

Try respect and integrity on for size

By [Contributed - Quesnel Cariboo Observer](#)

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Editor:

Re: Setting the record straight, Feedback, July 6.

I agree. I think you may be indeed be “setting a record” for the amount of attention given! Your “community” newspaper has printed this item filled with accusations, suggestions of collusion and loaded statements like the references to a “parade” of city management exiting- being “paid to leave”, a “wasteful whitewash” from the auditor etc. *(editor’s note: I wonder if this is implying letters to the editor should be edited by the Editor before they are published)*

And despite your policy that submissions should be 250 words or less, by my estimate, Ms. Morton’s letter was closer to 1,000 words – half a page! *(editor’s note: Why no complaints when the comments were positive about the mayor and council?)*

Pardon me, but I think your bias is showing. Printing an editor’s note at the end of this lengthy submission indicating that Mayor Sjostrom declined comment is almost laughable. What should she comment on? A careful reading of Ms. Morton’s submission does not offer any compelling “evidence” of the serious accusations that she continues to put forward. This is what I read from the article itself: *(editor’s notes: read the evidence, open your eyes...it is all available)*

- Ms. Morton states that she requested “a clear understanding” from the advanced rulings department of Revenue Canada on the tax-free expense allowance. (This might suggest that this is a regulation that is very open to multiple lawful interpretations.) They returned her fee, she states, because they “do not want to provide the information.” What should the Mayor comment on here?

- The fact that Gail Shea, Federal Revenue Minister referred Ms. Morton’s letter to Finance Minister Flaherty is not confirmation that the exemption has been misinterpreted or misused. If Ministers Shea or Flaherty provided Ms. Morton with the “clear understanding” that she requested, she has omitted it in her submission – I do not see it stated there. Ms. Morton states that MP Dick Harris is “clearly at odds with his government’s own finance minister!” but we don’t even know what Mr. Flaherty has said. To be fair, perhaps this is why Mayor Sjostrom declined comment. *(editor’s note: James Flaherty's letter appears under the date of June 19th...mayor and council were given a copy of the letter during a council meeting. It would have to be someone with limited intelligence not to understand a council member cannot have the 1/3 tax free expense allowance and a reimbursement of expenses the allowance is to cover....as for Dick Harris he said the allowance is for "sports jackets and suits" so perhaps Dick Harris should answer the taxpayers as to who actually gets to claim these expenses on their tax returns. HARRIS SAYS DOUBLE DIPPING TO HIM WOULD BE IF YOU WERE GETTING IT ON ONE HAND AND CLAIMING IT ON THE OTHER. Isn't this exactly what*

Sjostrom has been doing? Getting the tax-free allowance on one hand and then claiming for a reimbursement of the very expenses on the other?

Ms. Morton seems to suggest that some phone numbers on the phone bills provided should not have been blacked out, (editor's note: *All phone numbers were blacked out not just some as this letter implies. I expected to see all personal calls redacted but not all phone numbers. How can a proper accounting be done if all information has been removed? Should taxpayers be paying for any ones personal calls?*) because anyone who knows her understands that she is "very concerned about protecting the privacy of individuals." While I am sure this is true, it must be said, sadly, that this is not a sufficient guarantee in the realm of governmental policy and regulations. Governments and their agencies do not rely upon promises or personality to implement the rules fairly. *BC Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act section 35*

And remember your front page story about a city employee's termination? Any public official who offers his opinion and further, makes unsubstantiated accusations about a sensitive human resource issue is violating confidentiality and is in breach of his oath. *Oath of Office proves there is no violation...no mention of personal opinions...and unsubstantiated accusations are coming from the rest of council against Thapar and it is only going to cost taxpayers as this situation will end up in court*

Anyone who works in this area knows this. To deflect his irresponsibility by ridiculing other councillors for upholding this oath is even more dishonourable. (editor's note: *Who is best representing the taxpayers, a councillor who provide important information to the taxpayers or those who what to withhold important information? None of this has to be kept confidential as per the Community Charter section 90(1)*)

But you gave it the front page and of course, the mayor and other councillors, honouring their oath of confidentiality, declined comment.

Only a few people know all of facts here. Why should we rely upon someone who cannot honour his own oath to interpret this story? (Editor's note: *The facts can be provided under the Community Charter it is just this council does not appear to want to be transparent*)

A community newspaper can go a long way to promote respect, integrity and civility in the political discourse. I think you should try it. (editor's note: *Bev has it all wrong, our newspaper reports the news and the Mayor and council are creating quit the stories by their actions...perhaps if the majority of council was more concerned about the people they represent they would be more open and honest in their dealings with taxpayers money and quit trying to silence the only real voice the taxpayers have on council.*)

Bev Haluschak

Quesnel