

# VVC needs some sunshine

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**DIANA CARLONI HOLLY NOEL**

Failure of the Victor Valley College Board of Trustees to post the video recording of a publicly noticed and conducted May 31, 2013 Special Meeting of the Board, contrary to the board's previously adopted policy to do so, was a red flag signaling a lack of transparency and a deficient public records policy at the college district. That flag was raised again at the most recent trustees meeting June 11.

Item 11.1 of the June Board agenda, was entitled "Public Hearing for the District and CSEA for Successor Contract." A public hearing was convened and the board president twice called for the public to comment on the contract items. Exasperated, a member of the public told the board that the contract under consideration could not be found for review. How does a public entity hold a public hearing, seeking public input on contract provisions, or any other subject for that matter, and hide the very information upon which the public is asked to comment?

The State of California declares that "access to information concerning the conduct of the people's business is a fundamental and necessary right of every person in this state" (Cal. Govt. Code 6250). These laws are grouped in a section entitled, the "California Public Records Act." The Act specifically identifies school districts as entities who must comply. Only specific exemptions, defined by the California Legislature, are exempt from disclosure.

If a member of the public is denied access to records, a reason, supported by one of those exemptions, should be given immediately.

The law further provides that, "A state or local agency may not allow another party to control the disclosure of information that is otherwise subject to disclosure pursuant to this chapter." Hence, one board member's decision (after seeking counsel) not to post the video which is the business of the people is contrary to the law. In the case of VVC, not only is the public deprived of access to the video stream of this as well as other meetings, but the public is also deprived of its fundamental right to know the business of the board, as published at taxpayer expense in the agenda packet provided to board members.

It is time for the citizens of the Victor Valley to demand transparency from VVC. We say: When a meeting notice is posted, the complete agenda packet for that meeting should be immediately available for review. Most local public entities post their entire agenda packet, online in PDF format, on their websites. VVC does not. Most local entities have copies available in their main lobby with an available receptionist or at the local library where the public can access it immediately. VVC does not. To access the board packet at VVC, you have to drive to the campus, search for a metered space (if it exists or otherwise risk a parking citation), ring the doorbell on the president's office (it is locked and not open to the public) and wait for someone to answer.

This outrageous deficiency in compliance with California law as it pertains to the business of VVC must be corrected. Immediate steps in the right direction are simple:

- Immediately post all videos recorded at regular, special, workshop and/or emergency meetings of the board.
- Post complete agenda packets, or attach readily apparent "links" to the published agenda online that easily direct the reader to the backup material of each agenda item.
- Prepare complete descriptions of agenda items, not vague referrals, i.e., "Contract."
- Place hard copies of the board agenda in local libraries and at the Student Activities Center on campus for easy access.

These few steps ensure transparency and, as the law requires, makes the business of the college available to the people. With this in mind, VVC board members should post the Video Retreat Workshop of May 31, 2013, the Budget Workshop of June 11, 2013 and all future agenda packets.

Diana J. Carloni and Holly Noel live in the Victor Valley.