

# THE CROOK, THE CRYBABY AND THE COWARD

It's always entertaining to see how some people (or their over-eager friends) try to slap back at reporters, editors, or other citizens who've written or spoken out about public officials, public issues, or public entities.

Here are three recent examples with spooky similarities. The first is excerpted from a letter sent to the New York Times by **Frank Tassone**, the disgraced superintendent in Roslyn, New York, who's headed to prison for pilfering a ton of money from his school district.

**"I am no longer going to remain quiet when lies and distortions are written about me. In a Sunday New York Times editorial, it appears that once again Paul Vitello is writing in his critical fashion using mistaken facts and information. First, I did not systematically "plunder" the Roslyn schools. Secondly, if he would have listened, I pleaded guilty to taking \$1.1 million not \$2 million....**

**My last year has been quite painful; I lost my job, reputation, career and licenses and I am receiving a prison sentence of four to 12 years.... I know of drug dealers and child molesters who have served far less time....**

**I hope the hard working mothers and fathers in Roslyn also remember how much the schools improved as a result of my leadership. Their real estate has increased like nowhere else in the country primarily because of the schools.... I am not a danger to society; drug dealers and rapists are. I was given erroneous advice by the auditor and the assistant superintendent ...."** [Frank Tassone]

**Ken McCann** is the General Chairman of Cheyenne Frontier Days. In a recent newsletter to CFD volunteers, McCann lashed out childishly at both media types and ordinary citizens who dare to speak up about one or more issues involving Frontier Days. Equating them with terrorists was a nice touch, however, Kenny.

**"I asked myself this question: 'Is it just me or does it seem like there are members of our community whose sole purpose is to destroy it?'**

**You know them: they tell you what's best for your kids, what your business needs are, what social behavior they accept, and what's wrong with your rodeo. I've learned that all social and political terrorists have personal agendas neatly hidden under their lambskin coats. They lurk in the shadows, loathe the truth and dismiss those not aligned with their thinking. You have to ask yourself: why are they doing this? Is the real reason revenge, monetary or political gain, or something else entirely --- vanity or jealousy perhaps? Their favorite recipe is a mixture of half-truths, marinated in yellow journalism, served half-baked to us practically every day of the week."** [Ken McCann]

This third error-filled rant was posted on Cheyenne Network's FORUM by someone who thinks saying hateful, nasty things and doing it anonymously is great fun.

Posting under the cutesy sobriquet **Carmen de Rojas**, the writer was responding to a suggestion that those who post messages on the FORUM should be required to use their REAL names.

**"I would recommend you leave well enough alone. The reason anonymity is supported and respected by most, is because of the Naysayers. If Jim Mathewson, Pete Laybourn or Dave Featherly, et al., were to find out the identities of some of us, there would be no end to their stalking, digging and harassing. You will most likely cause a lot of grief for all. You need to remember the Naysayers have no other purpose then to seek out and ruin others by making half-truth statements, causing doubt and suspicion among our peers. They are horrible, petty, spineless, loathing scumbags and will stop at nothing to obtain self-recognition in the community."**

How amusing it is to see a coward like Carmen post an anonymous message on an internet forum to accuse someone else of being "spineless". And where did you get that idiotic word "self-recognition", Carmen?

## *A Final Thought*

On June 14<sup>th</sup> of this year, the respected school superintendent in Elizabeth, Colorado, was sentenced to six years in prison for stealing several hundred thousand dollars from his school district.

A few days earlier, the respected school superintendent in Roslyn, New York, had been indicted for stealing a few million dollars from his district.

It wasn't a very good week for their respective school boards, either.

Ironically, both schemes to pilfer huge sums of public money came to light only after otherwise ordinary citizens noticed something amiss and started asking a few questions.

### **YOU MAKE HOW MUCH?**

Bruce Bartlett had been the school superintendent in Elizabeth for several years. The members of his school board thought he was being paid \$123,000 per year. The board also thought that Nancie Munsey, the district's business manager, was making \$93,000.

Jack Dixon, a local mortgage broker, became curious and did some rooting around in the district's financial records. He asked to see the employment contracts for Bartlett and Munsey, but was initially told to get lost.

When it became apparent to the board members that they were going to be on the losing end of an embarrassing Public Records lawsuit, Dixon was finally shown a copy of each contract.

At a subsequent board meeting, Dixon revealed that Bartlett and Munsey had actually been paying themselves \$190,000 and \$120,000 respectively.

The shocking revelation about salaries sparked a complete examination of the district's financial records, uncovering a \$2.25 million shortfall.

The two administrators have now been convicted on 27 counts of embezzlement, fraud, and forgery. They were each sentenced to six-year prison terms.

