

LETTER TO THE EDITOR FROM THE CUSTER COUNTY BOARD OF HEALTH

Mr. Hedberg:

For months the Tribune has, for some inexplicable reason, been on a crusade to attack and impugn the character, integrity and professional reputation of Dr. Clifford Brown, the Public Health Director who was hired last year by the Board of Health. Dr. Brown was hired based on his many years of experience in the field of public health; his curriculum vitae is over 30 pages in length and establishes his credentials and qualifications beyond any shadow of a doubt. Yet you chose one thing listed by Dr. Brown, his Master's Degree in Public Health, to focus on. We have explained to you and your readers on several occasions that this degree was never even discussed with Dr. Brown during his interview, and the Board of Health did not rely on this particular accomplishment during its deliberations before deciding to offer the position to Dr. Brown. As we have stated previously, Section 25-1-508 (5)(c)(I) of the Colorado Revised Statutes says "A public health director may be a physician, physician assistant, public health nurse, *or other qualified public health professional.*" It would be very difficult to find a candidate for the position more qualified than Dr. Brown.

Your newspaper asserted as fact that the institution from which he obtained his degree, Dartley University, was nothing but a diploma mill. You have said that you asked Dr. Brown to produce documentation to you regarding his diploma and transcripts. When he declined to do so you took this as proof that your assumption was correct. After Dr. Brown had been hired and this allegation first arose the Board of Health (comprised of Commissioners Flower, Canda and Printz at the time) inquired of Dr. Brown about the claim that his degree was from a diploma mill. He provided the diploma and transcripts and stated that he had taken classes for two years online to earn the degree; he had no knowledge that Dartley was accused of being a diploma mill. The Board of Health was satisfied with his documents and his explanation, especially since there had never been any reliance on the Master's Degree in the first place.

Instead of accepting the decision of the elected officials who were statutorily charged with the responsibility for hiring a public health director, you claimed Dr. Brown had forged the diploma and the transcripts that you had never seen. You also said Dartley University never existed, contrary to your earlier statement that it was a diploma mill. You called Dr. Brown a fake, a fraud, a phony and even a felon. You did not have any evidence to support your accusations; everything you said about Dr. Brown was based on speculation and supposition on your part. You filed a criminal complaint with the Custer County Sheriff's Office, accusing Dr. Brown of committing the crime of a Forgery without ever having seen the documents you claimed he had forged. An investigation was conducted by the Sheriff's Office and your accusation of criminal behavior was determined to be "unfounded". The case was closed.

During its meeting on April 7 of this year the Board of Health discussed whether it should ask for a retraction and public apology from you and the Tribune on behalf of Dr. Brown. The vote was unanimous that we send a Letter to the Editor making such a formal request.

On April 6, knowing that discussion of requesting a retraction and an apology was an agenda item for the following day's meeting, you sent an email to the Board of Health saying you would consider doing so only if you were first provided with the diploma and the transcripts. There is no valid reason to provide documents that were never used by Dr. Brown for any purpose and were never relied on by the Board of Health for any purpose.

Please do the right thing: Retract all the false things you have said about Dr. Brown and apologize to him.

Bill Canda, Chairman

Tom Flower, Vice Chairman

Kevin Day, Member