

Guess Who's Not Coming to Dinner

My wife and I were having dinner at our friend's house, when the subject turned to politics. (Surprise!) Our friend "Sue" was angry because her "local representative" had done something that was contrary to her wishes. Despite the kick under the table from my wife (she knew what was coming) I couldn't resist. "So, do you really think that your elected representative should always make decisions that reflect your own opinion?" I asked rubbing my shin.

"Sure!" she said.

"What about the opinion of the other 6,000 people that he represents?" I asked. (She stopped eating...)

"Well, I guess he should poll all of us and do what the majority thinks."

"Really?" I said... "On every decision?"

"Yes...I mean, no... Just the important stuff." she stumbled, sounding a little less certain.

"Oh... Then who decides what's important?" I asked while rubbing my other freshly kicked shin.

"The people do!" she countered proudly.

"Sue, you're not suggesting that he should poll people to find out whether or not he should poll them, are you?" (I know that look... no dessert for me)

"No!" she said placing her napkin in the plate. "He can tell by the letters or email he receives and by talking to people he knows."

"OK," I replied, "but people that contact him, often have a vested special interest or they're emotionally motivated. Plus, when you hear someone say 'Everybody I talk to thinks...' 'Everybody' is probably only a few dozen people. Do you want those people deciding for you?"

She started fanning herself and sighed, "I don't know."

"And," I added, "what if they want this person to do something that he thinks is wrong, or illegal, or unconstitutional? (Uh-oh... My wife is looking at the ceiling) Does he ignore his own judgment and do something that he knows is wrong or unwise, because a handful of people want him to?"

“No, of course not!” she said looking around for reinforcements at the table. (They were all examining the inside of their wine glasses.) “He should use his own judgment... that’s why we elected him in the first place.” she said sounding satisfied.

“Then,” I added quickly, “you elected him because you trust his judgment.”

“Yes!” she said.

“And you want him to use his judgment to make decisions for the people he represents... right?”

“Sure!” she said shrugging.

(I have you now, I thought in my best Darth Vader inner voice) I leaned across the table. “So, we should elect people of sound judgment who will listen and weigh the information, who won’t be swayed by special interests or intimidation, who will make decisions based on good arguments and sound facts while weighing the rule of the majority with the rights of the minority, leading us to trust them to do what’s best for the community.”

“Exactly! She said banging her hand on the table. Then she leaned forward, her nose almost touching mine, “As long as he does what I want him to do!”