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PUBLIC STATEMENT TO ALTA-AURELIA COMMUNITY SCHOOL BOARD MAY 13, 2024

To the children, parents, President Hinkeldey and other school board members of AACS;

My name is Paul Dorr from Ocheyedan. I work in ten states to help restore local representative government. I wanted to make some brief comments tonight, from my professional observations, as to the reason board members so often insist that local stakeholders attend their meetings, where the board receives public comment. Failure to attend is portrayed as the public being indifferent, ignorant, and not really qualified to speak publicly on such matters. But that's not the real reason local apathy is such a problem across the country.

The reason is that the meeting rules so often end up rigging the outcome to the board's benefit. The nature of such meetings held by local government bodies are designed to champion their cause while leaving some of the finest members of their communities frustrated.

Here's how it works. As AACS own policy reads, "Public comment is a time set aside for community input, but the board will **not discuss** or take any action on any matter during public comment." Not discussing most often includes not publicly answering any questions either. Sometimes, they might get back to you later by private email.

What if a member of the public has questions he/she believes should be answered - publicly? "Sorry, that doesn't conform to our policy." They might provide a brief response but it usually ends there. So apathy sets in.

This is not a New England Town Hall format to help answer questions and resolve issues. This is designed for the board to control the conversation, let the frustrated public vent off some steam, and have the board's legal counsel intimidate a little, if needed. See the committee's letter on the back of my handout.

Then after some strong questions have been asked or statements made by the public and the public comment period is officially closed - but before they go on to the next Agenda item, the President or another board member will often say, "Before we move on, I'd like to make a few comments about what we just heard here tonight." And then he/she will proceed to spin less than truthful answers (often leaving out critical information) making some of the speakers appear ignorant. And **then** it ends. No rebuttal, no challenge, no evidence allowed.

And often there sits a local reporter from the dying industry of small-town newspapers. They can't afford to risk upsetting the school who drive readers to their paper through all the sports and other school coverage, nor all the ad revenue this generates.

So! Are they going to report in detail the public commenter's statements or questions; or will they focus on the comments made by a board member **after** the public comment period was closed? Obviously the later!

So **this is why** my client will be inviting the public to their own Town Hall meeting soon. They will make their case and take questions from the public. They've already invited President Hinkeldey and he's still deciding. Our format will allow for a vigorous but controlled give and take from all sides. If Tom and the board do show up, we won't let them (or their friends) grandstand on my client's time but will allow sufficient time to answer questions our members and the public ask them. Committee leaders are also negotiating with an experienced civil engineer to do a walk-through of the former high school building and hopefully, the public will get a fair report. This walk-thru will happen if the school board will allow us in. Watch Alta-Aurelia Citizens for Progress's FB page and for the bright yellow postcard announcing the date coming soon! Thank you.