

The IMLA Municipal Attorney List– Civility Lives Here

by Don Knight

Perhaps, like me, you have looked around at what passes for political dialogue today and asked yourself, "Can't we all just get along?" If you long for a marketplace of ideas and information based on the three simple, yet powerful, principles of Courtesy, Civility, Collegiality, you need to join the over 600 municipal attorneys who come together on the IMLA/Municipal Code Corporation Listserv (and its companion list, the Municipal Attorney Water Cooler, which exists for the more whimsical or collegial banter that attorneys enjoy).

Say what?

All around us, it seems that our society is filled with folks that have forgotten their manners. When you can't even pick up your MTV Video Music Award without having some guy grab the microphone and use your time to announce that your co-nominee's music video was a lot better than yours, you know we've got problems. And it's not all caused by overconsumption of Hennessy. By all accounts, the Congressman who yelled out "You lie!" to the President of the United States as he addressed Congress on health-care reform was stone-cold sober. Likewise, the professional tennis player who was disqualified from a tournament after threatening the line judge with violent retaliation for a bad call sure hadn't been drinking. All those red-faced folks showing up at town hall meetings around the country, shaking their fists, seem as sober as they are somber.

And what's up with Michael Jordan? I never, in my wildest dreams, imagined that he would use the opportunity of his induction into the Basketball Hall of Fame to go on a rant about every perceived slight that he had received in his basketball career. We've all heard the great story about how he was cut from the basketball team as a sophomore in high school (actually, he didn't make the varsity team as a sophomore; he was never cut, as such) and how it motivated him to put in more hours and become the best player he could. At least I thought that was the take-away from the experience. Mr. Jordan seems to have a different take on it. He invited the player that took the place on that team, and the coach that didn't select him to varsity, to his Hall of Fame induction – not so he could thank them for inspiring him to do better, but so he could tell the coach, "I wanted to make sure you understood: You made a mistake, dude."

An Oasis of Peace in a Sea of Conflict

If you are like me, you sometimes wonder if, in the midst of all this anger, rudeness, and discourtesy, there is some place you can go where people aren't screaming at you. The Municipal Attorney Listserv and the Municipal Attorney Water Cooler are founded on the notion that the free expression of ideas works best within a framework of courtesy, civility, and collegiality. In fact, the Water Cooler's motto is "Courtesy, Civility, Collegiality."

Both lists operate subject to these overriding principles. That does not mean that expression is squelched, just that it is done with respect for the opinions of members that differ from those of the other participants. And that, as much as any characteristic of the lists, ensures they will be a valuable resource for years to come.

Not So Much Goodbye as Until We Meet Again

When Chuck Thompson asked me to start writing this column a little over two years ago, the purpose was to promote awareness of a valuable resource for municipal attorneys, the IMLA/Municipal Code Corporation Listserv. Well, I think that has been accomplished, as the large membership and high level of daily activity on the list evidences.

So, I am begging off column duty for the foreseeable future, and this will be my last column.

Thank you to everyone whose posts assisted or inspired me as I wrote for this magazine. It has been fun, and I look forward to continuing a dialogue with all of you on the list itself. See you there!

For those of you who still haven't joined the Listserv and would like to, here's how: go to http://www.municode.com and select the *Listservs* link to get the page on *Mailing Lists*. In the first paragraph, click on *Municipal Attorneys* to bring up the subscription page. Fill it out and hit *Subscribe*. To sign up for the Water Cooler, send an e-mail to MunicAttyWaterCooler@yahoogroups.com that identifies you and the local government that you represent. You will get a response from YahooGroups and asking if you want to join. Respond to the message as directed. **ML**

Don Knight is an Assistant City Attorney for the City of Dallas. He advises and represents city officials on a variety of legal matters, including telecommunications, cable, electric and gas utility regulation, technology acquisitions and electric service agreements. Since 2001, Mr. Knight has served as the Chair of the Texas Coalition of Cities For Utilities Issues (TCCFUI), which represents over 100 Texas cities of all sizes.