

RESIGNATION FROM THE DISTRICT GOVERNING BOARD SPEECH

By Al Filardo

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In resigning from the District Governing Board (DGB), I'd like to share with you an analysis of what I have learned during my tenure. While I've had a feeling this day would come, I had hoped to complete my term. That is no longer possible. To put it simply, I am resigning effective December 1st because the actions taken by the majority of the DGB don't align with either my guiding principles or my sense of what is right.

There are four key areas in conflict with my guiding principles:

1. Making significant fiscal commitments without the requisite comprehensive strategic planning;
2. Failing to authorize research to inform important, key decisions;
3. Overlooking problems masked by policy governance; and
4. Suspending the Verde Valley Board Advisory Committee.

First, let's consider the fiscal commitments without appropriate planning.

On the surface when presented to the public, the \$103 million Campus Master Plan appeared to have followed appropriate due diligence. However, given the magnitude of the financial commitment in that plan, there should have been a comprehensive strategic plan driving those recommendations. I couldn't find one. Further, a group of citizens strongly protested against moves outlined in the campus master plan – most especially, the move to sell the Sedona Campus to enable the building of major facilities in Prescott Valley.

Verde Valley, thank you for raising your voices. As taxpayers, you helped drive modifications to the campus master plan resulting in decreased expenditures of close to \$40 million. Bottom line, if the Verde Valley had stayed quiet, the College would likely have been on the road to implementing a \$103 million 10-year campus master plan without the accompanying rationale of a comprehensive strategic plan.

In addition, until I raised concerns about the lack of a comprehensive strategic plan, the DGB was ready to approve a budget including tax and tuition increases requested by the President. Policy governance clearly states a comprehensive strategic plan is required which supports the requested budget. When raising this issue to the DGB, I was told by the College President that the previous strategic plan had simply been extended. This was not acceptable. In response to my concerns, the administration much later started a comprehensive strategic planning process.

That said, once the strategic planning started and the Verde Valley Board Advisory Committee (which I'll get to in a minute) began their recommendation process, I actually felt the District Governing Board was beginning to move in a positive direction. To the uninformed, the VVBAC might be looked upon as an irritant which produced unreasonable suggestions. However, many of the recommendations from the VVBAC actually were incorporated into the new draft of the strategic plan. Because of my years of extensive experience as a process-improvement professional, I viewed these steps forward as progress in representing constituents. There was dialog! We can all agree or disagree. The important point was that we were talking to each other. Further, Yavapai College responded well. Things were actually progressing. I cite the Sedona community planning and involvement led by Dean Dennis Garvey, the return of College for Kids, the creation of the digital media arts curriculum in Clarkdale and more. However, despite the progress, lingering questions remain.

Next, let's consider the failure to authorize research to inform important decisions.

One key request of the Verde Valley is to create a separate administrative college mechanism. It's a hot topic and one that has caused fighting between impassioned factions. So, at the March 1, 2016 DGB meeting, I moved for the Board to hire an objective and independent consultant to produce research on 3 topics:

1. The viability of a separate administrative college,
2. The establishment of an advocate for the Verde Valley as a College employee,
and
3. A summary of the College's response to the community.

To my dismay, the DGB rejected my motion – by a 3 to 2 vote.

This is my interpretation of what I heard from the DGB members who voted against my motion:

- I don't know if we can find an objective independent consultant,
- It would be expensive to add another layer of management, and
- I talk to a lot of people on this side of the mountain and they don't want a separate college.

In contrast to those opinions, it's important to note one local newspaper conducted a survey regarding the community's desire for a separate college at about the same time. Survey respondents overwhelmingly favored a separate college by more than 80%.

This discussion convinced me that not everyone understood all the pros and cons of a separate administrative college. What's worse, the majority of the DGB was not open to hiring someone to provide us with an objective, research-backed opinion. Providing research on controversial topics performed by a neutral party is standard practice when trying to resolve quarrels between opposing factions. From my perspective, the DGB was caught up in the quarrel instead of seeking a solution to the root cause of the disagreement – the citizens' desires to provide equal access to education for those in the Verde Valley. Lacking input from a neutral third party, this quarrel will never be resolved. For all the DGB knows, a separate administrative college may have been a reasonable and workable solution, but without factual data, the Board will never know.

