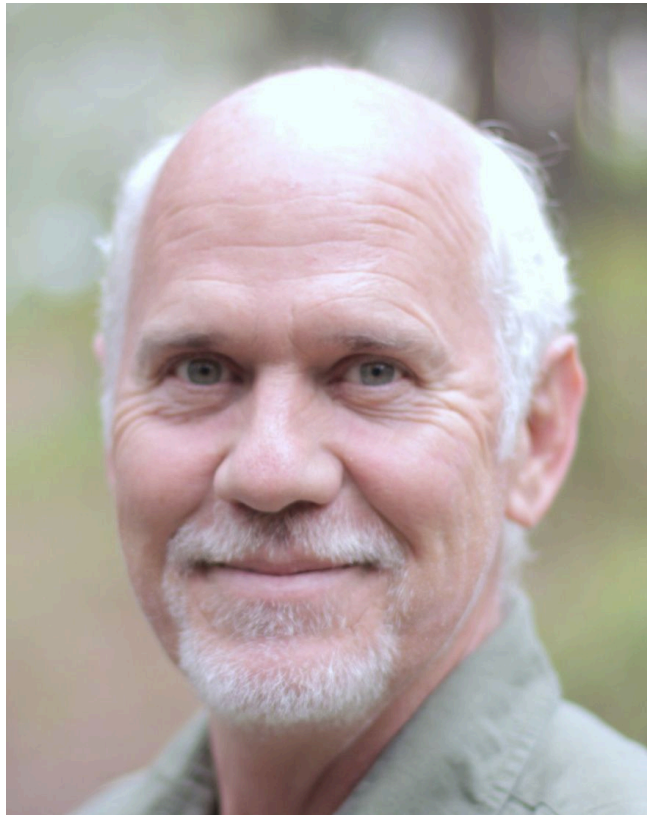

View from the Left: Setting the Record Straight

February 14, 2023



Providing verified accurate information is something that I strive for each week. If I am going to express an opinion on a subject, I want to also provide the facts to back it up.

I made a mistake a couple weeks ago when I criticized Roger Gitlin's reaction to an incident at the January 10 meeting of the Del Norte County Board of Supervisors. I relied only on the information that was provided in Gitlin's commentary.

I stated in my column that an unruly member of the public was "ejected" from the meeting. This was an inaccurate statement that I based on my interpretation of Gitlin's reporting.

After submitting my column, I watched the recording of the meeting and got a more complete picture of what happened. Gitlin reported that the chair had the sheriff deputies clear the chambers and the speaker was escorted from the dais. This is true but fails to tell the full story.

What Gitlin neglected to mention is that after the cool down period, the same speaker was allowed to continue to comment on other agenda items. But this detail does not support Gitlin's grievance about a

citizen's rights being abridged.

One thing I realized from this experience is that I must watch the recording of a meeting to be better informed before commenting. I also know that attending a meeting in person is far more illuminating. Rather than only seeing what the camera shows you, you can see the reaction and even hear the side commentary from all those in attendance.

One way that I can judge a good reporter is when they write a story about a meeting that I attended. Because I was there, I can more easily evaluate the capacity of a reporter to write truthful, objective stories.

Since Gitlin has been writing stories as a reporter for the Triplicate, I have been able to use this litmus test more than once.

On January 27, the Triplicate published a story written by Roger Gitlin about a Harbor District meeting that I also attended. Gitlin reported that the Commissioners approved an application for a \$750,000 grant "for boat ramp repair resulting from storm damage at Whaler Island." This is incorrect. Though the words "ramp repair" are in the name of the grant program, this is not what the grant will be used for.

The agenda for the January 17 Harbor Commission meeting clearly stated the grant was to "address damage to the Whaler Island Groin." What they were referring to is the rock "jetty" that sticks out to the east of Whalers Island. The high waves and storm surge had punched a big gap in the groin, allowing waves to flow though unimpeded.

When it is intact, this groin reduces the impacts of waves to the adjacent parking lot and the boat ramp in the recreational boat basin. What I heard at the meeting was concern that if this groin was not rebuilt, the next storm could wash over the parking lot and might damage the boat ramp. This may have been the cause for Gitlin's confusion.

What could have been reported from this meeting is that almost two weeks after this January 5th storm, the Board of Supervisors had not yet declared a state of emergency for our county. This would have made it much easier to find funding to repair this storm damage. At that time every other county on the California coast had declared an emergency, but not our county. This emergency was eventually declared by the County Director of Emergency Services on January 18 and ratified by the Supervisors on January 24.

I can't blame a reporter for not writing about everything that happens at a meeting, but if they choose a topic, it is incumbent on them to get the details right. When a reporter starts providing incorrect information about a meeting I was at, it makes me doubt the reliability of information presented in other stories.

News sources must be anchored by impartiality and credibility to be of any practical use for our community. If Gitlin continues to write news for the Triplicate, I hope he will try harder to prevent his personal biases from infecting the stories that he writes and will be more diligent to ensure the specific story details are correct.

In his weekly column, I accept that he can say any outrageous thing he wants. His column is provided as an opinion, not as truth. However, if a story is presented as news, we should expect precise, honest reporting.

It seems the best I can do is provide balance and an occasional correction of Gitlin's reporting to set the record straight. This might keep me busy. In the last Triplicate, Gitlin had four "news" stories and I have issues with three. I am not sure I can keep up with only one column per week.

If readers want to correct misinformation in a news story, send a short "letter to the editor." It might get published.

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