



Our View: Hanna needs attribution, not excuses

Posted: Thursday, February 24, 2011 3:30 am

We're concerned that freshman U.S. Rep. Richard Hanna and his staff are downplaying questions about plagiarism regarding an opinion piece generated by their office.

A column Hanna recently submitted to a newspaper contains some paragraphs that are so similar to those written by someone else that it's difficult to tell them apart.

The opinion piece explains Hanna's "no" vote on extending some portions of the Patriot Act. But in summarizing specific parts of the anti-terrorism law, Hanna uses strings of words that are nearly identical to those written by an affiliate of the Cato Institute, a think tank to which Hanna is also associated.

But when asked about the similarities, Hanna's communications director said that the original author had "offered his assistance for this particular piece."

The writer told The Citizen that he was OK with the Hanna column because there are "only so many ways to paraphrase" the three Patriot Act issues that were being debated.

But these explanations ignore the larger issue of giving credit where credit is due. All Hanna had to do was give proper attribution.

Students in junior high know that they need to cite their sources in research papers. College students get expelled for failing to do it. And people in our business lose their jobs over it.

OK, so Hanna didn't outright "steal" someone else's work, but the fact that he had permission to use the other writer's words doesn't make it OK.

Hanna is the elected official in this case, and we expect that when we see his name attached to an opinion piece that it's really his ideas — and his words — that we're reading.

It's not our intention to blow this out of proportion. It's not an offense so egregious that it can't be forgiven. But it can't be dismissed as a non-issue, either. And it can't be allowed to happen again.