

Dear Islanders,

October 16, 2018

Two days before the All Candidates Meeting I received an email with a letter referencing a workplace sexual harassment claim against me and questioning my candidacy. By next morning it was posted on Facebook. I was not at my best when I tried to address it at the Public Debate.

Upon reflection, what I most want my community to know is that I share the value that women have the right to feel safe – on the road, in the workplace, at home, at social events, speaking with their political representatives, everywhere. Times are changing and many of us, myself included, now see our behaviour from a different perspective than we once did. Some of us are still catching up to what that means.

For me, this meant acknowledging the validity of a workplace complaint submitted summer before last by a woman I worked with occasionally. I made inappropriate comments to her at a party. When she made it clear she didn't appreciate my comments, I backed off. When she lodged a workplace complaint, I attended a meeting about the incident and learned how my behaviour had made her feel unsafe. This had not been my intention. I was told this was all confidential. I followed up the meeting as agreed with a personal apology. She said that she accepted my apology. I had learned an important lesson and I thought that there was closure. So the Facebook post caught me off guard.

There's no doubt that sexual coercion and harassment is a very serious issue, including on this island. I'm glad that the power imbalance between women and men in our society – which enables men to ignore the impacts of their actions on women - is coming to light. I'm glad for this for my 22 year old daughter, I'm glad for this for my beloved wife of 25 years (and yes, we are working through this), I'm glad for this for myself, and I'm glad for this for my community.

It is my hope that with this letter I have helped to calm and heal the community, along with the public discourse, and better enabled you to make an informed choice on October 20.

Cortes Island is in my heart. The land and all of its natural world. The people and the community. I would be honoured to be your representative at the Regional District.

respectfully yours,  
George Sirk