

*The following letter was written in response to an article published in the Saginaw News by its editors regarding our position with the United Way.*

Dear Saginaw News Editors,

10-25-05

"Labor bluster", "petty", "selfish" and "myopic" were the headlines/adjectives stated by ignorant newspaper editors to describe labor leaders and their position of no longer supporting the United Way of Saginaw County.

I feel a duty to not look the other way even if an 85-year-old organization no longer lives up to its claims. I guess in this county, if you speak your mind and heart against a "charitable organization's" abuses, even if based on substantiated facts, you get chastised publicly. Regrettably, in this case, fact-based journalism never entered into the equation. The Saginaw News failed to contact me or anyone else to get the facts, but just took pot shots based on a truly one-sided, "myopic", and "self-interested" political agenda.

So let's set the record straight. Larry Sims, the chairman of the board of United Way, attended a labor council meeting against my recommendation. I told Mr. Sims that I felt that he owed it to United Way of America, his board, and the community to deal with the problems in Saginaw behind closed doors, but he decided against that. It was at that meeting that he admitted that Gary Sheppard, UAW, one of his executive board members, threatened the board by telling them that if they laid off his member, Bob Cramer, currently the liaison at United Way, Mr. Sheppard would not allow Cathy Trudell, the other liaison at the time, into the plants to solicit funds on behalf of United Way.

I asked Mr. Sims at the last board meeting I attended, why Mr. Sheppard was even allowed to still attend the meeting. I asked why Sheppard wasn't removed from the board immediately after his threat against Cathy Trudell? Mr. Sims told us he was moving on with the meeting, and refused to address it whatsoever. I also told Larry Sims face-to-face that he didn't need to lay off anyone. The fact is that when Gerald Little, former United Way CEO, resigned, United Way saved enough money to accomplish their original goal in savings. I further explained to Mr. Sims that he was placing United Way in a bad spot by relying completely on

the UAW campaign and that he was a major layoff away from a catastrophe. Mr. Sims refused my advice. That's how things are done at United Way. Ignore the problem and hope it will go away.

Unfortunately, although the United Way cares about labor's donations, they appear in every other respect, to be anti-union, and poor stewards of donor dollars. Proof in Point: They were found guilty of violating the National Labor Relations Act. They were found guilty of wrongful termination of an employee. Ask the United Way here, why they refused to accept a contract prior to bargaining that already existed with the CWA and the United Way in Kalamazoo. Why did they decide to hire from an anti- union law firm, an attorney, who was a board member, and then take a full year to complete the agreement. Why did it take years for the organization to act when inappropriate behavior and countless financial errors were turned over to them involving their Chief Financial Officer? Why won't United Way investigate allegations given to them by three different employees, involving a manager of the organization using United Way personnel, time and materials to further a political campaign? I wonder, how much donor money was spent/lost on all those problems. These are a few of the questions I have for the Saginaw Chapter of United Way. Perhaps you could get answers to these questions. I never could even though I was a board member at the time.

That's why I no longer support United Way in Saginaw. I believe that no union organization or member should participate in any organization that doesn't believe in, and support the cause of labor as they do.

Finally, I told my members to give directly to the charity of their choice because I care as they do what happens to their neighbors. They share my desire to know where their donations really go. To me it's like shopping at Wal-Mart. I wouldn't spend a nickel in that store, because to me, it really does matter how we spend our hard earned dollars. It really matters whether we support financially the ideology we believe in, and have fought to preserve during our working lives. Our way of life and all of our futures are depending on it.

Billy Martin  
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