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Palm Beach House race is a case out of TV's Columbo

BY GARY LANDRY

Maybe its just me or maybe I'm simply having one of those Columbo moments—you know, those moments when the popular television detective would rub his forehead in a state of utter confusion and beg for help understanding—sort of his way of letting viewers know he did not buy the explanation in the first place.

Shelley Vana is the Democrat candidate for the Florida House of Representatives from District 85 in Palm Beach County. She has never run for elective office before but she is no political newcomer. As the longtime president of the Palm Beach County teachers' union, she has taken on a number of political issues, thereby creating a political record that her Republican opponent, Andy Edwards is using against her in his bid to win the seat being vacated by the term-limited Lois Frankel.

In fact Edwards began airing television ads citing Vana's threats to boycott student field trips; her disruption of planning meetings and extracurricular activities; and Vana's remarks discouraging new teachers from working in Palm Beach County. What's more, the Palm Beach Post, hardly a conservative publication, called her representation of teachers, 'extremely poor'.

The ads also point out the \$102,709 salary (plus an additional \$8,400 automobile allowance) that Vana reported in her annual union report to the Public Employees Relations Commission (PERC). It seems that boycotting our children's field trips and disrupting extracurricular activities is something she is proud of because she immediately called a news conference to denounce Edwards' ads, not to challenge the boycott threats or the disruption of school activities, but instead, to challenge the salary cited in the ad—the salary that is clearly stated on the reports Vana, herself, filed with PERC!

At the hastily called news conference this past week, Vana claimed she made a mistake in reporting her salary at \$102,709. She has since filed an amended report reducing her salary down from \$102,709 to \$76,500, plus the \$8,400

auto allowance for a total of about \$85,000—still twice the salary of the average teacher from whom union dues is used to pay her union salary.

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It all seems too convenient. Vana's salary on her initial report is exposed publicly, and immediately she begins damage control.

By the way, does Vana think that being paid \$85,000—twice as much as teachers—is that much worse than being paid more than \$102,000?

Vana could clear all this up in a moment's notice by producing all of her W-2 forms for the last tax year so that the figures cited could be matched up against her federal income tax return that is part of the papers on file with the Division of Elections as required of all candidates. But because there is still room for confusion, she would have to produce her husband's W-2 forms also since the federal income tax return that she submitted to the Division of Elections is a joint return. The bottom line is that the entry on total income on that joint federal tax return must match the total of all income reported on their W-2's.

It would certainly be a cure for my Columbo moment.

Gary Landry is a policy analyst at the James Madison Institute and may be contacted via email at glandry@jamesmadison.org.