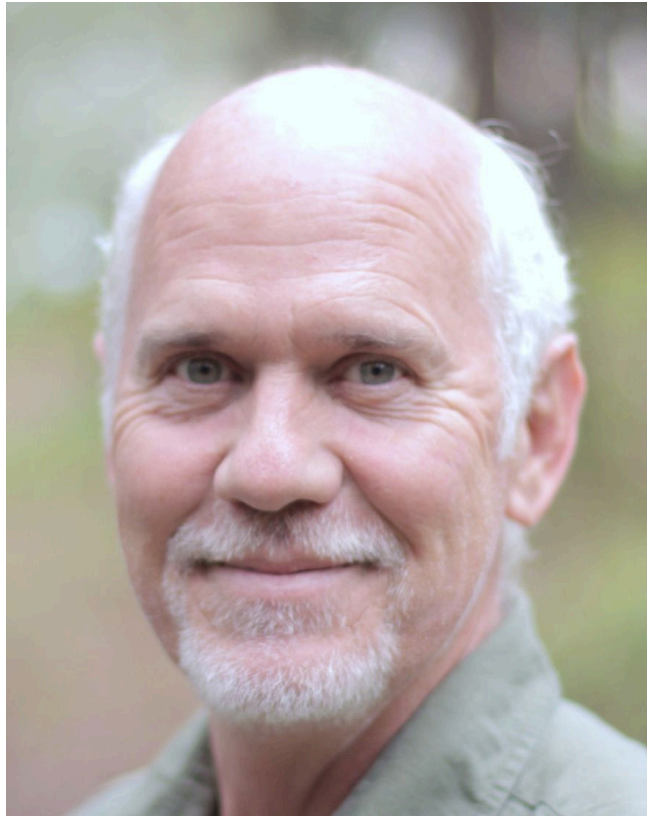


Guest Column: Gitlin's slander and libel must stop now!

October 18, 2022



I have written 28 weekly columns adhering to a self-imposed rule that I would not respond directly to anything that Roger Gitlin says in his column. I vowed that I would never say his name or give him the attention that he craves. Today I will override this rule.

I am compelled to respond to the scurrilous accusation that Gitlin made in his last column. I have watched for months as Gitlin assails various elected officials and impugns their integrity with his venomous attacks. Every week he concocts a witch's brew of fabrications, conjecture, and innuendo to make his point.

No doubt Gitlin feels impervious to legal challenges because he believes that he has an unbridled right to free speech and that public figures are fair game for criticism. Indeed, it is very difficult for an elected official or other public figure to sue for defamation, slander, or libel.

The exception is when a person makes a defamatory statement that they know is a lie. Under this circumstance, the perpetrator is vulnerable to being sued for defamation, libel or slander. Gitlin has crossed

this line. His slanderous and libelous statements about me must stop now.

Gitlin's claim that I was fired for malfeasance is provably untrue. He knows this is false because he was on the board when he voted to approve my negotiated separation agreement with the Del Norte Solid Waste Management Authority.

This agreement stated, "the parties wish to end this employment relationship amicably and with due respect" and that I would be "entitled to all the benefits and compensation due retired county employees." Not only did Gitlin vote to approve this agreement, but he also made the motion to provide three months of severance pay.

Why would he vote to approve this generous retirement package if he thought that I was responsible for "missing money"? The answer is that there was no evidence of any wrongdoing by me. In the end, this concern was largely attributed to flawed accounting procedures.

If you read my column, you may also read Gitlin's counter column. I will leave it to you to decide who is more credible and reliable in sticking to the facts.

It is true that at that time, some members of the Solid Waste Authority Board wanted me to go away, but not for issues related to bookkeeping.

Near the end of my 20-year term as director, the Solid Waste Authority Board was infiltrated by members of the local Tea Party led by Gitlin. The antigovernment ideology of these new board members conflicted with everything that we had built. I resisted and they were annoyed by this.

Most concerning was their goal to sell our publicly owned transfer station to a private garbage company. I opposed this idea because we would relinquish local control of rate setting and accounting of the fees collected. We would give up all the revenue yet retain all the responsibility to comply with state mandates.

Eventually Gitlin was exposed for having secret meetings with the local garbage company. The 2014/2015 Grand Jury concluded that "meeting with a contracted vendor outside of the board's purview and discussing a possible sale of the Authority Board's property shows a lack of transparency, a lack of respect for the process and rules of order, and a conflict of interest."

They recommended that Gitlin be removed from the board for "misconduct and multiple violations of the Code of Ethics."

Frankly it is a miracle that I survived in this job for 20 years. I worked as an at will employee, who could be fired without cause at any time with the vote of three board members. I kept my job because I was successful and worked hard for the benefit of our community.

I am proud of what I accomplished as director of the Solid Waste Authority. When I started in 1993, the county landfill was out of compliance with state and federal laws. There were fines and orders to clean it up and close it down. It took a few years, but I managed this complex multimillion dollar construction project and brought it to completion.

Before we could close the landfill, we had to find a location for a new transfer station. I directed the effort to site, design, permit and construct this essential public facility and established a sustainable agency to operate it. Today, the transfer station continues to provide quality service at a fair price and the Solid Waste Authority is financially self-sufficient.

After retirement, I worked as a project management consultant in the private sector developing solar energy projects and funding watershed conservation projects.

I am running for Harbor Commissioner because my project management experience will benefit the Harbor District as it embarks on a series of complicated and expensive improvements to the fishing infrastructure.

I am not going to disparage any of the other candidates for Harbor Commission. I respect that they are willing to step up to help the Harbor. This is a non-partisan office and voters should pick who they think is most experienced and best qualified to lead the Harbor District into the future.

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