

Gadfly mayoral forum #8: negative campaigning

[The Bethlehem Gadfly Forum](#), [Gadfly Forum](#) May 4, 2021

🦋 *Latest in a series of posts on the Gadfly Forum* 🦋

The prompt:

You have both been accused of negative campaigning. Explain the strategy in your latest mailer. Defend yourself against the charge of negative campaigning.

J. William Reynolds

Since I announced my campaign four months ago, we have run a campaign based on what we have accomplished as a city as well as what we feel our community can be as we emerge from the pandemic. We have knocked on thousands of doors, held virtual town halls, discussed our vision for Bethlehem's future, and organized our city.



My opponent's campaign for months, however, has been based on his belief that Bethlehem is headed in the wrong direction. This is politics, and we get that. We watched attacks on our city's progress, Mayor Donchez, my colleagues' record on City Council, my record, and even other candidates' running for City Council. We stayed silent. Week after week of attacks on his own social media pages and at candidate forums. We stayed silent. There are bigger issues to deal with in our city, and they are the issues that people want to know about such as how we are going to emerge from the pandemic a stronger city. My plan was to continue to take the high road as I have always done in the past (even at certain points to my political detriment).

Our philosophy changed when thousands of households in Bethlehem received his attack mail piece on Thursday April 22nd. The attacks on Mayor Donchez, my colleagues on City Council, my integrity, and the

progress of Bethlehem could not go without a response. Our campaign did not utter one word about my opponent at all on any social media or campaign literature until our response mailer yesterday (April 29th).

Let me be clear. I am proud of our record as a city and of every vote I have taken as a member of City Council. I am proud of the support our campaign has received, and I am proud of the coalition we have built in the community.

My opponent's history of workplace violence in City Hall is a legitimate issue for voters in Bethlehem to know about. A simple internet search will give anyone all of the facts that they need to know. Our response mail piece laid out those facts. He has negatively referenced the city's recent progress as a community and my time on City Council. It was fair for our campaign to have the opportunity to respond to his attacks by stating the facts of his own workplace history.

In hindsight, we understand the Trump imagery on the mailer was very powerful. If we were to do it again, we could have responded to my opponents' attacks without referencing the worst President our country has ever seen. No one wants to ever see him again. We should have realized that.

We are going to keep knocking on doors, organizing our community, and discuss the issues that people really care about. We will continue to run a positive campaign and send out positive mail pieces with our vision for the future of our community. We will continue to answer everyone's questions at their door and share our ideas about what we can become. Almost all campaigns become contentious at some point. We hope that these moments of mailbox negativity are behind us, and we can get back to talking about our ideas on how to move Bethlehem forward and build a stronger city coming out of the pandemic.

Dana Grubb

From the start of my campaign, I laid out a comprehensive agenda for addressing the issues I considered most pressing in



Bethlehem, including parks maintenance, appropriate economic development, community policing, environmental and climate action, the need for a comprehensive ethics ordinance, small business support, creating a more user-friendly and accountable parking authority, and more. My candidacy is one of action; I have the experience and knowledge to work with people to understand their challenges, then design and implement solutions.

It has become apparent to me that my opponent's practices are exactly the kinds of things that must be stopped if we want to bring about Bethlehem's brighter future. A Mayor must not pick and choose their issues: differing opinions in all areas need to be heard, and the gaps between them bridged, so that solutions to challenges can be found. Conflict resolution, a willingness to take responsibility and be held accountable, and a desire to create something better through cooperation and understanding are critical instincts, and part of my personal character.

Candidates' records are one measuring stick of their qualification to hold elected office. I've considered questions that have been asked about my prior experiences as a city employee to be fair, and I have offered a consistent explanation for those experiences. I have not avoided the question about the 2004 altercation, which has been asked repeatedly by many: I have explained that I was physically confronted by a co-worker in city hall who barged in to a conversation in which he was not involved, tried to defuse the situation, was the victim of a single punch thrown by my assailant, and that both of us were held accountable and took early retirement: we were not "fired." We have both moved on. This shameful pandering to people's lowest impulses by continually regurgitating something that happened 17 years ago, and once in a 27-year career, something that was over in 20 seconds, and in which I was not the aggressor, is akin to gossip, and a distraction from my message and my mission.

As far as what has been called a negative mailer from my campaign, every one of the nine points made in that mailer is factual. The mailer was not specifically negative, it merely cited facts about my opponent's record and campaign funding solicitations. If he and his supporters choose to say those facts are "negative," they are the ones thus

characterizing them, and therefore his behavior, in that way. If my opponent and his followers find these facts distasteful or negative, that speaks to the facts themselves, standing on their own, and nothing more.

The characterization of my second mailer as an “attack” which was “negative” is clearly a verdict on my opponent’s own record, one which he has avoided defending. Calling my statement of opinion an “attack” is subjective and prejudiced: I have the right to state the way I feel about my opponent’s record, i.e., that Bethlehem cannot afford Mr. Reynolds as Mayor because of his actions as an elected official. A factual list of my opponent’s voting record on various issues is merely that: a list of facts. It is neither negative, nor is it an attack. It does, however, reveal a disparity between the “vision” Mr. Reynolds has lately been presenting for the City and the history of his voting record. For example, my opponent says he favors environmental protection, yet his voting record shows that he supports projects that blatantly disregarded environmental concerns. Therefore, it may be valid to question whether citizens can trust Mr. Reynolds.

My mailer did not deprecate Mr. Reynolds’ character with *ad hominem* rhetoric or publish deceptive insinuations: it merely presented the facts.

Mr. Reynolds’ most recent mailer both disparaged my character and engaged in the publication of misleading innuendos; a single incident in a 27-year career of service to the residents and city of Bethlehem is not a “history” of violent behavior. The mailer, my opponent, and his followers have continued to cast me as the “bad guy,” and to extrapolate from that miscasting and suggest that fly-off-the-handle aggression, bullying, and verbal abuse is my normal *modus operandi*. This is at best disingenuous and at worst malicious. It also calls into question Mr. Reynolds’ apparent willingness to distort any fact, frame any situation, and tread roughshod over just about anyone to get what he wants.

We recently learned from a former member of the BASD school board, that several years ago, when she spoke publicly at a meeting of that board, she was loudly castigated by my opponent after she spoke. The school board member recounted that Mr. Reynolds, who was a member of City Council at that time, was shouting his vehement disagreement

with what she had said. The confrontation was so disturbing that a security guard intervened, twice warning my opponent to calm down and give the member of the public some space. Mr. Reynolds was shown the door, and the security guard remained vigilant while he left. I am certain that my opponent remembers this incident. Should his memory fail him, however, he could ask the school board member in question to refresh his recollection.

Now that all of this has been addressed yet again, I will continue to promote my comprehensive plans for delivering the best city government I can, plans born out of responsiveness to residents and businesses. Bethlehem government must be collaborative, with all residents having a voice and a say in how our City moves forward. Bethlehem government must be responsive to concerns regarding public safety and policing. Bethlehem government must be committed to preserving the history and quality of life that makes our city unique and a place I am proud to call my home town.

A lifelong Democrat, I “Believe in a Better Bethlehem,” and if residents do, too, they will vote for me on May 18th.

Residents are welcome to fashion reflections on candidate comments, sending them to ejg1@lehigh.edu. On Gadfly we seek the good conversation that builds community, so please be courteous at all times. Gadfly retains the right to abridge and to edit your reflections and to decline posts that are repetitive or that contain personal attacks. Gadfly will publish resident reflections on the week's Forum at noon on Friday.

The Bethlehem Gadfly