

# Rod *"Trust, but verify"*



June 19, 2013

Jared Kink  
Everett Education Association / United Teachers of Everett

Mr. Kink:

Thank you for your invitation to interview for the EEA's consideration of endorsing my candidacy for Everett Public Schools Director Position #1.

I'm afraid I must decline your invitation. Quite frankly, I don't think your union should issue an endorsement of any school board candidate, and I don't think any board candidate should accept one. The school district and its employees' unions are natural adversaries, and although they may be more or less friendly with each other over the course of time, at the end of the day they still represent conflicting interests. You represent the teachers of the district; school directors represent (theoretically) the taxpayer-citizens who elect them; I don't see how a school board candidate's acceptance of a union endorsement could be anything but a conflict of interest.

That doesn't mean we have to be hostile, and I'm willing to come in and talk with you, if you wish. That's up to you.

As for your questionnaire, most of the questions may be superficially relevant to education but have little to do with the actual role of a school director, let alone the board's functional relationship with the teachers' union, so I'm not interested in filling it out. But there is one question on your form that I think is *very* relevant, and I'll answer it here. I'm afraid my answer is not so simple as yes/no, and requires more space than was provided on your form, so I beg your patience here.

#### **4. Do you support the collective bargaining process between employees and the District?**

That's a hard question to answer, since I, like the rest of the general public, am not allowed to know much about the "collective bargaining process between employees and the District." I do know that there is a series of Closed Sessions, which are regarded as the holiest of holies in terms of the secrecy of their content. They typically culminate in a last-minute contract between the Union and the District, at which point the general public is so relieved that school will be starting *at all* that we just suck it up and swallow the fact that a major change to district families' schedules has been imposed on us without any input from us whatsoever. But other than that, we on the outside don't know if you're really

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conducting hard-nosed negotiations

night and day, or if you're just drinking beers and playing cards while the clock ticks down to the Wednesday following Labor Day. We don't *get* to know.

So, no, I can't say I support that aspect of the collective bargaining process between employees and the District.

I would be much more supportive of the collective bargaining process, regardless of the outcomes of individual sessions, if it were to take place like it does with our neighbor to the south, Oregon. In Oregon, public-sector collective bargaining takes place in open session, with closed sessions being the exception. In fact, [the Oregon School Boards Association declares that "bargaining in public is good policy,"](#) and issues [specific guidance for those agencies who choose to bargain in closed session](#). That's a far cry from how it happens here in Washington, where absolute secrecy is the default setting. As a taxpayer, I prefer to know how my government representatives arrive at their decisions on how to spend the monies I've had to pay.

Another aspect of the collective bargaining process between the union employees and the District that I can't say I support concerns the fact that current board president Jeffery Russell is married to a teacher at Evergreen Middle School. Although Pastor Russell very visibly recuses himself from the public discussion and vote on collective bargaining agreements between the Union and the District, he does *not* recuse himself from the strategy sessions prior to the actual negotiations. He is not required by law to do so, I'll admit, but, still, I can't think of a greater conflict of interest than having him attend these sessions, especially as board president. He can influence the direction of the District's bargaining strategy in ways that benefit his wife (and by extension, himself), while also being privy to information that is supposed to be shielded at all costs from the eyes of the Union. We just have to take his word for it that he's keeping everything he hears in those strategy sessions held completely confidential from his own wife.

Or, on the other hand, when you endorsed Jeff Russell in 2009 you knew you were buying yourselves one heck of a mole.

Yet another item on the menu is the "collective bargaining process" that occurs between the District's superintendent and the Union president. I don't know what gets talked about at the monthly lunches at swanky restaurants between the two of them, but I do know that the District picks up the bill for it.

I was stunned – er, slackjawed, speechless, etc. (you get it) when I received a copy of the receipt from this rendezvous between Dr. Cohn and Kim Mead:

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Everett School Board

Vanderwilt, Debbie

Subject: Kim Mead
Location: Lombardi's
Start: Mon 9/24/2012 11:30 AM
End: Mon 9/24/2012 1:00 PM
Show Time As: Out of Office
Recurrence: (none)
Organizer: Cohn, Gary

Monthly Update Meeting

9/17: Reservation for 2 under Cohn (spoke with Mia)

RECEIVED
OCT -9 2012
ACCOUNTING DEPT.

LOMBARDI'S CUCINA OF EVERETT

Date: 9/24/2012 Time: 12:58:10 PM

Card Type: Visa
Card Number: XXXXXXXXXXXXXXX8840
Expiration Date: XX/XX/XXXX
Server ID: 353
Tab Number: 50
Number Of Covers: 2
Persons: 1, 2
Card Owner: COHN/DR GARY D

AMOUNT 27.79
TIP 6.00
TOTAL 33.79

Approval: 05516C

I AGREE TO COMPLY WITH THE CARDHOLDER AGREEMENT

LOMBARDI'S CUCINA OF EVERETT

Check No Tab Server Time Date
301759/1,2 50 353 12:57:36 PM 9/24/2012

2 COFFEE 5.50
1 BOWL OF SOUP 6.00
1 L-CLAM PASTA 13.95
Food Sub-Total 25.45

SUB TOTAL 25.45
Sales Tax 2.34

CHECK TOTAL 27.79

THANK YOU, ANDREW

Reserve our Private Dining Room for Parties Meetings & Special Events

97.12

This is "good-faith bargaining"? Monthly private meetings over fresh seafood offerings at the tony Lombardi's while the District picks up the tab? Are you kidding me?!? If this is the kind of relationship with the superintendent you're looking forward to as you assume the Union presidency, I am definitely NOT your man for school board.

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But there is, in fact, an aspect to collective bargaining that I do support. I think every worker should enjoy some kind of collective advocacy against what would otherwise be the tyranny of the employer. I've lived in Right-to-Work states, and I know that Right-to-Work is a Right-to-Get-Screwed-Over. As I've watched the recent all-or-nothing transitions in Wisconsin and Michigan, I wonder if after a few years of shaking off "those unions" the residents of those states will still think it was really worth it. I'm glad Washington has so far not chosen to go that route, and I hope our unions in all sectors will think about that when they keep turning up the heat on their demands. I hate to think of how it would be if our dedicated educators had no union to back them up against the whims of Supt. Cohn.

Which brings me to my final concern: I keep getting approached by individual teachers who tell me I have their full support and to keep up my activities as watchdog and whistle-blower of the District. Then they tell me they don't dare say that in any kind of public forum, "for fear of losing our jobs."

For fear of losing their jobs? For just exercising their free-speech rights in a way that might be critical of the District? I thought that was what their union dues were for – to protect individual teachers against mistreatment by their employer. I've heard countless stories over the years from individuals from many districts about that lazy or incompetent math teacher who "can't be fired," because the union will always go to the mat against the district (while in the meantime, the children get cheated out of a proper education), but teachers still have to worry about retaliation for just expressing the wrong opinion? That doesn't seem right to me. It seems like an unscrupulous union president can be persuaded – perhaps over a steaming plate of clam linguine at Lombardi's – by an equally unscrupulous superintendent to *not* complain when the District decides to take some subtle but punitive action against uppity staff members. That's not what I'm interested in, however, and I'm willing to bet that both the citizens of Everett as well as the employees of the District aren't interested in letting such practices continue, either.

Good, healthy relationships between a union and the employer are a sign of collaboration. When they get *too* good, that's a likely sign of collusion.

So again, I must respectfully decline your invitation for the reasons stated. Feel free to contact me if you have any questions or wish to discuss anything at all.

Warm regards,

Rodman Reynolds