

- [Photos](#)
- [Directory](#)

By [Tim Leeds](#)

Officials deny 'drunken Indians' comment

Commissioner calls Havre Daily to task for failing 'due diligence'

Like 3 people like this. Sign Up to see what your friends like.

December 2, 2013

Hill and Blaine county officials said this morning that they want to quell comments by a Ravalli County official from some 300 miles away, and called the Havre Daily News to task for running the articles with the comments without confirming them.

The Havre Daily News ran stories from The Associated Press based on Ravalli Republic story reporting that Ravalli County Planning Commission President Jan Wisniewski said he "had a conversation with law enforcement officials in Havre who complained about their jails being filled with 'drunken Indians' off the reservation."

Wisniewski made the comments to a Ravalli County Commission meeting. Representatives of several law enforcement agencies this morning said race does not come into the picture in local law enforcement.

Hill County Commissioner Mark Peterson said he could not find any local officials who had met Wisniewski, much less made the comments.

Blaine County Sheriff Glenn Huestis said local law enforcement officers charge people whom they have evidence have broken the law — despite claims of racial profiling, especially against Native American law enforcement officers, no evidence has shown that to be true, he said.

"We charge those that violate the law no matter who they are or what they do," Huestis said. "We get that tossed at us quite a bit, that 'you're only doing this because I'm Native American.' No, you broke the law ...

"It really makes working relationships with other entities tough when these comments surface without any validity to them ...," Huestis said. "When we make a case on somebody, we do not put in reports information unless we can verify it, and I feel the press should do the same thing."

Hill County Commissioner Mark Peterson, who asked the Havre Daily Friday afternoon to attend the press conference, said he was disappointed the newspaper did not do more to find out to whom

Wisniewski had spoken before running the articles — it appears he may not have spoken to anyone, Peterson said.

“We have not been able to verify in any way shape or form him communicating with anybody ... ,” Peterson said. “It really concerns me that the Havre Daily News is reprinting information from somewhere else without doing due diligence to follow up and research and see if in fact this statement is true or not true.”

The Republic reported Wisniewski’s comment came at the end of a meeting with representatives of the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes held to discuss the tribe’s wish to place some land sacred to its members in a federal trust.

Tribal Council member Steve Lozar told the commission he was deeply offended by Wisniewski’s comment, the Republic reports, and the commission Wednesday voted to hand-deliver an apology to the tribe.

Peterson said the Hill County Commission has received a multitude of phone calls about the articles.

“We do not need that kind of information coming out in Hill County or even the surrounding counties to, if you will, badmouth us when it’s not true,” he said.

The Havre Daily News attempted to contact Hill County Sheriff Don Brostrom — the county detention center is an arm of the sheriff’s office — before running the article, but Brostrom was out of state and did not receive the message before the articles ran.

Wisniewski does not have a listed number or contact information. The Havre Daily made requests for that information last Monday to the Ravalli County Commission, which has not yet responded.

County officials have made their own inquiries. Brostrom provided the Havre Daily with a copy of an email conversation between officials in the Hill County and Ravalli County attorney’s offices, which reports that Ravalli County Commissioners Jeff Burrows and Ron Stoltz “both said that Jan mentioned speaking with a commissioner (not law enforcement, as reported in the paper), but didn’t give a name.”

“We are having so many negative comments directed at local law enforcement, which doesn’t just include the (Hill County) sheriff it includes Blaine County, fish and game, the police department, the Border Patrol ... every law enforcement agency in Hill County got a black eye over that, and I think it was credited inappropriately,” he said.

“I cannot understand why this gentleman chose to make those comments or who he supposedly talked to,” Brostrom added.

Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks Game Warden Shane Reno and U.S. Border Patrol Deputy Chief Patrol Agent Aaron Heitke also were at the press conference this morning to express their support for the local law enforcement agencies.

Brostrom, Huestis and Hill County Undersheriff Jamieson Ross and Blaine County Undersheriff Frank Billmayer all made comments that the people in the Hill County Detention Center are there because they are accused of breaking the law, and no other reason, and the law enforcement and detention center officers simply are doing as Montana law requires.

Ross, who was administrator of the detention center before becoming undersheriff, added that the center holds people arrested by officers in several counties in the area and that many are serving time ordered by a judge.

"The jail is a melting pot. We get who we get," he said.

MOST POPULAR:

Comments

Viewed

**HAVRE
DAILY
NEWS**

Community Christmas Din...

John Kelleher

**HAVRE
DAILY
NEWS**

For the Record. Decembe...

**HAVRE
DAILY
NEWS**

St. Pierre to be instal...

John Kelleher

**HAVRE
DAILY
NEWS**

Healthy Bison get their...

Daniel Horton

**HAVRE
DAILY
NEWS**

Robert D. Holman

iPad Air

