

Opinion: Bullies don't belong on City Council

By Kathryn Reed

Politicians are elected to SERVE the public.

Many seem to have forgotten that. They have their own agendas. They want to represent a few instead of the majority. They forget about doing what's right for the greater good and refuse to put aside personal opinions. And it's not just happening in Washington, D.C.

The Oct. 15 South Lake Tahoe City Council meeting was embarrassing to sit through.

Once again the topic of banning plastic bags was before the council. It's been talked about for four years, but by the way some councilmembers act it's like the ban is a new idea.

What was so horrendous is how Councilwoman JoAnn Conner treated the people who spoke in favor of the ban. And then how Mayor Tom Davis allowed her to get away with it. The mayor is supposed to run the meeting and have control. Clearly, that was not the case on Tuesday.

They are also the only two who for the second meeting in a row voted the same way – against the ban.

Eleven of the 13 members of the public who spoke Tuesday favor banning single-use plastic bags.

Conner was combative after nearly every single pro bag banner spoke. She bantered with them, questioning in a harsh tone as though her only intent was to belittle them.

The point of public comment is for the council to listen. Questions should be to clarify something, not to degrade the

person for their opinion. The public is not there for an inquisition. No one should be vilified for his or her opinion.

There are ways to disagree and still be respectful. But Conner should not have even been engaging these people in conversation in the first place.

If that is the new norm for how the public will be treated, I would think the number of people coming forward at future council meetings would diminish.

When it came time for the councilmembers to give their comments Conner went on a rant. This is supposed to be the time when the council members state their opinions and try to convince their colleagues to vote with them.

Not so with Conner.

At no time did she even have eye contact with the other four electeds. Instead, she stared at the audience – the ones who had just spoken and the few others in attendance. She chastised them, practically ridiculed them, and scolded them as though their opinion were irrelevant.

Wake up Conner. You were elected to represent all 20,000-plus residents, not just your opinion or the ones who call you. Have you ever thought that those who disagree with you are afraid to call because of the way you treat people in public? One can only imagine the venom that might spew from you in private.

One has to wonder why the mayor didn't take control of the meeting. Was it because Conner was his only ally on this topic?

Davis said he would rather support a statewide plastic ban. It's likely another such bill will circulate through the Legislature after the first of the year. Normally Davis is one for local control and doesn't like to abdicate his authority

to others.

But by getting the council to write a letter in support of the statewide ban with his signature on it while he is still mayor, he comes out looking good even if it never goes anywhere in Sacramento.

He constantly says there is no plastic bag problem in Tahoe, then cites Clean Tahoe and South Tahoe Refuse. Maybe you don't see the problem because they do such a good job. The problem, though, Mr. Mayor, goes beyond whether you see a bag on the street or in the lake. The problem is in the landfills as well as with wildlife.

And Mr. Mayor, since you are a board member of Lake Tahoe Wildlife Care, one would think you would have insider info about the hazards of plastic and wild animals.

I'm not saying we should have 5-0 votes on the council. Disagreement is fine – even good at times. But decorum should be mandatory.

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And for the record: I am against the plastic bag ban because I don't want government telling me what to do. However, I think it's good for the city to set a standard of environmental stewardship. If I were on the council, I would have voted for the ban because it's for the greater good.