At the sentencing, the Judge directed some particularly harsh words toward the members of the school board for their failure to detect the ongoing fraud and their obvious practice of blindly rubberstamping everything which came before them.

### **\$11.2 MILLION AND COUNTING**

Roslyn is a very upscale community located on Long Island, about 20 miles east of Manhattan. The average home is valued at about a million dollars.

The Roslyn School District has 3,300 students attending five schools ... one high school, one middle school, two elementary schools, and one school for pre-kindergarten children.

Roslyn also has a Home Depot store. There are Home Depot stores located in several other nearby communities as well.

That's why a clerk at the Home Depot store in Selden, 35 miles east of Roslyn, thought it odd that a man was using a credit card belonging to the Roslyn School District to buy tens of thousands of dollars worth of building materials ... and having them delivered, not to Roslyn's schools, but to his own home.

The clerk's phone call in October of 2002 led to an initial limited review of the single credit card account by the school district's outside auditor and Frank Tassone, the district's superintendent.

They determined that the card had been used at numerous Home Depot stores around Long Island to buy about \$225,000 worth of building materials. The purchases were made by the son of the school district's Assistant Superintendent for Business.

Superintendent Tassone then told the Roslyn School Board members meeting behind closed doors that the assistant had offered to resign and reimburse \$250,000 for her son's many visits to Home Depot.

The board members agreed to keep the theft and the reimbursement secret for fear that they would all look foolish if the public found out about it.

When no word of the scandal leaked out for several months, another citizen who was more intimately aware of other details of the scandal sent a shocking

letter to the local district attorney.

The writer of that letter has so far not come forward to take credit for blowing the lid off of what the Comptroller of the State of New York is now calling "the largest, most remarkable, most extraordinary theft from a school district in American history".

### **IT'S LUCKY SHE DIDN'T HAVE MORE FRIENDS OR A BIGGER FAMILY**

Pamela Gluckin was Roslyn's Assistant Superintendent for Business. It was her son, a contractor, who was the loyal Home Depot customer.

For her part, Mrs. Gluckin was more into ATM's. She used her school-issued credit card when she visited ATM machines around Long Island, withdrawing an average of nearly \$30,000 per month for several years. The school credit card used by her son was just one of 74 she issued to friends and members of her extended family. When the bills came in, she and the outside auditor created fictitious vendors to hide the unauthorized purchases and ATM withdrawals.

Superintendent Tassone was keeping his card warm at ATM's too, although his cash withdrawals only averaged about \$27,000 per month for more than six years. He also liked traveling to Europe on the Concorde and taking other school employees to Las Vegas, New Orleans, and Thailand for what he called "mandatory mini-retreats to discuss school issues."

All the trips were paid for using the school credit cards. School money was also used to buy vacation homes and vehicles, to pay off personal credit card bills, and to purchase everything imaginable.

The State of New York's real auditors have so far identified thefts totalling \$11,200,000. Several of the school district's big-spenders and its outside auditor are already headed for prison. More will follow.

The auditors also scalded the board members for their failure in all four of a board's main responsibilities ... good faith, due diligence, care, and caution.

During one of his many court appearances, Frank Tassone blamed his part of the scandal on confusion about what his contract allowed him to spend public money on. He later bemoaned the fact that the scandal has "irrevocably damaged, if not destroyed, my career in public education". Very perceptive, Frank.

### **BOARDS, BOARDS, AND MORE BOARDS**

When most Laramie County residents think of Boards, they usually think first of school boards whose members are elected by the public.

But there are many, many other APPOINTED boards conducting a lot of PUBLIC business around here. Some even have their own checking accounts and bookkeeping systems so their transactions are seldom, if ever, reviewed or scrutinized by the City Council members or County Commissioners who establish the board and appoint its members.

There is no evidence that we have a problem locally with dishonest or unscrupulous board members at any level. If scandals have been swept under the rug behind closed doors ... like the Roslyn School Board tried to do ... I haven't heard about them.

Having attended my fair share of board meetings during in the last few years, however, I can tell you that we have a lot of people sitting on various boards around here who are much too eager and willing to approve every proposal and every expenditure which is put before them.

Sometimes I get the feeling that some members of some local boards think that they're auditioning for a bigger, better board appointment down the road. They seem to believe that if they ask any tough questions or insist upon receiving more complete information before casting a vote, they'll get a reputation for not being a good "team player".

Sadly, they may be correct. Perhaps that's why I so seldom hear cogent questions being asked by members of local boards before they vote to spend more and more public money.

No, "Is there any pizza left?" doesn't qualify as a cogent question.

*Jim Mathewson*