

Tribune Editorial: Chalk drawings are not ‘criminal mischief

By The Salt Lake Tribune Editorial Board

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<https://www.sltrib.com/opinion/editorial/2019/04/08/tribune-editorial-chalk/>

Unless there is some record of police officers in Lehi paying intimidating visits to the homes of young chalk artists who are partial to images of Spiderman, butterflies and My Little Pony, then whoever sent the cops to call on the families of children who have been expressing their reasonable concern about air quality in the Utah County community is way out of line. As the ACLU has explained and as, if the city’s policy is not soon reversed, the courts are sure to agree. City officials and the management of Geneva Rock are allied in their desire to dig up (don’t call it “mining”) a bunch of rock and gravel from developing property near the Traverse Mountain residential neighborhood. Many of the residents of that area are not thrilled about the prospect, understandably concerned that such activity is likely to make the air in the community even more dangerous than it already is. As is their First Amendment right, and the duty of concerned citizens and responsible parents and siblings, Lehi residents of all ages have been making their feelings known. Among their chosen methods of petitioning for a redress of grievances has been chalk drawings on the sidewalks of Main Street and in front of Lehi City Hall.

None of the messages are permanent or otherwise damaging to public property. None of them are obscene or slanderous. All are fair comment. All are protected by the First Amendment. None of them constitutes what a City Hall spokesperson has absurdly called “criminal mischief.” The city’s overly sensitive reaction to this particular method of clean-air advocacy can only serve to demonstrate that someone in a position of power -- governmental or economic -- thinks they should not be criticized and that they have the right to employ the muscle of the state to tell other people to shut up.

No, they don’t.

Whatever happens with the don’t-call-it-a-quarry that Geneva plans, the children involved in this literal sidewalk protest movement may come away with one of two lessons.

Either they will spend the rest of their lives in fear of police officers and highly reticent to engage in any personal or political expression.

Or they will internalize the message that, sometimes, people in power are officious poops who don’t deserve the respect they claim to be owed by virtue of their public office or corporate wealth.

Please, please let it be the latter.



Rick Egan | The Salt Lake Tribune) Felicity Hoffert 10, draws on the side walk in front of the Lehi City Hall, to protest the expansion of Geneva Rock's mining activities near their neighborhood, Tuesday, April 2, 2019.