

~ Letters to the Editor ~

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Fight the injustice

To the editor;
I write this letter after just leaving another funeral meal that Melissa Lindsay is organizing. This may be the tenth one that I have observed her helping the families that need help. I see her everywhere doing this. That is the person that she is.

My thought is as I pass the people manning the tables to spread half-truths and misinformation so that they can waste our county's resources on an unnecessary recall action, that I never seen them helping, organizing or volunteering. This may be why they have time to do this horrible thing. I say horrible because it is unfair and presents an inaccurate picture.

As a long-time resident of our community, I have witnessed the hard work Melissa Lindsay has undertaken to assist the efforts of our local organizations. I can speak for Heppner Day Care. She approached Amazon regarding their community outreach program and directed them to this struggling non-profit. Her efforts brought them enough money to re-open after covid, but to also improve staffing and many programs. She encouraged them to apply for covid relief funding and other available dollars that helped to continue operations.

The Heppner Community Foundation was also a recipient of her encouragement. As a board member I can say that opening the Gilliam and Bisbee Building weeks before Covid shut

down was discouraging. Melissa found ways for this organization to find funding to finish the projects and offer a valuable gathering spot for our area residents. I hope that the people that have benefited from this spot remember that Melissa is a key factor that it is available for us. Funerals, weddings, proms, so many things have been celebrated there. None of these things would have been possible without the foresight of Melissa Lindsay.

This is just the beginning of my list of reasons that we need to fight against this horrible injustice to one of our best residents. I hope that many of you think back – have you been touched by the day care, preschool (children, grandchildren?) Have you had a reason to use or attend an event at the Gilliam and Bisbee Building? If yes, then please stop and thank Melissa. Let's stand up for person that has helped so many. We truly need people like her here.

Kim Cutsforth

Done with the lies and misleading timelines

To the editor:
My name is Nazario Rivera. The purpose of this letter is to put an end to speculation around my resignation as the public health director. I feel the need to speak out because my name continues to be dragged by other peoples' narratives. I am done with the lies, I am done with the misleading timelines, I AM DONE!

For those who don't know who I am, I will give you a bit of my background. I am a queer Latino man. I was raised in Hermiston. I graduated from Hermiston High School in 2010 and moved to Corvallis and attended Oregon State University and graduated in 2015 with a degree in Public Health. I have participated in an active role as a leader in the community since returning to eastern Oregon.

What drove me to apply and pursue a career with Morrow County was their mission statement, "Building healthier individuals,

families, and communities where they live, learn, work, and play through information, advocacy, and services." These coincided with my personal values; integrity, advocacy and community.

I began my employment with Morrow County as the public health director with enthusiasm, presuming the biggest challenge would be COVID 19. I constantly faced barriers which prohibited me moving the department forward. I followed the chain of command and reached out to HR and CIS (liability insurance company). This led to a new agreement revising the nepotism rules. With the revision came the recommendation to have the employees involved follow a new chain of command. Meaning any concerns about me or my ability to lead the department would first be made to our county counsel and CIS. These events occurred on or between December 2020 and May 2021.

During that time, I faced constant scrutiny from my direct supervisor, Darrel Green, and his wife, Debra Green, Public Health Office Assistant, who is also a county employee. Through that, I attempted to continue to serve the citizens of Morrow County and complete the mission I was hired to do. Until March 9, 2022, I resigned from my duty as the public health director. This decision was not made lightly. My biggest fear was leaving my department staff. I was afraid that my experience was going to repeat. I did not use my resignation as a way to flee from the investigation as alleged in the April 2022 article in the Heppner Gazette. I participated through the completion of the investigation and provided honest accounts of all the events that transpired. I resigned on my own terms. I was done with the continuous harassment, discrimination and lack of respect. I left for my own mental health and

sanity. All of the vicious accusations against me have been cleared.

I want to thank the county commissioners who voted in favor of what was just and in the best interest for the county. I want to thank them for taking the time to understand the complex dynamics we were experiencing within the public health department.

