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The Dignity Index Left A Mark On Town Fair Attendees





By Ted Brady, VLCT Executive Director

The week before Town Fair, VLCT issued [a press release](#) announcing that a “national leader in political depolarization” would deliver the keynote address at Town Fair. The headline didn’t roll off the tongue, but – based on the media’s interest and the standing-room-only crowd at Town Fair – it caught some people’s attention.

Governor Phil Scott [kicked off](#) Town Fair this year by invoking the memory of a Vermont political legend – the late Vermont Senator Dick Mazza. Scott said Mazza was admired because “... he worked hard, listened to both sides, and treated people with respect.” Scott asked municipal leaders in attendance to do the same, to be role models and restore Mazza’s values to our town offices. He then turned things over to our keynote speaker who had a practical tool to help them do so – [The Dignity Index](#)

UNITE Chief External Affairs Officer Tami Pyfer, a former city councilor and state political appointee from Utah, shared that she and her peers have been using this tool to reduce contempt in politics. The Dignity Index is an eight-point scale used to measure how people talk to each other when they disagree. **By scoring the language we ourselves use, we learn to model good behavior and encourage others to do the same.**



Pyfer's simple message: aim high. Speech that scores higher than five points "reflects language grounded in dignity." Moreover, **analyzing speech reduces the focus on the speaker** – a trick designed to reduce vilification and objectification of the speaker.

While I wasn't able to be at Town Fair this year due to illness, my phone blew up with texts throughout Tami's speech:

"The Dignity Index speaker was amazing."

"Tami Pyfer was one of the best keynotes I've ever heard, and perfect for this moment."

Both the governor and Tami struck a nerve among VLCT members. It's not surprising, given the stories we hear. Town offices can't open due to threats from citizens. Towns increasingly struggle to effectively run meetings due to unproductive behavior and language, from both citizens and fellow elected officials. And at the national level, the National League of Cities [reports](#) that four out of five local officials they surveyed had experienced harassment, threats, or violence.

VLCT is currently working with Tami's organization and others here in Vermont to discuss what resources we need to bring to our members to help them through this trend. For now, consulting the Dignity Index is a great start. And if you want to practice your skills, play the [The Dignity Daily](#) – an opportunity to apply the Dignity Index on historic quotes.

Our keynote seemed to steal the show this year, but **there was much more throughout the day for the more than 500 attendees**. The dozen or so workshops were full. We raised nearly \$3,000 for the VLCT Municipal Service Scholarship. We awarded our [2025 Municipal Service Awards](#), handed out more than 50 Years of Service pins (you can get yours [here](#)), celebrated the launch of the [Vermont Town Careers](#) campaign, and highlighted some of our state's best [Town Reports](#) (congrats



to Guilford, the Members Choice Award winner).

With our biggest event of the year behind us, we now start planning for Town Fair 2026, scheduled for October 7 at the DoubleTree in South Burlington. Thanks to all who joined us this year, and we hope more of you will join us next year.

PS: The keynote speaker at the [National League of Cities City Summit in Utah this November](#) will be **Tim Shriver, who co-created The Dignity Index with Tami Pyfer.**

