

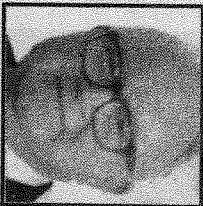
METES & BOUNDS

97.11

Paranoia & politics

10/22/97

by Bill Haigwood



As president of the Laguna de Santa Rosa Foundation and a strong advocate for restoring and preserving the Laguna, I feel compelled to apologize to the City Council and citizens of Sebastopol for the unwarranted and excessive abuse articulated by some supporters for the funding of the Laguna development plan.

It would appear that many citizens have lost the skill and civility to disagree agreeably or to recognize that a differing point of view is not necessarily wrong. The unfortunate change evident today is that all sides have adopted the policy, formerly attributed to attorneys, that "If you can't attack your opponents arguments, attack your opponent!"

Don't misunderstand me — I still am convinced that the City Council members who failed to support the request for \$78,000 to fund specific plans for the proposed Laguna Park are being short-sighted and missing the opportunity of a lifetime to create something a lot more important to the future of Sebastopol and its children than another soccer field. However, I also recognize that some citizens have,

legitimately, a different set of priorities and Council members are morally obligated to give them a fair hearing and then use their best judgment as to what is in the best long-range interests of the total community. It is not an easy task, and sometimes it is impossible to satisfy everyone. An unfavorable decision, however, does not justify an unfounded and unwarranted attack on the moral, ethical or intellectual integrity of individual Council members.

Some of the most bitter critics of the City Council sound like graduates of the Berkeley School of Confrontation Politics, with whom I have had some personal experience as executive vice president of the Berkeley Chamber of Commerce between 1960-1968. Their philosophy, as demonstrated repeatedly in Berkeley (and I do mean "demonstrated"), was based on the premise that there was only one version of the truth, theirs; one valid viewpoint, theirs; one valid argument, theirs; and only one possible solution, theirs!

Anyone with the temerity to challenge them on any point at any time was promptly vilified, accused of all sorts of criminal and unethical motives, and shouted down by the crowd that always appeared

"spontaneously" (as the result of an effective phone-tree that could generate a demonstration in as little as two hours). Their objective was to discourage opposition and persuade the public at large that they represented the majority viewpoint. The media usually cooperated, particularly when advised in advance that a "spontaneous" demonstration was

going to take place.

I agree with Councilwoman Anne Mag-nie's comments at a recent meeting when she called for a return to civility in public discourse and the conduct of city business. Unfortunately, in the heat of an argument a few minutes later, she was somewhat sharp in her comments to fellow Council members. It still is a valid point. Confrontation politics, in which loudness and vituperation substitute for logic and persuasion, serves only to polarize the community and diminish the potential for compromise and cooperation.

It is time to replace paranoia with civility in Sebastopol politics — and fund the Laguna Plan simply because it is the moral, ethical, intelligent, realistic and practical thing to do!

(Bill Haigwood is a Sonoma West Times & News columnist)

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