Third, let's consider the lack of attention to problems masked by a policy governance process.

As a professional educator and business leader, I know open, honest communication and good processes are essential to a high-performing organization. During the SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) analysis performed by the College as a portion of the Yavapai College 2015-2020 Strategic Plan, one of the weaknesses cited was as follows:

'District wide, students, faculty, and staff related that **communication** within the College and between YC and the community could and should be enhanced.

Additionally, staff and faculty cited the marketing of YC offerings and programs as a weakness...'

Also, there seems to be a culture of fear in the College regarding interactions with the DGB. For example, when one former DGB member attended his last meeting, people came up to express their gratitude for his service. One College well-wisher told him, "Just think. You can visit the campus and people won't freak out!"

In addition, when I joined the Board, some College friends told me that because I was now a member of the DGB, they can't be seen talking to me anymore. This is the kind of culture policy governance fosters.

As far as I can find, no other community college or school board in Arizona uses the Carver Model. The College should stop using it effective immediately. In practicing policy governance, the DGB reviews monitoring reports every meeting.

Here are some thoughts on these reports as presented by Chandler Chimes, a renowned educator and author:

"... monitoring is an activity of administration, an administration that is hired and fired by the CEO, an administration which must please the CEO for a pleasant day-to-day work experience and ultimate job security. What is put in monitoring reports might meet the letter of the law and what the board expects to see, but, although truthful, it might not present the entire truth, and thus, be deceptive. A CEO's job is directly tied to his successful accomplishment of the Ends the board has established. Subordinates' jobs could be dependent on the CEO's success. Words and statistics can be used in creative ways to hide the entire picture, or, at the very least, to make it blurry. A conflict of interest seems to exist in the very nature of the model, as far as monitoring is concerned. Having administration monitor itself, even if the board is supposed to participate, seems outrageous. If monitoring of CEO progress is an attempt to ensure accuracy, either an independent body and/or board members themselves need to be involved on the ground floor, not after the fact, in the study and preparation of written reports for the board to evaluate as a body, or conflict of interest by the administration could easily taint the process."

In addition to a poor communications model and process, the Carver Model uses language and terminology which is confusing to the general public rendering the DGB proceedings difficult to understand. Terms like "Ends" and "Ownership Linkages" are confusing even to journalists who regularly cover the College. Why do we use language that needs to be translated?

Yavapai College could join hundreds of other respected and well-governed community colleges around the country in using a common-sense approach. Right now, the DGB gives the Administration goals which are called "Ends", and the President gives her "reasonable interpretation" of the Ends back to the DGB. Instead, the Board, the President, and the members of the College Executive Leadership Team should – cooperatively - establish goals stated in language so clear that no one gets confused when trying to interpret it. Then the DGB can hold the Administration accountable for achieving the goals and can allocate resources appropriately.

Further, we should be discussing issues such as those raised in the September 2015 ATRA (*Arizona Tax Research Association*) Special Reportⁱⁱ:

"...their primary property tax levy per FTSE (*Full Time Student Equivalent*) ranks highest in the state at \$10,667, nearly double the statewide average. Their expenditures per FTSE rank second highest in the state behind Navajo at \$11,028."

In my two years with this Board, we have increased tuition multiple times, increased taxes, and continued spending millions while enrollment has decreased at an alarming rate. In fact, at the August 2, 2016 DGB meeting, the College informed the Board that FTSE was down 8% year-over-year.

At a minimum, the DGB should be discussing the following:

1. Why the per FTSE tax levy and expenditures are so high,
2. What needs to be done to increase enrollment,
3. Why the College scored so low in the recent Wallet Hub ranking of community colleges nationwide, and
4. Lessons learned from the \$1 million loss from the federal cancellation of the flight school.

And finally, the suspension of the VVBAC.

A rigorous process was used to select each member of the VVBAC. All town and city councils, the Yavapai-Apache Nation and each Yavapai County district representing the Verde Valley were included. Applicants wrote a letter regarding their interest in being members of the VVBAC. Yavapai County School Superintendent Tim Carter interviewed all the applicants plus the organizations from which they were nominated. This comprehensive process was one of the best I've seen in selecting representatives for a genuinely broad-based committee.

