

April 15, 2006

Times-Press  
Letters to the Editor

As I sat at last Tuesday's (April 11) Common Council meeting, I couldn't help comparing it with the huge "Wal-Mart" meeting two weeks earlier. The size of the crowd and the dedication displayed that night were undeniable proof that people will show up and speak up when something they care deeply about is on the agenda.

But I'd like to encourage the citizens of Hartford to turn out even when the "W-M" issue isn't specifically listed. Sometimes it will come up anyway -- as it did briefly last Tuesday, when one council member asked about the Wal-Mart "timeline." This is a critical issue and we have to watch it much more closely.

Who knows? Maybe more consistent citizen oversight would have spared us hearing some of the strange comments made by certain of the council the night of the Wal-Mart meeting, after discussion was closed. Without worry that anyone in the audience could challenge or question what they said, several of our elected officials offered opinions about the current dispute. Jacki Lokken told about the "informal survey" she took while collecting the 50 signatures required for her to file election papers. Is she saying that casual conversations within one homogenized neighborhood constitute a valid representation of her entire district?

Kathleen Isleb mentioned she was tired of driving "all the way" to West Bend for one or two items. (Does she need time management tips?) Mayor Henke stated that "they" (Wal-Mart?) wouldn't get his dollar. Does that mean it's OK for him to back a project irresponsible in so many ways, not just for Hartford, but for the larger community and the environment as well?

And against all commonly accepted views that one letter written represents the views of many more than just the writer, one alderperson (I couldn't see his name tag) tried to make the case that "silence is consent." He said he was willing to accept Marilyn Raschka's assertion that she'd collected -- in barely over a week -- nearly 1000 signatures opposing the project. He was also aware that the vast majority of the nearly 200 people attending the meeting were against the plan. In spite of that, he pointed out that there were about 7000 voting age adults in the area, and perhaps we should be thinking more seriously about the wishes of the 6000 supposedly unrepresented thus far. Folks sitting in the hall outside the chamber just looked at one another in amazement. (Not to mention that the ensuing election pitting pro-Wal-Mart candidate Graef against anti-Wal-Mart candidate Ziemer in District 3 resulted in Ziemer's election. And in four days of campaigning as a write-in against District 2's Jim Core, Marilyn Raschka got a third of the votes cast!)

But the worst, both in terms of arrogance and thoughtlessness, were comments by former mayor James Core in his "you can't stop change" speech. He repeated the concept in several ways -- but the bottom line was always "it's none of our business" what Wal-Mart's wage scale is. "It's none of our business" whether Wal-Mart's employees have health coverage or not. (Oh, really? Who pays for Badger Care? And didn't we learn that the single largest group using this tax-payer funded service is Wal-Mart employees? But it's none of our business?) Who could believe these were comments from a former mayor -- someone who certainly should have deeper feeling for struggling citizens, hard-working people who could well lose their living wage jobs should Wal-Mart open. Shame on you, Mr. Core. Shame.

Heads up, Hartford. This isn't over yet. Wal-Mart isn't the bargain it pretends to be. It's time to add in all the "hidden costs". The only conclusion you can reach? It's not worth it!! It's time to SAY NO!