

**Press Conference February 5, 2009**

I am standing before you today as an individual, and as a leader in the Broken Arrow community, to decry the latest attempts to smear the reputation of innocent citizens in this community. I am asking other community leaders to join me in calling for a return to civility in the public arena. In the last six months, one after another, citizens of this community - including businessmen, physicians, community leaders, and elected officials, have been viciously attacked in the media, and by word of mouth. Without a shred of proof of any wrongdoing by any of these individuals, these citizens have had their names and their character publicly dragged through the mud.

This indiscriminate mud-slinging is poisoning the atmosphere of the entire city of Broken Arrow. Long-time school administrators and employees are contemplating leaving our district. Businesses are beginning to second-guess decisions to locate in our community. Home-buyers are beginning to look elsewhere for a community that does not appear to be in such turmoil.

It is time for the leaders of this community to say "enough is enough". Today I am publicly demanding a stop to this craziness. I am issuing a call to "Stop the rumors" and "Stop the allegations". It is time to demand some accountability and responsibility from our citizenry. It is time for the good and decent people, who are the heart and soul of Broken Arrow, to demand responsibility and accountability from those other citizens in this community who seem to delight in stirring up controversy by repeating, and/or acting upon, unsubstantiated rumors and unproven allegations. It is also time for the media, and specifically the Broken Arrow Ledger, to commit to objectivity, rather than sensationalism, in their reporting.

Last week's attack on our community came from someone outside our community, and is simply outrageous. Last Friday, a member of the Oklahoma House of Representatives, Mr. Mike Reynolds, issued a press release accusing hundreds of past and present employees of Broken Arrow Public Schools of accepting so-called "illegal compensation". In his statement, Rep. Reynolds also accused current and former school board members, as well as current and former superintendents, of recommending and approving these supposedly illegal payments. Unfortunately, Mr. Reynolds did not verify the accuracy of his information before issuing his press release. The truth is, no one authorized or received any payments that have been found to be illegal by either the Attorney General or any court. Every dollar paid to these innocent employees whose character Mr. Reynolds so publicly denigrated was authorized by a series of votes by several Broken Arrow school boards and a series of superintendents, including the superintendent terminated by the school board last year. These dedicated employees do not deserve to be vilified in the press or accused of accepting illegal dollars when they simply were paid what past boards voted to pay them, and what past superintendents recommended they be paid.

**It is absolutely unacceptable for a member of the Oklahoma House of Representatives to publicly accuse innocent people, like the current and former employees, administrators, and school board members of Broken Arrow Public Schools, of breaking the law without even bothering to verify whether any laws had been broken!**

**Many people were surprised when this latest set of unfounded allegations came from a legislator outside our community. The real question that needs to be asked is, "What and/or who motivated Rep. Reynolds to make the statements he did at this particular time?" I believe the purpose of these very public allegations was clear. The purpose was clearly to affect both the upcoming school board election and the superintendent selection process - by use of falsehoods and half truths.**

**It does not matter who each citizen supports in next week's board election; every citizen should decry this type of campaigning, and insist that candidates - and their supporters - adhere to ethical behavior and not engage in dirty tricks. A blatant attempt, such as this, to denigrate any potential candidate in the superintendent search currently underway in Broken Arrow is not only unfair, but mean-spirited. Every citizen should decry these types of smear tactics. Such tactics are simply not acceptable in a community such as Broken Arrow, which prides itself on integrity.**

**Because, in my opinion, Mr. Reynolds so egregiously overstepped the limits of his office and because his unproven allegations have caused more turmoil in our community, I have sent a letter by certified mail and via email to Mr. Reynolds demanding a retraction of his statements and an apology to our community. I have also sent another letter to the Speaker of the House, Rep. Chris Bengel, by certified mail and via email, asking for a formal inquiry by the House of Representatives into Mr. Reynolds' actions of last week. I certainly hope the Speaker of the House will be able to persuade Mr. Reynolds to investigate the facts more thoroughly before making any more public and false accusations. In addition, I have sent copies of both emails to members of the Oklahoma House of Representatives and to members of the Oklahoma Senate who represent the Broken Arrow area, in hopes that they may be able to persuade Mr. Reynolds to refrain from making any more uninformed public accusations about the Broken Arrow citizens they represent. At the conclusion of my remarks, I will be happy to give out copies of both letters, as well as this statement, to anyone who would like a copy.**

