

Dear Ms. Wyss,

I'd like to take this opportunity to address my shock and dismay over the barrage of articles the Northwest Herald published last week regarding Nippersink District 2.

On Monday, your paper's front page reported that the Northwest Herald asked the Attorney General's office to investigate whether the district has violated the Illinois Open Meetings Act. You cited Don Craven, general counsel for the Illinois Press Association, as your expert, and he concurred with the Herald that the negotiations meetings should be posted.

On Tuesday, the first five lines of your column very confidently stated that "We're not going to wait for the Attorney General's Office. No, we're going to go out on a limb here and conclude that District 2 is in violation of the Illinois Open Meetings Act. OK, so it's not that long of a limb. And, metaphorically speaking, it's not all that tall of a tree. The point is, we're comfortable with our position."

On Friday, your column references "a story and an editorial regarding teachers contract negotiations in Nippersink District 2, the K-8 district serving Richmond and Spring Grove. The focus was on lack of transparency."

As Paul Harvey would say, "And now, for the rest of the story...."

With regard to Monday's story, it is evident that you ran a damaging front page story without doing proper research. I won't address the light in which this casts your media expert. Perhaps you were enlightened to the true facts when you read the statement placed on the District 2 websites on Tuesday, wherein we cited our expert and a corresponding Illinois Compiled Statute reference. The District made every effort to promptly assure its communities that we were, in fact, following the law.

I'd also like to discuss Diana Sroka's attempts to obtain comments from board members, the business manager and superintendent prior to the printing of last Monday's article. Ms. Sroka badgered Mrs. Bushing even after Mrs. Bushing politely asked her to direct her questions to Dr. Oest, and after staying on the line when put on hold *twice* by Ms. Sroka. Mrs. Bianchini confirmed for Ms. Sroka the fact that we are in negotiations. However, Mrs. Bianchini questioned whether Ms. Sroka hung up on *her*, although Ms. Sroka called back and claimed that there had been a "power failure" at your facility. Ms. Sroka called Dr. Hain and threatened a one-sided news story if someone didn't call her. When there was no answer on my home phone, Ms. Sroka called *my husband's office* and asked for *my husband*. When repeatedly questioned by his secretary as to the reason for the phone call, Ms. Sroka finally responded that she was from the Northwest Herald and that she "needed to talk to his wife regarding school board matters." Did she honestly think this phone call would intimidate me into calling her, or that my husband would

make me call her? Ms. Wyss, please ask yourself if you think these interview techniques are conducive to eliciting responses to questions or return phone calls.

With regard to Tuesday's editorial, you flat out accused District 2 of not following the law, and proceeded to disparage District 2 based on your false assumption. Well, the limb of your metaphorical tree has come crashing to the ground, and you were on it. The wound you have suffered in that fall, as far as many readers are concerned, may very well be a lack of credibility.

With regard to Friday's editorial, it was nothing more than an elaborate cover-up of the fact that you and Diana Sroka were wrong. The story and editorial pieces you reference had far less to do with "lack of transparency" than they did belittling District 2 for what YOU incorrectly determined was a violation of the law. Friday's editorial did nothing more than blame District 2 for following the exact laws and procedures followed by other districts, state-wide.

I would respectfully request that if you have a problem with the Open Meetings Act or the Illinois Educational Labor Relations Act, and the transparency that may or may not exist between public bodies and taxpayers as a result of those laws, you should address the public bodies that are in a position to change those laws. And, if you truly represent the public interest, extend your opinion and complaints to every school district in Illinois, not just District 2. District 2 *follows the law*. We hold regular public meetings in accordance with the law, post meetings in accordance with the law, have *two* opportunities for public comment in the course of our meetings, by our own choice, and post our teachers' contract on our website. The contract expires on June 30th, and it states that we begin negotiating by April 15th. Therefore, we have begun negotiating. It is one of the many functions we were elected to perform, so we are doing it. We have upheld the law and we are performing our duty as elected officials. There is the District 2 story. Stick to the facts.

If our community members/taxpayers have questions for the Board, then we genuinely encourage them to attend our meetings so that we can answer honestly and directly. The Board of Education has every hope that our constituents will understand that if a Board member does not respond to the Northwest Herald, it is not because the Board or District is being secretive or non-transparent, it is because we rather deliver the facts face to face in a lawful meeting versus using the Northwest Herald as a self appointed "middle man". We have no problem with transparency; we have no problem with communication. But, as evidenced this week, our constituents will get a far more accurate story if they communicate directly with District 2 and/or visit our website.

Of course, I fear that District 2, its administrators and/or Board may be at risk of another Northwest Herald article or editorial as a result of this letter. We all realize and accept that media contact and coverage are expectations that come with our jobs or elected position. However, our expectations of the local media, as provided by the Northwest Herald, are much higher than we have recently witnessed. It is of utmost importance to the Board of Education and administration of District 2 that *any* information communicated regarding District 2 is accurate. As recent history would suggest, the most accurate information regarding District 2 should be obtained directly from District 2, and not third party sources. For this reason, this letter has been posted on District 2 websites. I would encourage anyone with questions or concerns to contact District 2 via telephone or by visiting our website (815- 678-4242 or www.nippersinkdistrict2.org), or by attending a meeting. Any breaking news will be posted promptly.

Ms. Wyss, thank you for your consideration of this matter.

Sincerely,

Patricia L. Anderson
President, Nippersink District 2 Board of Education

cc : Diana Sroka, Northwest Herald via e-mail
cc : Chris Krug, Northwest Herald via e-mail