

February 17, 2015

Memorandum from Heather Bennett

To: Superintendent, Administrators, and Members of the Board of Education, Salt Lake City School District

On or about 3 February, 2015, many of you received copies of a letter from J. Michael Clara, dated 31 January and titled "SMEAR CAMPAIGN in the name of the SALT LAKE CITY BOARD OF EDUCATION." I understand this letter was also posted on his blog.

The letter is ostensibly addressed to me, though it is clearly meant for a larger audience. In the text, Mr. Clara makes a number of charges and demands rooted in his report of a phone call I made to him on the evening of 30 January. Please know that my intent in calling was to explain the timing and background of a letter Kristi Swett and I wrote to SLTA President Susan McFarland on 26 January, disassociating ourselves from quotes attributed to Mr. Clara in a report published by Parents for Choice in Education and presented to legislators at a meeting sponsored by the Utah Taxpayers Association.

Mr. Clara claims he never spoke to the authors of this report. In the phone call, I apologized for not calling him to see if the quotes were accurate. I did not apologize for spreading false statements, as he now claims. I tried to clarify that because the quotes were very similar to public statements he has made in the past, it did not occur to us to question their accuracy.

I have subsequently confirmed that the report's authors did, in fact, speak with two of our employees who were also quoted, although Mr. Clara indicated he had been informed otherwise.

Unfortunately, Mr. Clara was so overcome with anger that he assaulted me with threats, profanities, and scatological references, loudly enough for my husband and daughter to overhear. My husband took the phone out of my hand and asked Mr. Clara to stop. The bizarre postscript at the end of Mr. Clara's letter apparently makes reference to that brief exchange. Anyone who knows me (or Kevin) can only read that part of Michael's letter as, at best, a very bad joke.

Because Mr. Clara's telephone behavior was so extreme, I asked the Superintendent to request that our resource officer, Gary Trost, come to the front of our boardroom on 3 February as a safety precaution.

Addition to the Official Minutes  
Agenda Item: 2B  
Board Study Session: 02/17/2015