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Fine, probation ordered in megaphone-shoving incident before Warren town hall



Independent U.S. Senate candidate Shiva Ayyadurai, shown outside Southern Berkshire District Court in Great Barrington on Thursday, said he was pleased that Paul Solovay was ordered to undergo anger management classes and placed on probation for pushing a megaphone into his face.

HEATHER BELLOW - THE BERKSHIRE EAGLE



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By Heather Bellow

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GREAT BARRINGTON — A New York man who shoved a megaphone into the mouth of a U.S. Senate candidate last month has been fined and placed on probation for his role in the incident.

Paul Solovay, 74, of Hillsdale, also will have to complete anger management classes as part of the sentence handed down Thursday by Judge Paul Vrabel in Southern Berkshire District Court.

The candidate, Shiva Ayyadurai, suffered a bloody lip in the exchange July 22 outside the Mahaiwe Performing Arts Center before a town hall hosted by U.S. Sen. Elizabeth Warren. Ayyadurai said two of his teeth were chipped.

The independent candidate was chiding Warren supporters waiting to get into the event when he got into an argument with Solovay, who then pushed the megaphone Ayyadurai was using. A scuffle ensued, and Solovay was held down in the road by an Ayyadurai supporter until town police arrested him.

The entire episode was caught on video and aired by major news networks, as well as Alex Jones' Infowars website.

Several days later, Warren denounced the episode, saying "the confrontation was wrong," and that her events are meant to inspire, among other things, "civil discourse."

The video shows Ayyadurai, who is India-born, and his supporters shouting "racists" just before the incident. After the scuffle, Ayyadurai, 54, told the crowd, "that's racism right there," and labeled them "liberal fascists" after Warren supporters shouted back.

"I understand that there [were] oppositional beliefs on both sides of that street on that day, but I believe that the defendant really lost his cool in that circumstance when he turned to violence rather than just understanding ... somebody else's ... point of view and accepting free speech within this country," Assistant District Attorney Dana Parsons told Vrabel during Thursday's proceedings. "I understand that [Solovay] is 74 years old and has no record, but nonetheless ..."

Solovay's attorney, Louis Oggiani, asked Vrabel to consider continuing the case without a finding, an alternative used to avoid a guilty plea, often when there is enough evidence of guilt to result in a conviction.

Oggiani said his client did not need anger management classes, as recommended by Parsons, and suggested that his client had, that day, been set off by Ayyadurai's accusations that he is a racist.

"My client is anything but a racist," Oggiani said, noting that Solovay's son-in-law and extended family are African-American.

Oggiani also said that Solovay had crossed the street to simply "engage" with Ayyadurai, and that he had instead "pushed the [megaphone] back."

"So, I'm not sure if it was really a violent act, but nevertheless it was assault and battery," Oggiani said. "He apologized; he should not have had that kind of response ... he's embarrassed."

Vrabel continued the case against without a finding, imposing nine months' probation and a 10-week anger management course for the assault and battery charge, and a \$150 maximum fine and 60 days' probation for a disorderly conduct charge.

Reading from a statement he also emailed to The Eagle, Ayyadurai pulled the race issue into the courtroom.

"The picture of a white man emblazoned with "liberal" on his t-shirt, punching & shoving a megaphone, down the throat of a black Indian man, because he disagreed with his viewpoint, should be a wake up call."

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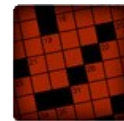
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Ayyadurai further said: "We need discourse and free speech to discuss important issues such as race and racism, as Americans. For far too long in America, those claiming to fight racism, liberal or otherwise, have monopolized that discourse and have no right to use violence to suppress opposing views."

Ayyadurai, who said his family had escaped "the oppressive caste system of India," told the court that "violence is not the answer."

After the hearing, about 15 supporters huddled around Solovay, who, along with his supporters, declined to comment.

Ayyadurai told The Eagle that Vrabel's ruling was "excellent," adding that it is his understanding that, typically, first-time offenders do not receive probation or anger management classes.

"It sends a signal, because something like this for a first-time offender would just be dismissed," he said. "I think it sends the right signal, that violence will not be tolerated and free speech in America is what should win."

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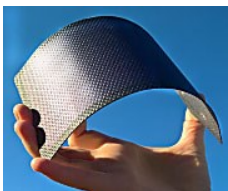
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