

Comments for Board Meeting

I am very excited and pleased to announce that this Thursday marks Peralta's 5th annual District-wide celebration of Earth Day. Faculty members throughout the district will be dedicating their classroom teaching to themes of environmental sustainability.

In addition to this district-wide environmental teach-in, at Laney College from 11:30 to 2, we will have a Sustainable Peralta Culinary Cook-Off featuring our culinary arts chefs in training (where YOU will be one of the judges), live music, a mini farmers market, seed-planting, community partners with information tables, a community garden work party and estuary clean-up day. Please come on down!

On a separate matter, I have a formal statement to read. I thank my board colleagues in advance for their support and forbearance during these slightly extended comments.

In recent days, the Bay Area News Group (BANG) has published an article and editorial decrying the supposed abuse by part-time elected officials in receiving health benefits as part of their compensation for their public service. Because my name has been published in relationship to this alleged abuse, I feel compelled to make a public statement about this matter.

First off, the Bay Area News Group's story and editorial should be seen as a part of an overall attack on the public sector in general and public employees specifically. The **real** story here is the extraordinary increase in health care inflation. In 1990, the per capita cost of health care in the United States was about \$2800. Current average costs are closer to \$9000. Without this health care inflation, BANG's so-called story would be a non-story.

The **real** story is the billions of dollars being siphoned away from regular working people into the coffers of the big health insurance corporations, pharmaceutical companies and hospital conglomerates. The public interest would be far better served if newspapers like BANG spent more of its resources investigating this scandalous transfer of wealth.

Second, I want to set the record straight regarding my own insurance benefits. BANG alleged that I was "double dipping" by receiving health care benefits at Peralta while also drawing benefits through my employment as a full-time faculty member and department chair in another community college District. As I explained to the BANG reporter who interviewed me and as they knew before they went to print, the essence of their story was false. So, it is unfortunate that they chose to twist the facts and completely distort my actual statement to them, to fit their preconceived story line.

As I explained to the BANG reporter who interviewed me, Peralta is on a different insurance benefits calendar than my employer. At Peralta, one must elect benefits coverage in October for a benefits calendar that begins in January. Where I am employed, however, the benefits election period is in April for a benefits calendar that begins in July. So, in electing one coverage or another, it was impossible to avoid an overlap of coverage.

But it is also important to note that the PPO health benefit program at Peralta does not have a fixed cost, but instead, only costs the District money when the covered person actually utilizes a health benefit.

In the first half of 2010 I received Kaiser health benefits through my employer which I waived starting in July. As I explained to the BANG reporter, during this period of time, I did not draw any significant Peralta health benefits. Starting in July of 2011, my benefits with my employer ended. And, unfortunately, later in that year, my family experienced a health crisis which incurred a cost to Peralta. It was these costs that occurred when I was not in fact double covered that BANG chose to publicize.

While the public has a right to information regarding elected officials' conduct, elected officials also have a right to some privacy. It is the job of an ethical reporter to make this distinction.

So, what is also unfortunate about the BANG report, is that they chose to publicize the dollar amount of the cost incurred to Peralta as a result of my family's health crisis and they used this dollar amount to try to incite public outrage over this supposed abuse of an insurance benefit.

The way that medical insurance is supposed to work is as a system of social solidarity. Everyone pays in and most of the time, most people don't use many benefits. However, when someone becomes ill, these shared contributions support this person.

What BANG's report did, however, to cherry-pick data from a handful of elected officials who had extraordinary health care expenditures last year, expenditures that represented health crises, not some abusive personal aggrandizement at the public expense. These expenses are not the norm but the exceptional cases of family or personal crisis.

BANG knew it was doing this but chose to exploit these family tragedies to distort the truth in its relentless attack on public institutions and elected officials, and on Peralta in particular-- regardless of the personal costs to these public servants or public institutions and regardless of the truth.

I am proud of my public service to Peralta and to the community. I am proud of my 20 years as a community college teacher. I'm proud of my decades of fighting for social justice and community empowerment. I make no apology for receiving health care benefits or a professional wage for professional work. I trust that my

community and the voters in my District will reaffirm their faith in my work and in my integrity.