow travelers to organize a nonprofit or use an existing nonprofit to sponsor speakers with the most extreme ideas and beliefs. Just don’t use our tax dollars.

**Conclusion**

If your goal is to tear the social and political fabric of our County then you have succeeded. You have used the power of government for a truly destructive purpose – to divide the people. I can assure you that going down this road will not end well, for you, for us, for our children, for no one.

On the other hand, if your goal is to unify our citizens into a functioning body politic then agree that the Sarsour incident was a terrible mistake and commit never to repeat it. Please don’t waste your most precious resource, OUR TRUST, on what I hope was just a bad idea that somehow slipped through the system.