

Anything two people know is not a secret

# CHEYENNE HERALD

FREE - TAKE ONE

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## Did Cindy Hill really tell the WTE that the Department of Education must speak with "one voice" - hers?

No. Reed Eckhardt made it up.

When they make up stories in their newspaper, on the opinion pages, that is one thing. When they fabricate direct quotes, that's another.

If Reed had said "We were told that Cindy Hill said ..." or, "A reliable source told us that Cindy Hill said ...", they might have a defensible position. What the editorial said was:

**"THE ISSUE:** Cindy Hill, the new superintendent of public instruction, has installed a 'one voice policy' at the state education agency."

No such policy has been installed.

Also, "I need to make sure it's one voice, and until I have that, it's all from me. I'm the voice." - Cindy Hill, state superintendent of public instruction.

Putting words in quotation marks with attribution to the person who was supposed to have said or written those words makes the assertion very clear: The WTE was claiming that Cindy Hill used those words and they were provided to them, Cheyenne's daily newspaper, by her.

Very provocative. Very disturbing.

Also very untrue.

Cindy Hill made the greatest leap of career of the five candidates for State Superintendent of Public Instruction in the 2010 election. She had more experience in education than did the Democratic nominee, Mike Massie, but he had served many years in the state legislature and lobbying for money and educational programs support is a very important part of the superintendent's job. Hill's candidacy was opposed in the primary and the general election by the WTE.

Cindy Hill trounced the competition in a strong Republican primary and did equally well in the general over a candidate supported by a two-term Democratic governor. And the WTE.

It is not surprising that the daily would take their loss personal. That is who, and what, they've become.

Cindy Hill must expect that the WTE will use every reason and every occasion to oppose her - even if they have to fabricate a difference. They are just as ungracious as losers as they are ungracious as winners (which seldom happens anymore).

My first reactions when I read the story was "how foolish," "she's getting off on the wrong foot," and, "that doesn't sound like the person I spoke with during both election cycles."

Having long ago learned not to believe what the WTE will print on its pages, I decided I would afford Ms. Hill an opportunity to tell me to my face that she would be the "one voice" to be heard from the Department of Education.

I called the WDE on Wednesday afternoon and asked for Cindy Hill. I was told she was out of the office and would be back Thursday morning. I had identified myself and told Rita Watson the purpose of my call. She asked if 9:00 am on Thursday morning would work. It did and I went to Cindy Hill's office that morning, less than a day from contact.

She had three of her top staffers in the office with her - a spartan office, by the way - and I told her my purpose was specific and my visit brief. I asked if she had said to Reed Eckhardt that the Department would speak with "one voice" and that she would be that voice. She said she had not. I asked her if she had put anything in writing to him - a press release or an e-mail - of that nature. Again, she said she had not.

I asked her if she had told her staff that such would be the policy. Again, she said she had not and the staffers in attendance confirmed that.

So, Reed, if you have something in writing or recorded that contradicts Cindy Hill's denial of your quotation, you should provide it to your readers. If you cannot provide proof that your quotation was not fabricated, you should apologize publicly. Fabricating quotes is in league with

plagiarism, which your paper has also been guilty of.

In management, especially when you take over a corporation, or in her case, a department of state government, and inherit many employees who pre-date you, you must make it clear to them that they have a new boss and that there will be some changes. Some they will like and some they may not. In Cindy's case, she received a resounding mandate from Wyoming voters to run the Department of Education. Her way.

She has earned the right to have her policies and positions be the ones articulated for public consumption. The dissent and disagreement Eckhardt favors (which is not allowed at the Tribune-Eagle, of course) has to be internal. A disloyal staffer who goes to the media with their dissatisfaction is looking to be terminated. If Brian Martin worked late one night and placed an editorial diametrically opposite of Reed's own position on any subject, he would be terminated. The newspaper has terminated employees who refused to wear an anti-union button. So, the paper, per se, is in no position to lecture anyone about freedom of expression if it is in the form of dissent or disagreement with the editor or publisher.

Has anyone from inside the WDE brought such dissent to the attention of the WTE? If they have, who and what was the issue of disagreement? Did someone from the WDE make a claim that Cindy Hill has stifled disagreement or independence in internal discussions? Who?

Cindy Hill told me, in the presence of those three key staffers, that she had not issued any such edict and pointed out examples of when staffers had spoken for the WDE in public meetings and they did it with her full knowledge and support.

She has been in office less than a month. Before setting off the depth charges, give her a bit of time. Let's see how she handles the job. Will she make mistakes? Very likely.

Did Dave Freudenthal continue to make mistakes until his last days in office? Of course. Did Matt Mead get into office via help from the enemy? Was that a mistake? What has Cynthia Cloud (the new auditor for those who don't remember) said to the employees she inherited?

Did Cindy Hill surround herself with strong and capable lieutenants? Time will tell. Did she install the policy claimed by the WTE? No.

Where was this same newspaper when Jim McBride was first appointed, then elected, to the same office? He was a proven incompetent but the cat must have gotten Reed's tongue about Jim. The WTE was never critical about the selection nor the election of the nincompoop who came up from Colorado after being summarily run out of Bennett after barely one school year.

Less than four weeks. Cindy Hill has been in office less than a month and already the vanguard newspaper in town is making up quotes they attributed to her. They don't attribute anything they knowingly steal from the pages of the Cheyenne Herald but they attribute a quote to her that she said she had never made?

I asked her if Eckhardt had tried to contact her for confirmation of the quote or for comment about it and then told her he was going to run it. She said he had made no contact and had not attempted such contact.

I was in her office within 24 hours of my request and probably could have gotten a cell phone call back from her in less than eight hours had I asked. When I left, Bob Beck of Wyoming Public Radio was waiting to meet with her. She is not ducking the media. Vigilance of a public official is one thing. Vengeance is another. A once proud daily newspaper should be above seeking revenge. An editor who deliberately fabricates quotes should be suspended or removed. The fact that Cindy Hill advertised on my pages didn't set well with the WTE. But, nothing justifies making up words and "quoting" them when they weren't spoken or written.

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