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Marc Tiritilli on His 2021 Campaign for Mayor of Normal

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WGLT Interview with Marc Tiritilli, September 3, 2020

Charlie Schlenker: Tis' the season to announce if your running for city council or mayor but not for Marc Tiritilli because he never really stopped running for mayor even after narrowly losing to Normal mayor Chris Koos in 2017. Now they are heading for a rematch next spring. Tiritilli speaks with Ryan Denham.

Marc Tiritilli: There's a lot of things that need to change in Normal. They needed to change 4 years ago, those things haven't gone away. They've actually doubled down on some of them so we have a significant debt load in the community we talked about that in the last campaign. Their talking about bonding again. They have a smart cities initiative which uh you know they want to have intelligent streetlights sort of things like that. Google already provides those things for free and at the last year's financial meeting the financial matters said if we're going to do that and be committed to it were going to be bonding again. They want to do uptown 2.0 south of the tracks that's about another hundred million dollars in investment. Um and we just can't afford to do that. So it's not that I'm opposed to projects in particular it's that the way we have consistently done it has put an added burden on us so for the hundred million dollars that was spend to uh borrowed to do uptown 50 million dollars will be paid in interest by the time those bonds are done I mean that's just money that's thrown away so a lot of these projects are fairly small 5, 7, 10 million dollars if you consider that small but the point is that can be accumulated in a couple years and paid in cash up front so the short answer is that I want to see some different dynamics about how we go about our business and I want to bring representation back to the council. So many of people in this community feel like their voices are not being heard whether it's over the mural in uptown, whether it's the firehouse that was put over in black stone trails whether it's what's going on with connect transit whether it's even being able to speak publicly at a council meeting people feel like they are being excluded from the conversation and I drastically want to change that and it needs to happen.

Ryan Denham: The town council is a different place than it was three and half four years ago one of allies Stan Nord, is now on the council. What do you make of his tenure so far?

Tiritilli: Well, I, he's done what he said he was going to do. He was going to listen to the people actively solicit their input and try and represent them on the council and he's done that and he's done it face on into the wind um so that has been a shift.

Denham: So some have criticized Stan Nord for what they would say as detracting from this collaborative culture that has historically existed on the council. If you were elected as mayor how, would you address those relationships?

Tiritilli: I agree there needs to be collaboration and there needs to be professionalism but it doesn't need to be uniformity. So Normal is in a unique situation where we elect all the council members at large there are no districts there are no wards. So you don't have your particular council person representing you and then someone else on the other side of town representing them, so what happens and this has been part of the problem over the last 20 years is that you wind up with a monolithic

council whatever that one attitude was that's a win or take all and so now you have all these ideal ideally suited voices on the council um and I think what happens is then you drift away from the other voices in the community and that's been the problem so I welcome a diversity of thought on the council I welcome those tougher dynamics it's a lot messier but there needs to be give and take I mean that's why our government is set up the way it is it takes longer to get through a meeting it's a messier process but its far more healthy and when you finally do reach a consensus and a conclusion and you get to a vote then at that point all parties have felt like yeah what I thought was said in that meeting and my voice was represented and so now we've come to a decision but we can move on from here.

Denham: This is sound ideas I'm Ryan Denham. Im here with Mark Tiritilli who's running for mayor again next spring in a potential rematch against Normal Mayor Chris Koos. So Mark, I want to pivot here to covid-19 big picture what do you think the roll of town government should be in pandemic protection?

Tiritilli: Really that falls under uh the county health organizations and getting direction from them. I think the role of government is to preserve the resources and the freedoms that we have and so I was really critical of the mayor's actions not because of the actions themselves whether or not they are going to work. Nobody really knows the answer to that but what he did was he used executive privilege and single handedly without any public input, discussion, or warning issued or set up the possibility of uh citations and fines to businesses and individuals who has no say so in how that was going to impact them whatsoever so those are the types of things that we don't need in a pandemic. We don't need people to get upset that hey what is this I'm being treated unfairly that just adds to the frustration.

Denham: But I can still challenge you in that one point that public didn't have input. I mean theoretically they elected the mayor right knowing that he has certain powers to do certain things so they have a moment of input during that election

Tiritilli: That's a fair but the mayor wasn't elected with those powers in mind. He assumed those powers in march from a very obscure part of our town code dating back to the 1970's and it was meant to deal with fast moving crisis like riots you know it was during the Vietnam era and so there's restrictions on no gasoline in bottles right? Molotove cocktails they're trying to restrict that sort of stuff so and it was portioned out in a matter of hours that 48 hours was the maximum limit then it had to be reviewed that sort of thing so those powers were never intended to be used for a slow moving crisis where you could convene the council and where it would go on for six months

Denham: So setting aside that criticism of the process what do you think of the actual idea in prohibiting large gatherings, requiring bars and restaurants have their customers stay seated?