For more than a year and a half, the Committee conducted two meetings a month, listening to presentations from a wide array of people including key leaders from Yavapai College, plus business people and educators from the Verde Valley. For those who attended these meetings like I did, you could see their many 'a-ha' moments plus the patience and understanding of all the Yavapai College representatives who provided eye-opening presentations. Because of the summary nature of the minutes, the minutes don't do justice to those moments.

At the September 1, 2015 meeting of the DGB, a discussion regarding the dismantling of the VVBAC took place and 27 members of the public spoke in opposition to this dismantling. In response to these comments, Dr. Pat McCarver noted, "It was really hard for me to sit through the open call and not being able to respond because – and it's in the minutes – at the last board meeting, the board did unanimously vote to continue the Verde Valley Advisory Committee".

In contrast to that, a year later-- September 12, 2016 during the DGB retreat, a Board member made a motion to effectively disband the VVBAC. I was shocked at the speed with which the motion was seconded. All I could say was "What is our exit strategy?" The wording of the motion was changed from "disband" to "suspend" after my objections, and a majority of the DGB voted in favor of the motion. One may wonder what has happened internally over the last year to cause this abrupt turnaround.

It must be emphasized that at that retreat no members of the public were in the audience from either Yavapai County or the Verde Valley specifically. This action was taken as part of the "Ownership Linkages" agenda item. There was no **clear** indication

of a discussion of the dismantling of the VVBAC on that DGB agenda. Such less-than-public action calls the majority of the Board's integrity into question.

It's also important to note, the DGB members who voted to suspend the VVBAC only attended the VVBAC orientation meeting two years ago, and never witnessed the workings of the Committee for themselves. The one exception to this was when Steve Irwin attended one meeting at my invitation. At the end of the meeting he shared this comment with me, "I wish I had a group like this!" In addition, the VVBAC pleaded to meet with the DGB, and the request was ignored. Bottom line, the DGB silenced the VVBAC.

This is contrary to what our policy governance coachⁱⁱⁱ, told the DGB to do. At our September 2015 Board Retreat, his single-page handout in big, bold letters read like this:

"Make sure" there is "representative ownership" by groups/committees that provide input on important issues brought to the Board.

The DGB has never had such a committee before. The VVBAC was a product of a rigorous selection process with participation from all local authorities not influenced by the College. While I supported the Board's desire to hear from new community voices which to me meant transitioning to new members on the VVBAC, I did not support the disbanding of the Committee, or the replacement of the current selection process with one whereby the DGB chooses to whom they are going to listen as that type of selection could promote biased feedback.

Due to the voting block from the west side of the mountain, I did not want to risk that group selecting people from the Verde Valley to provide input to the DGB. I feared they would only choose those voices who already agreed with them, not those interested in making substantive improvements in the College. So, one big question I ask is why eliminate the VVBAC? Why would you do it in a manner that is disrespectful to the citizens who have invested so much time to serve?

My observation is we are getting caught up in the quarrel and forgetting our mandated cause – we are to serve the educational needs of the citizens of Yavapai County. How can we know their needs if we silence their voices? Based on my years of experience as

a process-improvement and organizational development champion, I've witnessed when intelligent people quarrel and lose sight of the real cause, they do incredibly stupid things. They become politically obnoxious, diplomatically inept, and intellectually bankrupt. We are all better than that!

In closing, I would like to thank my constituents from the Verde Valley for their voices. It's been my privilege to serve you. In addition, I'd like to thank the faculty and staff of Yavapai College.

The SWOT analysis I referenced in the beginning of my speech notes, **“Overwhelmingly, people listed the highly qualified and dedicated faculty and staff at Yavapai College as one of the greatest strengths”**. Without you, Faculty and Staff, we have no college. Please continue your good work. Thank You, Thank You, Thank You.

ⁱ Chandler Chimes, Policy Governance Editorial in Sun News (Myrtle Beach, S. C.) Friday, August 17, 2007, Traditional Process Works: School Governance System Needs Change as excerpted from a white paper by Dr. Paul Peterson, Coastal Carolina University, Summer II, 2007.

ⁱⁱ ATRA (*Arizona Tax Research Association*) Special Report, September 2015, page 8 regarding the Yavapai Community College District

ⁱⁱⁱ Mr. Richard Stringham, Senior Associate, The Governance Coach, September 2015 DGB Retreat