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Dear School Council

My name is Rod Vance and I am a school council member for Laburnum Primary School, but I am writing to you in a private capacity as I am to all state school councils in the Whitehorse area; this letter holds the same communication as a formal Citizen-school council correspondence I put to Laburnum Primary School Council this week.

Recently you may have gotten a communication from the whitehorse city council asking for nomination of our children for an award of “young citizen of the year” by the council for Australia day to be awarded presumably by the mayor or CEO of the council. Personally I hold the 26th of January to be nought but “Invasion Day”, but that is an aside for the purposes of this letter, so let us for the sake of argument consider any like ceremony on a non-specific date conferring such “awards”.

In deferring the role of honor giver to anyone, we are holding that person up before our children as role models, as the pinnacle of achievement and worthiness to our children. I do not believe I am alone when I think that the behavior of many of our “leaders” in every level of government in every political party makes them role models only insofar that we should be encouraging our children to think of them as models of that which one should strive *not* to become. Let there be no doubt: these honor ceremonies for our “leaders” are, for the latter, every bit as much about the “leaders” themselves as about the “honored” children. They peddle implicitly, but nonetheless highly intentionally, a predicate to this “honor” that they wish to stamp indelibly on our children’s minds: that as the powerful and exclusive gatekeepers of such awards, they are lofty beings deeply worthy of our children’s trust and esteem.

Unfortunately my experience[1] leads me to believe that whitehorse city council are deeply unworthy of our children’s trust and esteem in this way. Let’s not kid ourselves, however, that this state of being is anything to do with whitehorse alone. Their behavior is almost certainly widespread in all levels of government, as attitudes of common Citizens seem to suggest. In particular, a 2011 Expert Panel on Constitutional Recognition of Local Government (before the aborted referendum on this issue) identified widespread attitudes of ordinary Citizens that could well scuttle any attempt to recognize local government in the Australian Constitution - attitudes that showed many Local Governments to be deeply untrustworthy in the eyes of their Citizens. One should take especial heed of the common opinions documented in the Expert Panel’ report that **(1)** Local Government is corrupt, **(2)** that it abuses bureaucratic power and **(3)** it simply does not deserve recognition[2]. Does this accurately reflect whitehorse? Who knows for sure, but I have yet to see any evidence whatsoever in whitehorse’s behavior that tells in the slightest against these opinions.

We voted for these “leaders”. We wholeheartedly deserve the dross they dish up to us that they think passes for behavior as I’m sad to say our governments are pretty representative of much average Australian behavior. In stark contrast, our children did *not* and do *not*. They had no say in the matter at all, no say in their future, and we don’t seem to be very good at listening to their needs. I don’t believe I am alone in having no time for any system of bestowing “honor” that sets our current “leaders” up as the pinnacle of being. We must bring our children up to earnestly feel and know:

1. They have a right to a great deal better than our current leaders;
2. They have a right to be and can be a great deal better than our current leaders;
3. They should never feel bound by the appalling standards that pass for leadership in this land.

What is the alternative if we wish to honor our children? There are at least three very real ones, that long term our children are much likelier to appreciate than the hypocritical delegation of this task to withered, shrivelled, soulless, conceited and wholly self interested people:

1. Firstly and absolutely foremostly, nothing is more honoring to a child by a parent than time spent with them, time showing our belief in them as intrinsically worthy for who they are and altogether aside from fatuous letters after one’s name, or vacuous pieces of paper documenting “achievements” or “honors” by legends in their own lunchboxes who would think nothing of spending taxpayer’s money to spread far and wide glossy brochures big-noting themselves.
2. If we do feel the need for a community honor ceremony, let’s choose people who are *worthy* of our children to lead such a ceremony. This may be harder than it seems, for such people almost certainly would work quietly and steadily and would never proclaim their own worthiness, with or without the help of other people’s money for advertising. Most likely they don’t have fatuous letters after their names. But I put it to you that in your school community there would be many examples of people greatly more worthy of our children’s esteem than government officials, elected or otherwise.
3. Nothing hurts our image obsessed, policy bereft “leaders” more than slights that become public. A widespread repudiation of their behaviors through a proclamation that they keep away from our children because their behavior makes them unworthy to honor our children might just begin to be a force towards something better. Perhaps one day someone in government might become a little tired of such low esteem and work to become worthy of our children.

By failing to stand against the behavior of our self-interested “leaders”, we are failing our children woefully. Our “leaders” treat us with contempt because *we* let them. For us, that’s too bad, however, in a great measure it is deserved. But it is unforgivable if we let them trash our children’s future in this way. Our “leaders” through their appalling behavior and blatant nose thumbing at the values of Sincerity, Honor, Fairness, Truthfulness and Love so needful to a decent future ***will not and cannot deliver the future our children deserve.***

I hope you will join with me in boycotting the Invasion Day “honor” of our children by people who manifestly do not measure up to such a task. I should be especially interested in hearing from parents who wish to form their own school honor committees, delegating honor ceremonies to

common people who by their decent behavior are far more worthy of our children than those who would set themselves up as exclusive gatekeepers of phony esteem.

Yours sincerely

Rod Vance

Footnotes and References

[1] Having dealt throughout a thirty year working life with many organizations, in many cultures and in both private and government organizations in many lands, I have never dealt with an organization that behaved more dishonestly than did whitehorse city council in dealing with me and other ordinary citizens and whitehorse's standards seemed by far and away lower than those of every other organization I have dealt with. Aside from Whitehorse, organizations in my experience seem to have a continuous, connected spectrum of honesty standards, but I found whitehorse to be utterly disconnected from this spectrum: something resembling a statistical outlier or utter aberration if we imagined graphing some measure of honesty with respective organization.

The matter that brought me into conflict with whitehorse is trifling and need not be repeated. Instead, it was the patterns of behavior which I found to be the most disturbing and which showed the present leadership to be utterly incapable of the kind of open and honest relationship that must exist between Citizen and Government if our children are to solve the deep problems that face their world. This behavior was painfully cyclic: repeated and deliberate statements to Citizens in support of the council's agenda that were shown to be blatantly false when challenged by legal letters. One cannot hope to find the truth on even the most trivial matters out when dealing with whitehorse without the help of expensive legal counsel. At one stage, the council claimed to a large meeting of Citizens to have legal advice in support of its agenda; when challenged in writing to show that legal advice, it finally admitted, after much evasion, that the advice did not exist. At the time when the council's lack of truthfulness was being exposed, I was visited in my home by a large man in an expensive suit "warning" me to be careful whom I spoke to and to be "careful" about what I said. The man categorically refused to say whom he represented and disappeared on foot. I documented the incident in a statutory declaration to the Victoria Police. Naturally I have no evidence as to who sent that person, but the unanswered question of how he came to know that I was saying things the council found to be uncomfortable, leaves little doubt in my mind as to which organization sent this person to my home. Is Australia the land where people are threatened for holding governments to account? Unfortunately it would seem so, and both police officers and lawyers I spoke to about this matter, although sympathetic, seemed altogether unsurprised by this account.

[2] See the December 2011 Final Report by the Expert Panel on Constitutional Recognition of Local Government. The full report can be downloaded from

<http://www.rdapilbara.org.au/publications/consitutional-recognition-of-local-government.pdf>