

# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

July 14, 2013

The trend to secrecy

Former Hesperia council member Diana Carloni ("VVC's free speech denials," Letters, July 11) exposed the practice of the Victor Valley College Board of Trustees using arcane rules to limit public input. Unfortunately this is a symptom of a disturbing trend among public agencies in our area.

In the case Ms. Carloni cites, a member of the public wanted to address the VVC board but had not filled out a speaker card "on time." For some reason the VVC board has a rule requiring that a member of the public who wishes to speak must fill out a request to speak card before the meeting even begins.

Obviously the board's intent is to use a technicality to stifle public comment. If the board really cared about the public's input, it could easily have let the person speak and then fill out the card later. We did that all the time when I served on the Apple Valley Town Council. Evidently the VVC board really didn't want to hear anybody's opinion. The board had a closed session an hour before the meeting started and bizarrely designated the closed session time as the start time, making it unlikely that anyone would fill out a speaker card on time. This demonstrates that for the VVC board, process trumped access. That isn't how a democratic institution should work.

As another example, the Daily Press recently reported that the Victor Valley High School Board of Trustees refused to allow full public comment during its discussion whether to open Adelanto High School. The Daily Press reported that there were several members of the public wanting to address the board, but they were denied because the allotted time for public participation on the item had expired. Why would a public board limit the total allotted time for discussion on a topic, especially on an issue of such community-wide importance as the opening of a new high school? One must conclude that the board doesn't really want to listen to the public it serves.

Another example is the Apple Valley Town Council. The council limits public comments to three minutes per person. When I served on the council 1996 to 2006 the limit was five minutes per person, and there were no limits as to the total public time on a topic. To be sure, there were times when the comments went on so long that they produced involuntary eye rolling in some attendees, but that is a small price to pay for access to our democracy.

Public access and input into the decisions of our local councils, boards, and commissions is critical to the legitimacy of the decisions they make. Perhaps more importantly, the public has a constitutional right to petition government for the redress of grievances. Look it up. Start with the First Amendment. Board members, council members, and commissioners: If you don't want to listen to the people you have been elected or appointed to serve, then you should find another outlet for your time.

Mark Shoup

Apple Valley

Recently there has been much discussion about balancing Victor Valley College's budget in order to meet the accreditation standards. Although it is true the college is deficit spending, they should not balance the budget on the backs of faculty, especially part-time faculty.

Since I was elected to the VVC board in 2010, I have been the vocal minority in trying to get parity for the part-time faculty, who should be paid equal wages for equal work, but that is not the case. In late 2001, a study was ordered by the state legislature, comparing the workload and pay of adjunct faculty to that of full-time faculty. The study showed that part-timers were not being paid for their workload outside the classroom, commensurate with full-time faculty.

Nothing has changed at VVC since that report; part-time faculty members are still not being paid on par with full-time faculty. Although there is a need to reduce expenditures at VVC, reducing the salaries and benefits of the part-time faculty are not an equitable solution.

Michael Krause

Victorville