

January 27, 2017

Statement Regarding Library Safe Use

We are aware of public information suggesting the Saskatoon Public Library rejected a political campaign event because of what might have been discussed at such a meeting.

Libraries are about the free expression of ideas and exchange of information. Libraries are a fundamental component of a democratic society, but they have to remain welcoming and safe spaces for everyone. As a result, the Public Library has a bylaw to keep a safe, secure and comfortable space for our patrons and staff.

The room booking was completed by an individual who stated the purpose of the event as, “day of reflection” and the organizational affiliation as “none.” Last week the library became aware the event was being promoted as a campaign event for Conservative Party of Canada leadership candidate Brad Trost. At no point was the library contacted by the event organizer to notify us or engage us in a conversation about the apparent change to the event’s purpose.

SPL was contacted by a group of protesters who called on the library to cancel the event. At that time, SPL responded to the protesters informing them the event would be allowed to proceed citing support for freedom of speech, regardless of the personal opinions of any SPL Board or staff member. However, we received subsequent information informing us the protesters planned to enter the library and attend the event. As we have explained, the Alice Turner Branch is also not equipped to support large-scale public events that involve potential safety and security concerns.

In hindsight, we regret using the phrase “controversial nature,” as we were merely attempting to convey the concern we had over those who opposed Mr. Trost promising to create what could be an unmanageable situation for the library staff and patrons. On the day of the cancellation, the library agreed to assist Mr. Trost by posting a sign in the library alerting his supporters to the change of venue.

The Saskatoon Public Library is a champion of free speech and intellectual freedom. We welcome democratic debate in our spaces, but we have to balance this in a way that the safety, security and comfort of all of our patrons and staff are not compromised.

Carol Cooley
Director of Libraries and CEO
Saskatoon Public Library