

Don't use City of Hamilton property to promote hate

By Lyla Miklos

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There are many other ways for merchants of fear to promote themselves, writes Lyla Miklos

Andrew Dreschel's Oct. 29 column said that the bus shelter ads that the Christian Heritage Party (CHP) produced "allegedly discriminate against transgender people." Allegedly? Fear and discrimination was clearly their message and intent.

In March 2017 I sat in the gallery of City Hall and listened to members of the community speak to the City of Hamilton's trans protocols. Jim Enos, CHP Ontario president, spoke as a representative of the Hamilton Wentworth Family Action Council, against the protocols. Enos repeatedly dismissed the legitimacy of transgender people by, for example, calling trans women "males who self-identify as females" or "males who identify as transgender." He also argued that discrimination is allowed and supersedes the human rights code.

The CHP sent out a press release on Oct. 5, 2018 after their legal win against the City of Hamilton in which they say: "The bus shelter ads ... were posted as a challenge to the city's pending policy which would allow biological males to access female washrooms, change rooms and showers." Their statement again delegitimizes the existence and reality of transgender people by wrongly reasserting the false narrative that biology is the only thing that defines your gender.

The CHP's focus on genitalia defining your gender does not align with the World Health Organization's (WHO) definition. WHO defines gender as "the socially constructed characteristics of women and men — such as norms, roles and relationships of and between groups of women and men. It varies from society to society and can be changed. The concept of gender includes five important elements: relational, hierarchical, historical, contextual and institutional. While most people are born either male or female, they are taught appropriate norms and behaviours — including how they should interact with others of the same or opposite sex within households, communities and work places. When individuals or groups do not "fit" established gender norms they often face stigma, discriminatory practices or social exclusion — all of which adversely affect health."

The column also repeats the CHP's claim to be a warm and cuddly organization "which promotes Judeo-Christian principles and values." Several other Judeo-Christian organizations' principles and values most certainly do not align with those of the CHP, since Temple Anshe Sholom, Beth Jacob Synagogue, Commons Mennonite Church, The First Unitarian Church of Hamilton, Hamilton Mennonite Church, Ontario English Catholic Teachers Association, the Sisters of St. Joseph's, New Vision United Church and the United Church of Canada all spoke in favour of the City of Hamilton's trans protocols in March 2017.

I'm with outgoing Ward 1 city Coun. Aidan Johnson who said to the Hamilton Spectator: "In my opinion, the morally and legally right thing to do is for the city to appeal the decision."

Our most recent municipal election included a mayoral candidate who is a self-avowed white supremacist. When I went to fill in my ballot at my polling station on election day, as a queer woman just seeing his name pained me. I got into an argument with a co-worker during the election when I applauded Evelyn Myrie's decision to not invite him to the Afro Canadian Caribbean Association and the African Canadian Action Congress's All Candidates Mayoral Debate. My co-worker felt that it was the wrong decision and that they should have been invited to the debate along with every other mayoral candidate. I stated firmly that there was absolutely no reason to invite a Neo-Nazi into a space filled with people who they have proactively promoted hate against. Myrie's decision made it clear. Hate is NOT welcome here.

This brings me to the City of Hamilton's need to create and craft a clear policy that states that no city property will be used to promote hate against any group of people. This was also one of the findings in the court's ruling. Our municipality did not have any clear policies at the time regarding acceptable content for bus shelter ads. We need to make it clear that hate is NOT welcome in the city of Hamilton. So let's make that message really really clear. CHP has all kinds of platforms to practice their freedom of speech, however hateful, hurtful or harmful that may be. They do not need the use of city space to promote their message.

When trans people use a public bathroom it's so they can go and pee in peace. CHP's press release said their ad "only showed the back of a person's head (presumed to be male) wearing a ball cap and pushing open a door which said "Ladies Showers." Interesting. Since CHP has already delegitimized the existence of trans and queer people I have to assume that the person in their ad that we

need to fear was a white, heterosexual, able-bodied, cisgender, male. I'll let that thought sink in and sit with you. Then I'll let you unpack that realization.

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