I ask the rest of the public to not dismiss my experience, and to not follow blindly. I ask the public to stop being quick to condemn commissioners without knowing all the facts. I know this couldn't have been an easy vote. I thank those commissioners who stood up against harassment and took all the facts and the summary of the investigation into consideration.

I often wonder if the scrutiny I faced was due to my capacity to lead or was it that a queer Latino man could lead?

Thanks,
Nazario Rivera

Recall petitions based on falsehoods

To the editor;
"The truth has no agenda," General George Patton. When Pilate sought to know "what accusation bring ye against this man" (John 18:29) Jesus answered, "Every one of the truths hears my voice" (John 18:37). Pilate answered, "What is truth?" Pilate knew Jesus' accusers had a treacherous agenda, but he lacked the courage to stand for truth and justice. Truth has no agenda, sophistry does. In the history of Morrow County "not only has a County Commissioner never been recalled in the 137-year-old history... but a recall effort has also not even been successfully initiated." (Gazette Times July 13, 22)

Carol Mitchell has initiated a recall petition against Morrow County Commissioner Melissa Lindsay. Mitchell has accused Lindsay of "intimidated county employees resulting in either firing or leaving their jobs under duress...The action of the firing of the Morrow County Administrator, with no transparency, refusing to let the public speak, or answer the administrator's questions about why he was sitting there, made it clear that in the remaining time of her tenure, this behavior would continue...To prevent irreversible damage, an immediate recall is the only answer." (G.T. July 13, 22)

In like manner Annetta Spicer has initiated a recall of Commissioner Jim Doherty, accusing him of "decisions...not in the best interests of Morrow County citizens. He is not open and transparent in his actions as commissioner, making decisions in secret and outside of public purview and without the inclusion of the third county commissioner...Commission meetings are not held in accordance with public open meeting law requirements." (G.T. July 13, 22)

The third commissioner Spicer referred to is Don Russell. Russell's public criticism of fellow commissioners has fueled the recall effort. Russell opposed the firing of County Administrator Darrell Green and

claimed he "was never told about the complaints against Green." (G.T. June 29, 22) Russell publicly criticized the county investigation that led to Green's termination. "I was told the questions were leading and it seemed there was already an answer looking for a narrative to support it." (G.T. June 29, 22). Spicer's recall assertion that Commissioner Doherty made "decisions in secret and outside public purview without the inclusion of the third county commissioner" (G.T. July 13, 22) refers to Russell being supposedly excluded from knowledge of the investigation of Green. "But you have to have the information to make a decision and that information has not been provided to me." (G.T. June 29, 22)

The termination of County Administrator Green has been called a "witch hunt." (G.T. June 29, 22) The headline of Green's termination, "I'm struggling to understand why I'm sitting here" (G.T. June 29, 22) makes Green appear to be a martyr. Green claims he was blindsided by Commissioners Lindsay and Doherty and had no knowledge of any complaint lodged against him. "Wouldn't a complaint against me trigger an executive session to discuss my performance." (G.T. June 29, 22)

Based on the public assertions of Commissioner Russell and fired Administrator Green, Carol Mitchell and Annetta Spicer have filed two recall petitions. According to ORS 260.532 it is a felony, punishable with up to five years in prison, to provide false information on a recall petition. ORS 260.715 requires for a recall petition: "A person may not knowingly make a false statement, oath, or affidavit when a statement, oath, or affidavit is required under election laws." My question to Carol Mitchell and Annetta Spicer is this: Did you do any research or investigation to determine if your recall accusation were truthful? Would not your recall petition campaign, a campaign that will divide our county and potentially

destroy the reputation of two dedicated and esteemed elected officials, require at the bare minimum, that you to honor the ORS laws and make sure your accusations are truthful? I have obtained the documentation of the truth of the unproven accusations of this recall campaign through Oregon Public Records law. You both had an obligation to research and discover the truth regarding these accusations before you initiate a recall petition.

