

AGENDA: ALEXANDRIA

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: October 28, 2025

Contact: info@AgendaAlexandria.org

***Agenda:Alexandria* October Program Highlighted the Science Behind New Levels of Civil Discourse and Local Level Examples and Solutions**

Agenda:Alexandria, the city's premiere organization dedicated to examining local issues from a wide variety of viewpoints, focused on the importance of civil discourse in a free society, and also at the local and interpersonal level.

Steve Davidson, Chair of **Agenda:Alexandria** and moderator for the evening, said that civil discourse is perfectly aligned with the mission of the organization, and the topic needed to be addressed now more than ever.

The panel was composed of:

- Kate Woodsome, Pulitzer Prize-winning Journalist(formerly at The Washington Post), Resilience Strategist, and publisher of Invisible Threads
- JoAnn Koob, J.D., Director, Liberty & Law Center, Antonin Scalia Law School, George Mason University
- Lt. Victor Ignacio, Field Operation Section, Alexandria Sheriff's Office
- Carter Flemming, Community Volunteer and Activist on many Alexandria Issues, and a 2017 Living Legend

Panelists had a lot to say about the meaning behind term "Civil Discourse" ranging from respectful discussions to the importance of having vigorous and thoughtful debate as an essential element of a functioning democracy. All agreed that the level of rancor is higher than it has been since the 1920's – but it was noted that during the half-century after the Civil War it was worse.

On a local level, Ms. Flemming pointed out that the relationship between the City government and the public were much more respectful and cordial than it was ten or fifteen years ago. She noted that recent city leaders were openly disrespectful of members of the public who just wanted to be heard. Professor Koob noted that there is clearly a lack of respect and cordiality among government officials at the national level, mirroring what we see in Alexandria, and the root cause is the same: reducing well-considered disagreements to personal disparagement.

So, what's changed in the past ten to fifteen years? The consensus was that the emergence of social media and changes in the economic model for news and journalism have a lot to do with it. Ms. Flemming pointed out that social media provides many people with the anonymity to express themselves with no personal accountability. Ms. Woodsome noted that hoods provided the same kind of anonymity to certain organized groups. The economic model of modern journalism



Agenda:Alexandria's panel discussion on Civil Discourse. L-to-R: Kate Woodsome, JoAnn Koob, Victor Ignacio, Carter Flemming, and Steve Davidson

requires that publications compete for eyeballs and clicks. To do that, 24-hour news outlets and on-line news sites trend towards the sensational; there is an economic incentive to wind people up, and profits depend on feeding outrage.

Lt. Ignacio described how all of this is impacting law enforcement and its relationship with the public. He described how, in the past, when the police are called to a scene, they could interact with the victim or suspect in a civil, interpersonal manner that tended to prevent escalation. But now, with social media spreading word of any incident, a simple situation is complicated by a crowd scene where “street lawyers” feel the need to unnecessarily escalate tensions.

All that discord takes a toll on people’s psyche – the public is in a constant state of stress, according to Ms. Wodsome, whose non-profit is organized to address and mitigate the impacts. Professor Koob described her Public Discourse Project that works with across college campuses to teach deescalation techniques to college students.

All four panelists emphasized the most important step to recover civil discourse is to listen, not to react. People often just want to be heard, and once they have said their piece, they are much more open to listening themselves. “When you are talking, you aren’t listening,” according to Lt. Ignacio.

The audience was clearly impressed by the program and the panel discussion, including Russ Bailey who said, “I have been a member of **Agenda:Alexandria** since the beginning. I would have to say this was perhaps the most unexpectedly thought-provoking program I’ve attended. Each speaker had something valuable to say: from revealing descriptions of the state of social discourse in Alexandria and social, technologic and biologic structures that contribute to discord, to practical ways to assess and understand opposing views. Truly an illuminating discussion. I’m very glad I attended.”

Agenda:Alexandria is a non-partisan 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. Membership is available for an annual fee. Non-member attendance cost is \$10. Corporate and individual sponsorships are welcomed and appreciated.

The program was video recorded and is available on the **Agenda:Alexandria** YouTube channel:
<https://www.youtube.com/@agendaalexandria>.

Agenda:Alexandria’s Sponsors are:

The logo for Simpson, featuring the word "SIMPSON" in a bold, blue, sans-serif font.The logo for "The Zebra" features the word "Zebra" in a large, stylized, pink-outlined font. Above it, the word "The" is in a smaller, pink-outlined font. Below "Zebra", the phrase "LL GOOD NEWS in ALEXANDRIA" is written in a smaller, pink-outlined font.The logo for Atlantic Union Bank features a green triangle to the left of the words "Atlantic Union Bank" in a bold, blue, sans-serif font.

###

The logo for "Agenda: Alexandria" features the words "AGENDA:" and "ALEXANDRIA" in a bold, white, sans-serif font, separated by a colon. The entire logo is set against a red background with a white border.