

April 8th, 2019

Dear Wil-Mar Board of Directors,

My name is Peter Anderson, and I'm a longtime big supporter of Wil-Mar's role in Madison cultural life, from Wild Hog to Story Slams to Larry Penn and many other great folk concerts, and to social action benefits, like you hosted in February 2017 to raise money for the environmental movement.

Something very wrong happened in the preparation for that benefit that, as an organizer, I acquiesced to, to my eternal regret. When the moment for true personal courage arrives at your doorstep, I so much hope you can avoid repeating that moral blunder of which I am guilty and now seek to assuage.

It involves the long-standing and heart-felt disagreement between two members of the progressive community, involving feminists and trans women.

As a straight guy, there is simply no way that I have any right, or portfolio, to opine on who's right – or even to know if there is a “right” -- in this whole affair.

That said, however, I do know this, and that is it is wrong – very wrong – for some in the trans community to make the issue personal and seek to deprive a feminist with whom they disagree of her livelihood and bar her from the public square in some kind of medieval variant of shaming, as if this were the Salem witch trials.

All this erupted in the lead-in to the Pipeline Fighters' Benefit Extravaganza at Wil-Mar two years ago, when we were told by some in the trans community that we had to disown Thistle Pettersen, who had been integral to the organizing effort, or the trans community would publicly urge Madison progressives to boycott the benefit seeking funds to fight the fossil fuel industry in order to avert a climate catastrophe.

As I said, we gave into this shaming campaign, which strikes at the fundamental right of everyone, and that is not limited to just those among the progressive community, to have their views aired and considered, and that legitimate and heartfelt voices ought not be ostracized, even before their opinions have been heard.

Please, learn from my grave error, and, when this comes to you to decide, do not repeat it.

That night when I found it “easier” to give in to mob demands two years ago will haunt me to my grave. I would not want you to fall into the trap of what seems easier in the flush of a moment of contention, when the path down the road to mob pressure ends in rupturing everything we all hold dear in a fair and democratic society.

The days when we burnt “witches” at the stake was thought to have long passed, and ought not be revived in our so-called enlightened age under the cover of misguided and perverted political correctness.

Thank you for considering my concerns.

Peter Anderson