

READERS' VIEWS

With Hard Rock, we ought to ask hard questions about compliance

On the morning of the Hard Rock construction collapse, my councilman was interviewed at the scene. Regarding the possibility of negligence playing a role in the catastrophe, his supposition was that such is unlikely on a development of this size and significance and that most contractors on this level usually stayed within the lines of expected and required performance.

I thought that a perfectly reasonable opinion, since most of us assume our major interactions accord with certain standards of behavior are rule-driven and produce desired outcomes. I also thought that assumption produced the wrong conclusion in this event.

But I have the benefit of almost a half-century experience in the heavy commercial and industrial construction industry. Across five decades as a skilled craftsman, labor leader, U.S. Labor Department skills training and compliance officer and OSHA-authorized construction trainer, I've seen the business from every angle. It is challenging, competitive and fiercely money driven. Often, the shortest path to a dollar is around a rule or a standard. Welcome to my world.

Because the laws of physics constrain construction and are reliably self-enforcing, violations are always punished. But our rules require an honest and effective inspection and enforcement regime. Otherwise, violators are often rewarded. Welcome to the world of commerce.

An investigation of the city's Inspec-

tions Department has already revealed significant wrongdoing, engendering major personnel changes.

I've held a Class D city electrical license for years and have never once been required to produce it by an inspector — not once.

Yet our mayor takes offense that the council appropriately plans to review the current relevant ordinances and their effectiveness in this critical area of public safety. She should be cheering them on, as should this newspaper.

Instead, the mayor is in a childish pout and columnist Will Sutton treats the whole city to a ridiculous scold for voluminous expressions of frustration and outrage ignited when the wind-wrestled shroud exposed the horrific "strange fruit" still dangling from pancaked slabs of concrete.

Unlike the "Strange Fruit" hanging from the poplar trees referenced in the old anti-lynching protest song, at least today the establishment is embarrassed by outward evidence of violence visited on the powerless and usually "invisible" among us, as are all workers lacking legal status and/or union representation. I suppose that's progress of a kind.

Real progress would result from rules that require safety and skills training for construction workers as well as empowerment through union representation.

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