

Critics should use arguments, not insults

To the Editor:

When David Carlin writes a letter on a public issue to The Daily News, WHAM, he gets hit below the belt. This time twice: first by Bob Fulghum and then by the Rev. Dr. Frank Carpenter.

My letter is not to defend Dave Carlin's ideas, although I agree with most of them, but to protest the smear attacks that regularly follow his letters.

For example, both Mr. Fulghum and the Rev. Carpenter label Dave Carlin as a member of the "Christian New Right" or "religious right." Mr. Fulghum repeatedly links Carlin with extreme right wing Republicans, like Pat Robertson and Jerry Falwell.

This is simply character assassination. Though I do not know Dave Carlin personally, I followed his political career and have read articles he has written in national journals as well as his letters published in this newspaper. Dave Carlin is a mainstream Democrat, with moderate to liberal views on virtually all public issues. He is not "right wing" by any stretch of the imagination.

In his criticism of Myrth York, for example, Dave Carlin did not say a word about one issue that Lincoln Almond scored many polit-

ical points on — her proposal, while a legislator, to increase welfare benefits so as to double the cost to taxpayers. This is the kind of issue that drives right wing Republicans up the wall. So why didn't Carlin say anything about it if he's so right wing? I strongly suspect it is because, as a Democrat, he believes in government being able to help people in need, and so he generally supports such measures.

The same is true for many other public issues: death penalty, gun control, health care reform, tax increases to fund social programs, and so on. All these are "hot button" issues for right-wing Republicans, and based on his writing and past voting record, Dave Carlin's views on these issues would be totally rejected by the right wing.

So how can Mr. Fulghum and the Rev. Carpenter get away with calling him a right winger? As I said, it's simply a smear attack, guilt by association.

Of course, anyone who publishes a letter for the public to read should expect rebuttal (and this letter is no exception). But why not discuss the issues instead of defaming the writer? Speak up if you don't think same-sex unions tend to diminish the institution of

marriage ... if you think child care centers should be required to hire homosexuals and that Roman Catholic (or other) landlords should not be allowed to rent only to married couples ... if you are in favor of unrestricted abortion right up to the day of delivery and euthanasia for all who want it.

These are all legitimate public issues, and views from all sides should be heard. But speak to the issue; explain logically why this or that should or should not be done, and forget the personal attacks.

David Carlin, I am quite sure, has a thick skin. But many would hesitate to express their views if what they get back is a barrage of personal attacks. This is not public discussion of the issues — it's a form of intimidation. Letters like those of Mr. Fulghum and Rev. Carpenter carry a not-so-subtle message: "See, this is what you get if you publicly express views we don't agree with. We are going to make sure that you are known as a bigot, a narrow-minded fundamentalist, even a — gasp! — right winger!"

Roland F. Chase
Newport

46/5/11 425