October 11, 2010

Ms. Sharron Angle

Dear Ms. Angle:

I am deeply distressed that you have been misled about our community and the way that we conduct our affairs. This is a very diverse community with a rich history in support of the United States' industrial growth. We have often been referred to as a crucial component of the Arsenal of Democracy. Dearborn is part of the Detroit metropolitan area, which is the geographic region that has one of the most concentrated populations of Arab-Americans. I would like to note that Arab-Americans practice religions other than Islam, and the Chaldean and Lebanese cultures in our area represent a substantial number of Christians.

I am afraid that many share the perception that Muslims have only recently immigrated to this area and are imposing their culture on our region. The truth is that Muslims have been in America since the Revolutionary War, fighting for our independence. The first mosque in the Detroit area was in Highland Park, in the center of Detroit, and was opened almost 100 years ago to serve automotive workers who were flocking to Detroit to earn the unheard of wage of $5 a day at the Ford Motor Co. Model "T" Plant. When Henry Ford built the still unrivalled Rouge Manufacturing Complex in Dearborn in the early 1920s, the second mosque was opened a short walk away from the plant. Muslims have been practicing their faith in our community for almost 90 years without incident or conflict. To suggest that they have taken over ignores the fact that Dearborn hosts 7 mosques and 60 Christian churches.

Today there are fifth- and sixth- generation Muslims living in Dearborn. You would be hard pressed to identify many young Muslims in our schools from their peers because so many have adopted popular styles in their dress and assimilated into the full range of activities in our schools and our community. Contrary to the Sharia Law misconception, there are Christian Evangelists who proselytize to Muslims 365 days a year without resistance or interference from anyone. Muslims in Dearborn actively participate in Christian holiday activities and in numerous community events celebrating America. This includes patriotic events in honor of our veterans, including the participation of the Association of Patriotic Arab Americans in the Military in our Memorial Day Parade, which is the largest and oldest in Michigan.
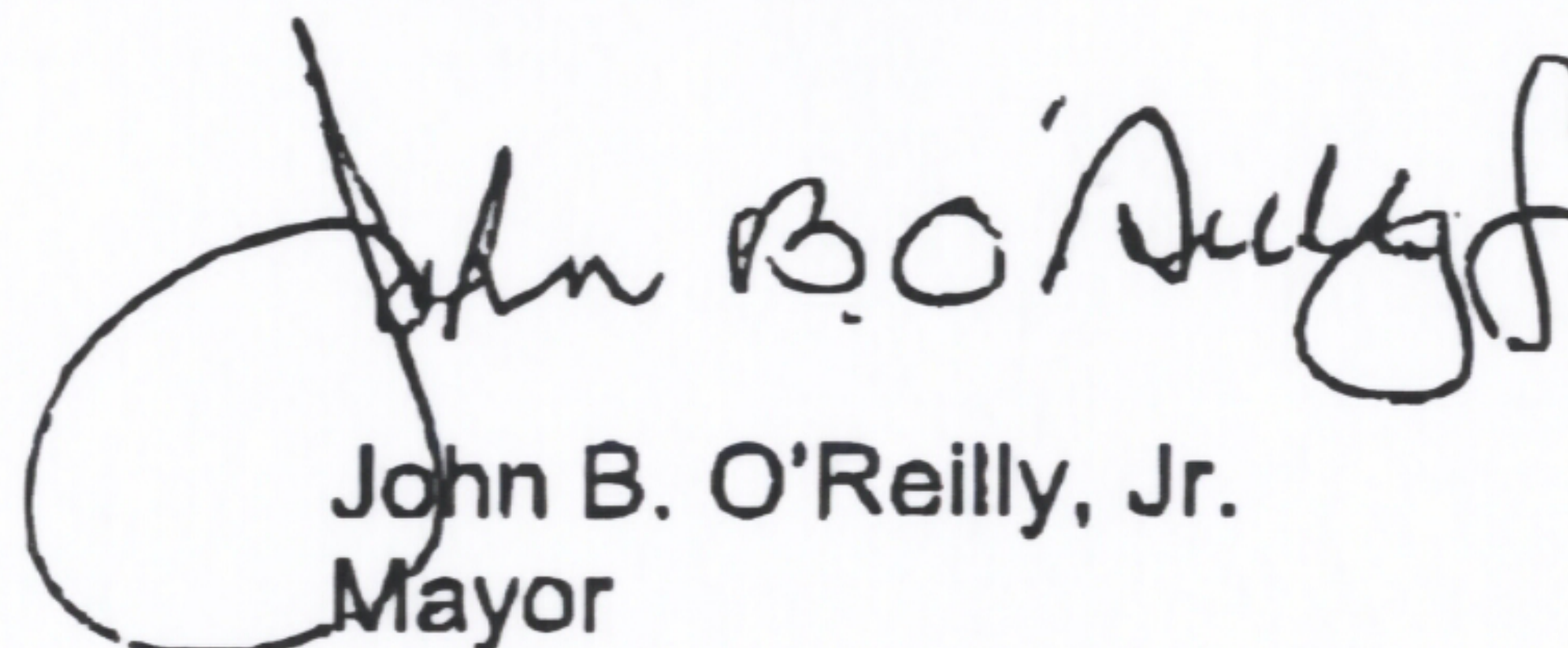
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I invite you to visit Dearborn and see for yourself what is really going on in our community. Not only will you experience a true American City, but you can enjoy many of our great assets, like the Henry Ford Museum and Greenfield Village, which are visited each year by 1.7 million people from across the world. You will also see that Dearborn is a college town, with the University of Michigan-Dearborn and Henry Ford Community College, among others; and that we are known for our regional health care centers, regional shopping centers, regional recreational and cultural institutions, and as a major employment center. President George W. Bush and President Bill Clinton have presented key speeches in our community, and in 2007, we hosted a Republican Party presidential candidates debate with all 9 contenders.

I don't blame you entirely for misunderstanding Dearborn. The international, national and even regional media haven't always painted an accurate picture of Dearborn. Because we are accessible to media markets for any story related to events in the Middle East, we are often used to provide a visual accompaniment to global news items, even if they are unconnected to our community.

There is nothing like a firsthand experience to help you establish your own perspective. I look forward to your response and visit. I promise to personally escort you to any venue in our community you choose to visit. If a visit is not possible at this time, I would welcome a phone call so I could tell you more about our community, which is really a world class hometown.

Sincerely

John B. O'Reilly, Jr.
Mayor