

No harm is done to a cause by listening to the other side

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Start Page: D.5

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Something my father told me has stayed with me for a lifetime.

I've been grappling with all the discussion, bad and good, about President Obama's upcoming visit to Notre Dame.

Should he have been invited? Should he come? Should people picket?

My dad always told me the only way to understand something complicated is to listen to all sides with an open mind and an open heart..

"Don't turn a deaf ear," he would say.

The people at the University of Notre Dame aren't deaf. Neither is President Obama.

They've heard the flak about whether Obama is a suitable speaker for Notre Dame's commencement later this month.

Many U.S. presidents with controversial policies have been welcomed by Notre Dame in the past. Sometimes people protest. Sometimes they don't. But, in my memory, I can't recall Notre Dame ever seriously considering withdrawing an invitation of this sort.

Like many who grew up in the Catholic Church, I know the church's unbending belief that includes protection of life in the womb.

I am also aware that President Obama seems more open to providing funding for abortion and to using fetal stem cells for medical research.

Obviously, this puts him at odds with the policies of the Catholic Church.

Recently our city has been targeted by people and groups protesting Obama's visit to Notre Dame.

I have had my fair share of discussions with people who are unhappy with The Tribune's constant coverage of "the Obama haters." They wonder why all the outside agitators have taken over and why The Tribune keeps writing about them.

Trust me. I hear you.

But The Tribune is committed to the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution -- which guarantees freedom of speech.

Whether you've been here all your life or just arrived yesterday, you have the right to say what you want about Obama and Notre Dame. Obama has that same right. So do the leaders at Notre Dame, who are free to invite whomever they please to speak.

Any newspaper committed to fairness and accuracy will make sure all sides are presented so people can make their own choices. This story will not end with Obama's visit to Notre Dame. The arguments over abortion and stem cell research will continue, no matter what our federal policy is.

His visit will help that debate continue. If he chooses to speak on other topics that are equally controversial, we will benefit from that, too.

It only works if people are willing to greet others whose opinions are the opposite of theirs. We need to quiet our own voices long enough to hear what our opponents are saying.

Let the man come. Let the man speak.

A deaf ear and an empty chair serve no one.

__Maylee Johnson is a staff writer for The Tribune.

Credit: Tribune Staff Writer

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Abstract (Document Summary)

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