

REPLY TO CHIP MARTIN ON PESTICIDES DEBATE

Edited version published in the The Reporter January 2002

I found Mr. Chip Martin's article on the ETC Meeting on pesticides very interesting considering that he only attended 10 minutes on Monday, October 27 and was completely absent at the meeting on Tuesday, October 28, 2001. From reading the article, it is clear that this gave him an entirely different perspective on the meeting than most of the people who were actually in attendance, including Dr. Pollet of the London Middlesex Health Unit, Barry Wells of Scene Magazine, President of the Labour Council Gill Warren, Councillor Alder or John Pope, or any of the other 100 or so people in the audience.

Mr. Martin writes about the need for City Council to show some leadership on the pesticide issue and to enact a pesticide by-law, yet he attacks the very same councillors who have tried to get a motion passed for drafting a by-law on pesticides. Councillor Miller and Controller Pohill have been trying to stonewall the pesticide issue for some time and to prevent a by-law on pesticides. They lobbied me in the past not to second Councillor Armstrong's motion for a by-law and to let the issue die at ETC. However, they became angry when I instead helped Councillor Armstrong draft a by-law on pesticide, so they scrambled to piece together a motion out of London Public Officer of Health, Dr. Pollett's letter stating that "pesticides [are] a serious health risk to the health of London residents" in order to appear like they were contributing to the issue. I believe it is this series of events that prompted Controller Pohill to personally attack me and swear at the meeting. Swearing in public as part of a debate is inappropriate behaviour for an elected official. In contrast, I did not attack Controller Pohill in any way or even make reference to him at the meeting. I only said that we needed to do more than just talk about the issue and actually enact a by-law. However, I question why Mr. Martin also feels the need to make personal attacks against me.

In his article, Mr. Martin criticizes me for using my skills and knowledge to the best of my abilities by putting my legal skills and training to use while discussing a legal issue at council. This is utterly absurd. Many people who actually attended the meeting have complimented my efforts to question the very dubious legal opinion prepared by our City's Legal Department. The staff opinion which states that the City does not have the authority to regulate pesticides runs contrary to the many authoritative legal opinions that were presented and which relied on the binding legal precedent set out in the Supreme Court of Canada decision of Hudson. All 9 justices of the Supreme Court unanimously supported the right of municipalities, including those in Ontario, to establish by-laws to regulate pesticides provided there was no conflict with provincial or federal legislation. Perhaps because there is no factual basis to his criticism, Mr. Martin even resorts to a personal attack, publicly referring to me as an "eccentric lawyer", a statement which highly perplexes people who know me. It is absurd and baseless comments such as that made by someone who is supposed to be reporting facts that is unprofessional.

I have no problem if Mr. Chip Martin disagrees about a policy or position or even criticizes someone for doing their job. However, if he is to comment on an issue, he should do so using accurate and objective information and not through personal attacks and name-calling. Overall,

Randy Richmond's article on the split in council was far more accurate and actually informed readers.

Adding further to the inaccuracy of Mr. Martin's article is his suggestion that my motion was not in order. In reality, my motion was ruled to be in order by the Chair of the Committee. My motion to add a by-law was also entirely in keeping with Controller Pohill's motion, as well as the London Middlesex health Unit's proposal, assuming that the purpose of Controller Pohill's motion was to actually do something about pesticides. My motion was to add a concrete step towards restricting toxic pesticides and was not contradictory as Mr. Martin alleges in his article. I only later withdrew my motion in order to present it as a separate motion in order to avoid further scenes like Controller Pohill's personal attack against me and speed up the meeting.

I find it interesting that Mr. Martin gave Joni Baechler, who I greatly respect, an A- in his "Report Card" and me a D when our voting record is very similar and our political positions are quite similar on most issues. This, along with his need to resort to unprofessional personal attacks, leads me to wonder if there is some reason for him to dislike me to the point that it interferes with his objectivity.

Lastly, I wish to point out that Susan Eagle and myself do not represent Ward 6 as Chip Martin alleges in his "Report Card". We represent Ward 7. This may be a relatively minor error, but accuracy is important in reporting.