

POLITICAL MESSAGING, LETS BE HONEST

HOW DO WE DEAL WITH CRITICISM AND OPPOSING OPINIONS

By: Kerry Morris - May 29, 2015



In a historic address to the nation and joint session of Congress Sept. 20, President Bush pledges to defend America's freedom against the fear of terrorism. White House by Eric Draper.

'Your either with us, or against us'

'You're either with us, or against us...' and similar variations are used to depict polarizing situations. Use of the phrase is intended to force bystanders, or others unaligned with some form of pre-existing conflict to become allies of the speaking party or to lose favour. The implied consequence of not joining the team effort is to be deemed an enemy.

The statement generally is a descriptive statement identifying the beliefs of the speaker(s), and thus state a basic assumption, not a logical conclusion. It is sometimes interpreted as a splitting or a false dilemma, which is an informal fallacy.

Some see the statement as a way of persuading others to choose sides in a conflict which does not afford the luxury of neutrality. Only when there is absolutely no middle ground or additional alternatives does the phrase hold validity as a logical conclusion.

It's Monday May 25th, council night in the City of North Vancouver. A public meeting to consider changes to Business License Bylaw, 2004, No. 7584, and amendment Bylaw No. 8377 has begun. The target of the bylaw is to approve amendments governing creation of childcare operations and approval procedures for the City. The bylaw intends to make the establishment of group daycares easier. The underlying issue is the conversion of residential homes into commercial enterprises, with or without approval by the immediate neighbourhood. The objective of the bylaw amendment is to allow staff to grant approval of new group daycares without subjecting the applicant to public meetings and council approval.

Hearing participants have offered a broad cross-section of opinions, but the data is generally not in dispute. The pro-side highlights a market demand for cost-effective home-based high quality facilities, affordably priced, operated by fully trained and loving service providers. An interesting twist was the claim that commercial and central Lonsdale locations expose children to dangerous environmental contaminants, such as elevated levels of gas and diesel fumes, in turn exposing children to elevated health risks. This is a new twist which screams out for proof, and raises the question why council proponents of the bylaw amendment have been so quick to approve sale and redevelopment of public schools fully able to satisfy the alleged shortfall in daycare capacity.



Residents opposing the amendment, of which this scribe is a member, argue that home daycare operations of 8 or less are well served by the current bylaw. I drew upon my wife's in-home daycare in support of this position. Staff's argument that the application process is unduly complex and excessively protracted was not supported by the evenings speakers.

The real opposition to the bylaw was quickly determined to lie in the fact that under the proposed amendment, group daycare operators would be able to start and grow a 20 plus childcare facility in any residential City neighbourhood of their choosing, right next door to your million dollar plus home. Under the proposed amendment, resident will be unable to stop the new facility from startup, no matter the quality of the reasoning. Several opponents of the amendment pointed to a group daycare facility located on East 4th street, currently in its 9th year of operation. The facility provides services to 20 plus children. Both staff and neighbouring residents suggest the operation has terrorized residents, and the operator is described as un-remorseful. The immediate neighbours took the podium and recited a painful history. One presenter was unable to hold back the tears.

The proponents, approximately 8 in total, are well organized and clearly taking instructions from councillor Linda Buchanan. What has not been disclosed to council is that those eight proponents, mostly residents of the District, are part of an organized initiative brought in support of a previously failed group daycare application. That application had sought to convert a private home, located in the Larson School area, into a full-time commercial enterprise, meaning no one would live in the home at night. It would only be occupied on days when it was conducting daycare operations. The immediate neighbours and others spoke against the facilities creation.

The home is already a fully operational daycare, with multiple operations independently using both the front and back yards, a creative method of skirting the child limit rules for residential daycares. To resolve the child limit and neighbour dissatisfaction issues, the operator had sought to transition to a group daycare license.

No one questioned the quality of care being provided, but when the immediate neighbours clearly describe the current loss of quiet enjoyment, bolstered by the stories from the 4th street debacle, council of the day (2014), in a split decision rejected the application. That previous Council put the interests of full time residential homeowners above those of commercial businesses working from residential properties on a workday basis only. Council's recognition of the need to preserve the sanctuary of residential neighbourhoods has clearly caused the battle lines to be drawn. The newly elected Mussatto 'Slate', seeking a way to overturn the previous council decision, while distancing itself from future impugned decisions, proposed the bylaw amendment that would have allowed establishment of group daycares under Staff's sole control.

When the Public Meeting was complete, council then got a chance to ask questions. As is typical, each one after the other embarked on the inevitable speechifying. Battle lines began to form up quickly in the now typical 4/3 split pattern, with the 'Slate' showing confidence in a favourable outcome. Then a twist no one saw coming. Councillor Holly Back broke rank and took a hard stand in opposition to the 'pro-amendment' positions of Councillors Keating and Buchanan. For a moment it looked like we were going to need an ambulance for Keating, and several boxes of Kleenex for Buchanan. No one could believe their eye's, or ears, and the shock was evident on the faces of all, but nowhere was it more evident than on the Mayors face. Back listed a series of sound reasons for her intended decision, but underlying all was the simple fact that residential neighbourhoods are first and foremost a place for residents, and commercial enterprises would take a subordinate position to a homeowners priority for quiet enjoyment.

It was then that the destructive rhetoric began in earnest. Mussatto was the least aggressive, but Keating and then Buchanan both argued opposition to the bylaw amendment constituted an attack on children, and put the community on a trajectory back in time toward the Stone Age. As I listened and discuss the matter with others in the audience, we were all clearly of the opinion that the pro-amendment 'Slate' members viewed opposition councillors and residents as child-haters. Nothing could have been further from the truth. Each council member that spoke against the amendment made it clear they were keenly interested in finding workable solutions to the availability of affordable daycare. All of the four in opposition thought that the shuttered schools offered terrific opportunities to fill the gap, a position virally opposed by 'Slate-School-Sellers' Keating and Buchanan.

The framing of the Keating - Buchanan argument was the second but equally important story of the night. The nature of the defence brought to mind the world famous '**...You're either with us, or against us...**' style of George W. Bush. The nature of the vitriolic rhetoric was threatening, if you thought it through, which was interesting in its own right. Councillors Bell, Bookham and Clark, all well seasoned, certainly weren't going to be intimidated by such tactics, being already on the outs. Therefore the target of the assault had to be Back. She had clearly made the uncharacteristic move of breaking rank, and she was being served notice, in no uncertain terms, that they (the 'Slate') were displeased. But would she bend? In the end, the answer was a resounding NO!

The amendment went down to defeat, as it should have. The battle won, but certainly not settled. The style of the table war to be waged is unknown, the manner in which it will be argued now certain. The big shock, Back went Rogue! Buchanan repeatedly whispered in Holly's ear and quietly kibitzed on several matters over the remainder of the evening, clearly attempting to pull Holly back into the fold. Holly for her part looked a little like 'a deer in the headlights', not knowing what to expect from the 'Wrath-Of-Khan' (I mean Keating), when the meeting ended. We're not likely to ever hear what's been said to Holly. The public persona will appear unscathed for the 'Slate' has just awoken to the reality Holly is necessary. The question: Has Holly awoken to the fact she now controls the Slate?