

As a public servant I take my role very seriously and work diligently to interact with and receive feedback from the public on issues of importance to them. A little over a month ago I invited Mary Souza to have coffee with me. I did so because her written statements to the public about local public officials had become filled with innuendo and negativity. I was one of the person's she had written about in what I considered to be a personal attack and I was disappointed she had been so reckless and untruthful.

I thought if we met and talked face to face she would understand that I am a strong advocate of education and I have no motives other than working hard to provide an affordable, quality education to all members of our community. I have been very vocal in my support of the education corridor and the opportunities it brings to all future students in our five Northern counties. I understand the process of acquiring the corridor needs to be open and transparent and include public input. The Board has committed to that and has hosted community meetings focused on the topic of the education corridor. There are more meetings to come on this topic and I encourage citizens to attend.

In good faith I spent 3 hours over coffee talking with Mary. The door was open to talk about anything she wished. The conversation was lively at times and although we do not agree on some issues, I gave her credit for caring about the future of education in our community and working to be part of the decision process.

I have since learned that Mary taped our conversation at the coffee shop. She did not ask me if I minded being taped or tell me she was taping me. That is perfectly legal in Idaho but not very considerate. I did not say anything to her about School District 271 or NIC that I would not say in public, however I did spend the first 15 minutes or so talking with her about my family. The conversation was mother to mother. Mary is my neighbor so I have known her for awhile and our children went to school together.

I am a very private person in my off time and I do try to shield my family from local politics. If Mary had asked if she could tape our conversation I would have said yes and dispensed with the private conversation. I was disappointed before I sat down with Mary and now I am disheartened that she is

not genuine to the issues. She is more interested in a "gotcha moment" that will appear sometime in one of her future columns.

As to the bold headline in Sunday Press "NIC cuts money from No.1 goal" and the ensuing statements in Mary's article, none of what she said about PT cuts is true. Mary likely referenced a worksheet from a budget hearing. If she had contacted the college and asked for clarification she would have been informed there was an internal re-allocation, not a cut and in fact the college has increased the PT budget by 4.5% which equates to \$195,000 additional dollars for programs. This fall we have added EMT training, dual enrollment in diesel mechanics, automotive tech, welding, as well as offering 8 week certificates, and 1 year advanced certificates. The RN budget is contained in academic transfer not the PT budget.

I believe the strongest communities are home to people who care enough to get involved locally and strive to bring quality education, employment opportunities, excellent health care services, a safe environment, responsible government, and strategically plan for sustainable growth.

I do not begrudge Mary or others for speaking out for those very things. I applaud it. But I do think that as a paid columnist for the Press she has a responsibility to research the facts and include them in her story. Instead she comes across as having an agenda. I am not interested in a "back and forth" every time Mary writes a column. Mainly because Mary has a barrel of ink so I could find myself very busy refuting false statements. I encourage the editors to insist Mary seek out the facts in order to give her credibility. I also encourage citizens to attend the Board meetings and learn about your local community college or contact a trustee if you have concerns or questions about our programs.

Christie Wood