Let us document for the record the public documents regarding Commissioner Russell and Administrator Darrell Green: Russell has publicly stated he was 1) never told about the complaints against Administrator Green, 2) cast doubt on the integrity of the county investigation, 3) publicly asserted he was not provided information regarding the investigation regarding the reason for Green's termination. County Administrator Darrell Green has publicly testified that he had no foreknowledge of a nepotism complaint, and he was "struggling to understand why I'm sitting here...Wouldn't a complaint against me trigger an executive session to discuss my performance." (G.T. June 29, 22)

On December 15, 2021, Don Russell, chair of the Morrow County Board of Commissioners, sent a letter to all public health department employees, county administrator, human resource director, and all affected parties. The subject of the letter was various employee complaints and allegations that ultimately led to Green's termination. "Due to the complexity of these issues...I have determined it best to bring an outside investigator to interview all involved parties." (Don Russell, Morrow County Board of Commissioners, Dec. 15, 21) Russell exhorted all parties, "While this matter is being investigated, you must refrain from any conduct that could reasonably be expected to affect the integrity of this investigation." (Russell, Dec. 15, 21) It was Commissioner Russell that initiated the investigation and it was

Commissioner Russell that purposely undermined the integrity of this investigation in order to remove both Commissioners. That is the definition of sophistry. The investigator was contracted to "conduct a fair and thorough workplace investigation...and make factual findings regarding the allegations... This investigator had been hired by the county under Administrator Green on numerous previous occasions.

On April 6, 22 all three of the Morrow County Board of Commissioners met in executive session when "initial investigation results were revealed." (Compiled from Morrow County documents) On April 13, 22 a notice was sent to Darrell Green regarding "SUMMARY OF INVESTIGATION FINDING", Darrell Green was fully aware of the issue he was facing with the county nepotism policy, a policy that Green and his wife signed and agreed to. The previous year on April 21, 21 at the Morrow County Board of Commissioners meeting, attended by Darrell Green, the board approved the nepotism policy. "In the event that two employees become immediate family members and a supervisory relationship exists, the employees and the county will jointly attempt to find an alternative work assignment for one of the two employees. If no alternative assignment is available within ninety days, it will be necessary for one of the two employees to resign. In the event both employees refuse or fail to resign, the county will make a discharge decision based on the same consideration as applicable in a layoff." (Morrow County Board of Commissioners, April 21, 21) On April 17, 22, Debra Green, wife of Darrell Green, responded to findings of the investigation, evidence they were received. (Email Commissioner April 16, 22, smartphone).

The Morrow County draft investigation report was officially sent to all commissioners on April 23, 22. On May 25, 22 the nepotism policy process

was moved forward. (Morrow County H.R) In plain words the Greens were given an opportunity to work with the board of commissioners to resolve the nepotism issue. By June 24, 22 "No response from either party. Darrell issued PAL letter and notice of hearing." (Morrow County H.R)

Darrell was offered an executive session hearing per Oregon statute. (Morrow County) On June 28 Darrell Green "requested a public hearing." (Morrow County) under his rights. Green knew exactly why an executive session was being held. He deceived the public and helped orchestrate the recall campaign. Darrell Green and Don Russell manipulated Commissioner Lindsay and Doherty's integrity (to honor their legal requirement to not speak) and the attorney client privilege required to protect confidential testimony. They deliberately used Commissioner Doherty and Lindsay's silence to turn the public against two dedicated and esteemed county commissioners.

If this treachery is allowed to continue in an attempt to recall two elected officials, Morrow County will never recover, and subterfuge will rule our way of life until truth prevails. Carol Mitchell and Annetta Spicer, you now know that according to the documented facts your recall petition is based on falsehoods, deliberate lies and a carefully orchestrated public performance to incite the public to recall two elected county commissioners. If you have been misled by Don Russell and Darrell Green to produce false statements in order to initiate this recall petition, then the citizens of Morrow County will expect you both to terminate these petitions. If you continue to pursue this recall based on false accusations against two dedicated and highly esteem public servants, then it will be necessary that the citizens of Morrow County rest not until justice for false statements on a recall petition be adjudicated according to the laws of the state of Oregon.

Stuart Dick, Irrigon



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