

'No Comment'

We never understand why certain politicians refuse to deal with the press. Do they believe their "no comment" will prevent the story from running? It won't. Or do they think that ignoring us will teach us some kind of lesson? It won't.

The only people they're hurting are their constituents.

We don't need to tell you that politicians are the voice of the people. They have a responsibility to answer to the community – the taxpayers who pay their salaries.

So when Rob Williamson, candidate for County Commissioner District 4, informed us that he would not respond to any questions from Navarre Press, we wondered whom he thought he was punishing. Us? No. You? Absolutely.

Williamson isn't pleased with the way Navarre Press treated him during the August primary. As a public figure, he's held to a higher standard than the rest of the community, and we have a responsibility to inform the public about their candidates.

Williamson stated to Navarre Press that we factually misrepresented him, however he refuses to provide an example. Any journalist knows what a crushing statement "misrepresented" is. We strive to tell the truth in a balanced manner, and, like everyone else, we're not perfect. Mistakes will be made and we'll be the first to correct them.

But Williamson never requested a correction. When asked for specifics, he basically said he put it behind him. Now we don't know about you, but if a news source is spreading untruths about us, we would be in that editor's office demanding an immediate correction. And we wouldn't leave until we got it.

So it mystifies us as to why Williamson would let something so egregious that he would no longer speak with us, go without some sort of correction.

Just to be sure, we called Jim Melvin, our current elected county commissioner, and asked him what his experience has been with Navarre Press during his four years in office.

"Navarre Press, as well as all of the other news media outlets in Northwest Florida, have treated me very fairly," he said. "The few times I've been misquoted or taken out of context, I immediately called the offending paper and they were all very quick to make a correction.

"Good press relations is critical for an elected official," Melvin continued. "The press and elected officials both have obligations to the public and it is critical to maintain a good relationship in order to effectively serve your constituents."

Regardless of Williamson's beef with us, if elected, he still has a responsibility to you.

He has instructed us not to call or email him. Anytime we have a question, he said his response is "I respectfully decline to comment." Which to us, is a more polite way of saying he "refuses to comment," which is really what he's doing.

It looks like no one told Williamson that the election is still a few days away. He hasn't even been voted into office and he's already dictating how he will be treated by the press. A bit presumptuous, wouldn't you think?

It's our job to hold him accountable and make sure he answers for his votes. If he refuses – excuse us, "politely declines" – to answer, he's leaving his constituents in the dark.

It's akin to having a rogue employee. If elected, Williamson works for you, but don't expect him to answer any of your questions, or explain why he voted for this but not for that. He doesn't want to answer to the public.

The residents of Navarre should expect far more from their prospective civil servants.