Tiritilli: You know nobody knows for sure if they're going to work. I can think of a lot of ways that people will get around them. Uh you know is ten the right number were basing this on science is there a study that says ten is more effective than nine or eleven? We don't have that data so these things are kinda shots in the dark um the mask restriction is really not much different than what the governor had already issued. If people are standing up well occasionally theyre going to take a drink of water, you know just like I'm doing here in the studio. Now were going to have people all of a sudden in their face on us again the more the government tries to tinker with the process I think we have unattended

consequences where people start getting in each other's faces and getting aggravated which is not what we want during a pandemic crisis.

Denham: I want to pivot to another kind of part of the covid-19 discussion, uh the financial aspect of it. Uh during a recent interview with another radio station, here in town cities 92.9 you said the town of Normal was in great financial shape compared with many other communities but it needed to tighten its belt more to prepare for the loss of revenue potentially coming from covid as people shop less or go out to eat less what have you. So what sort of belt tightening do you have in mind?

Tiritilli: Well, something like the smart cities project where they've admitted it's going to cost them millions and millions of dollars we don't need to be doing that right now the underpass there is no requirement for us to build an underpass if we do nothing Amtrak, Union Pacific, the federal government everybody is fine with the way uptown is built right now we have our reasons for wanting to do something different maybe but there is no requirement that we move forward on that project. We're talking about trail west already and we haven't even broken ground on trail east and those are projects where they're going to dull out millions of dollars and incentives yet again so those are the types of things we need to be restricting and on top of that we've gotta look at our pensions um they funded the pensions less than they had in the past this last go around. So, despite fifteen years of consistent property tax increases the funding percentage levels got lower and lower so we need to do something different. We needed to do something different long before the pandemic came along.

Denham: So four years ago during the campaign you made some pretty pessimistic projections about town debt and cast doubt on its positive bond ratings. Those have not necessarily come to pass. How should voters weigh the last few years, your views then, and your views now?

Tiritilli: Well the negative aspect of it was the opportunity costs the money that's been wasted you know were still paying interest on these. Some of the bond we have we do not pay principle on we just pay interest. We're throwing money away on those things and they keep saying well we have stable streams of income for them it's based on the hotel motel tax or it's based on sales tax. Those things have taken a huge drop so the negative aspects I was talking about are the liability when something goes wrong. When we have a lot of debt and something goes wrong then were in a riskier position and that has come to pass. We're not sure where the income is coming from the ten million dollar short fall they were talking about was before ISU decided they were going fully online in the fall. They were predicting that students will be back in full force and our economy will be back to steam again so the projections are actually going to wind up worse than that.

Denham: Four years ago, you were pretty critical of the Rivien tax incentive agreement when it was approved and you've continued to criticize it after the fact. At one point you listed demolition would have been preferable to bringing Rivien into the plant and seeing it fail, is that right?

Tiritilli: So, it's not that I wanted to see them tear the place down even Mayor Koos when I've talked with him and said we didn't even have a pen to hang our hat on the wall about this deal they had no idea if it would succeed and the question was about jobs and we said well we know if they take it down theres going to be hundreds of jobs for at least a year that is a huge facility that needs to be taken apart.

It would be a tragedy for that to happen so the problem was lets say Rivian did fail now you have a derelict property and you don't have anybody in position to demolish it cost effectively. The reason why the organization was into broker that deal was they had all the stuff in there all the robots all the forklifts all the tools everything that was in that plant tens of millions of dollars of inventory was still there so that they could sell it off and make a profit off of demolishing the building that's all gone right Rivian got rid of all that. Now if they fold with an empty plant theres no incentive for any you know wrecking crew to come in and try and get a profit out of it now we're stuck with a derelict building. That's the nightmare scenario that's when property taxes tank and the school is stuck. So that's why I was saying what I did. You're taking a huge risk you know and there is a real risk here and it would be safe to tear it down than take a huge risk if you're uncertain about that risk.

Denham: Were you wrong about Rivian?

Tiritilli: They beat the odds, they really did. I think theyre going to be successful theyre not there yet but seven billion dollars can solve a lot of problems ive worked in industry ive seen the types of problems that are involved with automation. Money can solve a lot of them so they have beaten everyone's expectations and even when they were here so going back over four years ago or about four years ago you know very quickly after talking with RJ and the other executives in the company I realized these guys have something going for them I wasn't opposed to Rivian. I mean who wouldn't want a successful company with worldwide recognition producing thousands of jobs in the community I'm not opposed to that. What I was opposed to was the deal itself why in the world they needed to give up the school districts money to support that. That was the real problem and that's why I fought it so hard.

Schlenker: That's Normal mayor candidate Mark Tiritilli speaking with Ryan Denham. He's headed for a rematch against Normal mayor Chris Koos in the spring 2021 election.