**I am tired of the wild and unproven accusations of corruption that in the last six months have been springing up against the citizens of this community. Almost daily the public is hearing a new allegation of scandal or corruption in our community - and almost every allegation is somehow associated with Broken**

**Arrow Public Schools. These attacks have obviously come from someone with an agenda to hurt Broken Arrow Public Schools - and specific persons within the Broken Arrow community. It is time for the public to hear what I believe to be the motivation for these attacks on our community. The public needs to know there is someone who six months ago stated his intent to create a public relations nightmare for the Broken Arrow Public Schools – unless the school board did what he wanted done in relation to his own employment.**

**In July of 2008, in three separate conversations with me, Dr. Jim Sisney repeatedly threatened to create a public relations nightmare for the school district, as well as for me personally, if I did not do what he asked me to do. Even though Dr. Sisney had already told me weeks earlier that the school district had paid Air Assurance legally, he threatened to “go public” with “the Air Assurance story” if I did not make sure the school board did as he wished. He told me he viewed me as the key person who could “get it done” and ordered me to “poll the board and get back to him with the answer”.**

**Significantly, in July, Dr. Sisney specifically threatened to sue the entire school board if I did not make sure the school board did what Dr. Sisney wanted done. He told me I had “left him no choice but to spend his time building a case to defend himself”. At the time, these threats did not make sense to me for two reasons – the first being that I could not understand how publicly attacking Air Assurance had anything to do with “defending” Dr. Sisney; in fact, I was not even aware Dr. Sisney needed “defending”. I had also already been told Air Assurance had done nothing wrong, and that all the school district had were some internal process problems Dr. Sisney was researching and correcting. In July, I pointed out to Dr. Sisney the second reason that his threats made no sense – he had presented to the board every financial recommendation we had voted on; I did not understand how he could incriminate the board without incriminating himself.**

**For the reasons just stated, I did not really expect Dr. Sisney to act on his threats. However, it seems very clear to me that the accusations and personal attacks that have been poisoning this community for the last six months are simply the fulfillment of Dr. Sisney’s threats to me of last July. To my knowledge, there is no “widespread corruption” within Broken Arrow Public Schools.**

**While I cannot discuss personnel matters without a signed release from an employee, I can assure you my vote regarding Dr. Sisney’s termination had nothing to do with unwillingness on my part to deal with any so-called “corruption” Dr. Sisney had uncovered. In fact, Dr. Sisney never revealed to me any evidence of any alleged corruption. It is time for there to be complete transparency in this debate. I believe unless and until the citizens of this community have the opportunity to see all the facts for themselves, the attacks on our community will continue. Therefore, I am calling on the Broken Arrow Ledger and other media to join me in asking Dr. Sisney to sign a release of all his**

personnel records, so the public can see the same information I had before me when I voted to terminate his employment.

I ask all of our leaders join with me to restore civility to our public discourse. Unless and until civility is restored to public discourse in this city, few, if any, competent public administrators will want to work in any position in the Broken Arrow School District, and I fear that good employees we currently have will be driven off. The rumors, lies, innuendoes and constant berating of school employees and school leaders must stop. This is no longer just a "school" issue; this has become a community issue. Everyone who reads or listens to the news has repeatedly heard about the supposed corruption running rampant throughout the schools and the businesses in our community. The time has come to demand that the hateful, mean, and destructive atmosphere currently prevailing in Broken Arrow be promptly changed to an atmosphere of genuine "community" where well-meaning people work together to solve our many issues.

*Mayanne Flipppo*