

Dear Pensacola,

Having been asked to serve on the Escambia County School Board by the Superintendent himself, and then being elected in 2006 I made a promise to the people of Pensacola that I would try and make those hard decisions and sometime unpopular stands for what is in Pensacola's best interest. The way the school board decisions operate is that we, as decision makers, can have no contact with each other regarding anything having to do with Escambia County Schools. When the Pensacola News Journal created an anonymous forum, encouraging the use of pseudonyms, as to let people take down their guards and speak in a frank manner regarding political ideas and thoughts, I jumped at the opportunity. What a wonderful idea to let people FREELY express themselves, and to make thought provoking remarks, without worrying about retribution. To this day, the Pensacola News Journal's guidelines for people sharing their ideas has never said IF you are a Public leader in the community, THEN please use your REAL name. One week ago I was asked to sit down with Sara Raab under the disguise and pretense of wanting to know more about my position regarding teacher salaries, etc. I prepared heavily for this meeting, excited to be able to give my ideas a legitimate voice. Ten minutes into the meeting I was sidelined by questioning my identity on a blog that was guilty of giving Pensacolans a different perspective on unions, etc. Never in a million years did I think Sara Raab and her editors of the Pensacola News Journal would risk their journalistic integrity and "create" a story and put my picture and personal information on the front page and head story of the day last Thursday. I am guilty of creating a buzz politically regarding some thought provoking ideas, that go against the grain of the "powers that be". I was advised to stay quiet and not seek legal action regarding my words being taken out of context, by my attorneys. I was advised that the story made the News Journal look terrible, and it was evident to any and all that my views had ruffled people's feathers. Then I remained quiet for the second story written, with the editor's explanation of why freedom of speech should not include anyone serving in any kind of leadership role. Folks, with today's story, and with a heavy heart I feel compelled to fight for my right to freedom of speech. I was cleared by legal at the school board level. Let me categorically say that I never divulged any "in-house" secrets or committed ANY crime. So why am I targeted for identity "ouster" out of all the "bloggers" that use the PNJ forum? The context in which the forum was originally intended was to provide anonymity for ALL that chose to participate if they so desired. Three news stories trying to go after my character-I am guilty of one thing: I am not and have never pretended to be a politician. I have always voted for what I passionately believe in and for what I have felt to be in the Escambia School District's best interest. If I don't speak up, I won't be able to teach my own children and the rest of the children of Pensacola, what the underlining **REAL life lesson** is here today. Freedom of speech, when not in congruence with the group think, can have HUGE consequences. I feel I have been misquoted by Sara Raab, and am now under attack **personally** for speaking out for things I believe in. I can look at my kids in the eye tonight and say their daddy is guilty of speaking out for what he believes. I wasn't under the context of "hiding" under identity, but rather was following the rules and keeping in the spirit in which this public forum was established in the first place. Let's get that straight. If I was trying to hide anything why would I use my personal computer and e-mail address? Someone didn't like what I was saying and so decided to "create" a story and "out" my identity and run a smear campaign personally

attacking my character and leaving my family vulnerable with the News Journal printing my personal information. This is "yellow journalism" and shows a lack of journalistic integrity on the part of the Pensacola News Journal.

In regards to Ronnie Arnold acting as a PR spokesman, and commenting on the school board's behalf, and then stating that he "tried to stop Jeff Bergosh", --this is totally false. Ronnie Arnold also stated that he was told by myself that I was the source of this other identity. This is also a complete fabrication. Let me state that Ronnie is NOT employed by the school board to be my spokesman, and he was never asked to speak on my behalf, as he did in front of the news cameras on Friday evening. Listen, I want to get past this and continue doing my job I was elected to do, but after 1 news story and 3 newsprints discrediting my character, I had to set the record straight.

Jim Paul and I have spoken today regarding the events that have transpired, and are in agreement, to continue to successfully do our jobs that the people, not the News Journal, elected us to do. Jim Paul and I have enjoyed working together, and while sometimes disagree on things, are ultimately working for the same cause and under the same principals.

As I tried after Thursday's big headline story, I will attempt to do again. It all stops here, as far as I am concerned. I will continue with the same work ethic and integrity I have always used, and will continue to act professionally. I am on the Escambia School District's side, and will continue to put out ideas and thoughts and work hard with the rest of the school board members to make Escambia schools the absolute BEST they can be.

Thanks for your time and the opportunity to give you the "other side of the story". I will not be commenting on any of this again, unless in a legal capacity. To comment further, would give credence to something I believe was never news worthy in the first place.