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## Councilmember Tonya Burke Earns NAACP Award



Perris City Councilwoman Tonya Burke addresses the crowd at the 4th Annual Salute to Labor Unions Awards Program at the Riverside Convention Center.

Perris City Councilwoman Tonya Burke describes herself as a "proud, dues-paying, card-carrying" member of her local union.

Her husband, Jason, belongs to a union as well.

And her parents strongly supported unions and organized labor.

Burke works with disabled youth and adults, including military veterans, as a Senior Vocational Counselor for the California Department of Rehabilitation.

In 2014 she was named president of United Employees of California.

A member of AFSCME, Burke has served Local 2620 as a steward and as a member of various committees, including the Vocational Rehabilitation Professionals/Occupational Advisory and Elections Committees.

So it was no surprise when Burke earned the NAACP's "Friend of Labor Award" Oct. 15 in a ceremony at the Riverside Convention Center. The award was part of the 4th Annual "Salute to Labor Unions Award Program."

The Friend of Labor Award honors exceptional individuals for their efforts to forge relationships between labor unions and their community.



Councilmember Tonya Burke with her "Friend of Labor Award," flanked by Sharron Lewis, award ceremony chairperson and Vaudieur E. Rucker-Hughes, president of the Riverside Branch of the NAACP.

"I am elated, ecstatic and humbled to receive this award," Burke said. "It's a total surprise. You don't see yourself being awarded for what you see as part of doing your job as a public servant."

Burke credits her parents, Corine and Herbert Brown, with inspiring her to support labor rights. Her parents say she picked up their commitment early, and that Burke was "organizing and advocating since elementary school."

Burke was elected to the Perris City Council in 2014, a position she takes great pride in achieving.

"It's been a delight," she said. "People voted me into office and look to me and my colleagues to serve them. It's great to be part of a team that is working to grow the City of Perris in a positive direction. I like being a City Council member, working with residents and businesses in Perris."

Burke took home the "Friend of Labor Coalition Award" for her willingness to listen to and support the concerns of unions and labor organizers.

"Tonya Burke is a hard-worker who is friendly, approachable, easy to talk to and a solution finder," said Sharron Lewis, NAACP membership chair and the award-ceremony chairperson. "She is a very positive person who is open-minded and brings a lot of pride to the City of Perris."

Lewis called the Salute to Labor Union Awards "exceptionally prestigious honors not given out lightly."

Burke is particularly keen about education and employment issues, speaking from the City Council dais to inform residents about regional job fairs and reminding high-school students about deadlines for enrolling in college and seeking scholarships.

She has volunteered for several community-improvement projects and twice has donned a hard hat and safety belt to scale rooftops to help install solar panels.

"Those are the projects I love most," Burke said. "I do not want to be just a politician. I want to be a servant—to be among people is the most important thing for me."



Perris City Councilwoman Tonya Burke, a "proud, dues-paying, card-carrying" union member is flanked by Perris Deputy City Manager Darren Madkin; daughter, Jaylyn; husband, Jason and Perris City Manager Richard Belmudez.

A number of dignitaries attended the Oct. 15 ceremony, including U.S. Rep. Mark Takano; (D-Riverside) State Sen. Richard Roth, (D-Riverside); and Assemblyman Jose Medina, (D-Riverside), as well as numerous municipal government and education officials.

Burke attended the event with her husband, Jason, and daughter, Jaylyn, 14. Also in attendance were Perris City Manager Richard Belmudez and Deputy City Manager Darren Madkin.

Waudieur E. Rucker-Hughes, president of the Riverside Branch of the NAACP, noted that the theme of the 2016 awards was "NAACP and Labor United As One."

The 107-year-old NAACP is the oldest and largest civil rights organization in the U.S., Rucker-Hughes said. The Riverside branch, founded in 1942, "has enjoyed a rich history of helping to improve the social, economic, and political implications of discrimination and bigotry within the Inland Empire," she said. "We are proud of the strong partnerships we have formed and it is our wish that our community partners such as you and our elected officials will come together to celebrate our common goals, including our commitment to labor unions."

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