

September 30, 2009 Longmont Times-Call Open Forum section

E-mail should have been in public folder

While perusing some emails on the city's server (and a special thanks goes to the City Clerks Office), I noticed an interesting exchange between Councilmember Karen Benker and Greg Burt. Ms. Benker said in one of the emails that she has "*emails from folks that substantiate*" that Mr. Burt is being paid to "*investigate*" her. You may also recall in an Aug. 5 Times-Call op-ed, Ms. Benker quoted an email from Mr. Burt.

One problem: those emails don't exist on the city servers.

So either Ms. Benker is lying in that statement, or she has once again ignored the rules about forwarding all correspondence to the city servers. There has been enough warning to the council members to send these emails. There is no excuse for Ms. Benker to flout this rule.

In the email she also slings mud at her opponent Katie Witt saying it was too bad she was "*going negative in this upcoming campaign*". But later in the same email, she asks Mr. Burt "*So what individual or group has hired you? What are the terms of your contract? and How much are you getting paid to investigate me?*" In other words she's guessing, or else why would she ask?

But in her blind sleuth work, she doesn't mind throwing out a baseless accusation at Katie Witt.

Also in Ms. Benkers op-ed she said "*please be wary of what you read in this newspaper*" (*this newspaper* being the Times-Call) and "*Don't always believe what you read.*" Ironic advice from someone with an honesty problem, or is hiding emails. It's one or the other, or maybe both.

This is the kind of dirty campaigning we can expect from Karen Benker – unsubstantiated claims without a clue. Maybe the civil campaign committee should look into this.

Chris Rodriguez
Longmont

EDITORS NOTE: Councilwoman Karen Benker received an advance copy of the above letter through the Longmont Civil Campaign Committee. She responds to it in the following letter.

E-mail was private, addressed campaign

Thank you for the opportunity to rebut the negative letter sent by Chris Rodriguez. Keep in mind Mr. Rodriguez writes a blog called "Wrongmont", so that should give you some indications of his beliefs.

He has accused me of not reporting to my city account an e-mail I received from a friend warning me about Greg Burt. Here's what Burt's e-mail said: "I'm doing some consulting work for a client in Longmont who is upset with Karen Benker...My client has asked me to catalog the frustrations that Longmont developers have with Karen Benker...He hopes to use this information to persuade voters to vote against her."

Personal e-mails do not have to be forwarded to my city account. Only e-mails having to do with city business are required to be made public. This e-mail did not relate to city business.

Under the city's new Campaign Finance Act, all independent expenditures made on behalf of a council candidate must be reported to the city clerk within 72 hours. This was adopted so Longmont voters could know who was funding local campaigns. Mr. Burt concedes he is being paid by a client from Longmont, but no report has been filed. Later this week, I will file a grievance with the city's Election Committee reporting our city law is being violated.

Please remember Mr. Rodriguez is suing the city (with the Longmont realtors) stating our campaign finance law needs to be overturned. Why? One clause in the new ordinance limits the amount of money that can be donated to a campaign. Previously, there was no contribution limit (in the last election, the Longmont Realtors donated \$5,000 to one candidate who won.)

I have signed the Civil Campaign pledge to refrain from negative campaigning. My opponent has not. Ask yourself, why?

Karen Benker
Mayor Pro Tem
City Council Candidate