

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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A call for an independent investigation into allegations of misogyny in Vilas County

To the Editor:

I am writing in regards to the recent revelation from the seven department heads of Vilas County agencies, and their written claims of gender discrimination violations from specific Vilas County supervisors. I find the allegations in the article to be alarming and potentially very egregious. I would like to share with your readers some personal thoughts.

First, I want to make clear as to how much I support the work of these various agencies. I have now resided in Vilas County for 50 years and have used the services of these agencies often throughout the years. I have always found them to be extremely responsive, professional and knowledgeable. They are a tremendous asset to our County and do not get the recognition they deserve for the work they do throughout the county. They make Vilas County a better place to live!

Currently, I am working very specifically with Land and Water Conservation and Vilas County Zoning in regards to creating a model lake shore improvement ini-



tiative for the Alma-Moon Lake District. Their services and expertise have been invaluable. I have so appreciated the direction and insight they have provided in this endeavor to better preserve the quality of our water ecosystem.

The agencies are well deserving of the salaries they earn. I was glad to see that the Vilas County commissioners voted 14-6 to increase the wages from 2% to 4%.

As a taxpayer I am in favor of making sure our departments are paid a wage that reflects the trends we see happening all over the country.

The crux of the article and my concern is about the statement, (there) "is an atmosphere of misogyny, defined as an 'ingrained prejudice against women,' and a good old boy's network at the county level among some board mem-

bers." As a Vilas County resident I am asking for assurance from the Vilas County leadership that this situation will be thoroughly investigated by a qualified and independent third-party agency. Personally, I am not convinced the Vilas County municipality insurance carrier should be involved in the selection of that independent agency.

I also strongly support the statement made by the department heads: "We need a county board chair and board members who value the work of women and will remove those who denigrate female employees. We feel fortunate to live and work in beautiful Vilas County and are dedicated to preserving and improving our community. We hold essential jobs that support the county and we need a county board that understands that sexual discrimination is illegal and misogyny is an outdated and unproductive force." The allegations detailed in this article are serious and have no place in the private or public work space. All Americans from all backgrounds need to be treated with dignity and respect.

I encourage all Vilas County residents to contact their representative supervisor to express how you feel about this current situation.

Len Larsen
St. Germain

OPINIONS

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Your Right to Know: Records shed light on DNR board shenanigans

The Natural Resources Board, an all-volunteer body that guides policy for the Department of Natural Resources, is part of Wisconsin's tradition of open government. The idea to empower volunteers — rather than politicians — was first proposed in the progressive era by leading conservationists, including Aldo Leopold, who understood that decisions about natural resources should be guarded against backroom deals between politicians and lobbyists.

For this reason, the NRB is designed to allow for direct input from ordinary people and for an open decision-making process. But a shadow has fallen over the board. Its current chairperson, Frederick Prehn, has clung to the role past his term, which ended in May. Dr. Prehn, a dentist in Wausau, maintains that he can hold on to the role until the state Senate confirms his replacement.

Gov. Tony Evers in late April nominated Sandra Naas to replace



By Tony Wilkin Gibart
MIDWEST ENVIRONMENTAL
ADVOCATES

Prehn. But the state's GOP-controlled Legislature has refused to take it up.

Wisconsin's public records law has shed light on this murky situation. My organization, Midwest Environmental Advocates, made several demands under that law for records regarding

Prehn. They show that Prehn spoke with staff of the Senate Majority Leader Devin LeMahieu, which helped him obtain a memo from the Legislative Reference Bureau about remaining on the board. Other records document Prehn's regular coordination with lobbyists from Wisconsin Manufacturers and Commerce (WMC).

These same lobbyists met with LeMahieu about Prehn's term before his replacement was announced. In other records, he suggested he should remain on the NRB to block the governor's proactive approach to PFAS contamination (the toxins found in Teflon and other products), policies that WMC

is also fighting tooth and nail.

The records law has given the public a clearer picture of what Prehn and others are up to. But the picture is far from complete, and that is why my group has sued Prehn.

Midwest Environmental Advocates believes Prehn may have illegally hidden the full extent of his coordination with WMC and others. We requested all forms of written communications Prehn sent and received about his decision. He turned over no text messages. But through a request to another official, we later discovered a text message in which Prehn reflected on his decision to stay on to oppose the governor's policies. Prehn was legally obligated to retain and disclose this message.

Our lawsuit is about holding Prehn accountable by obtaining records that we all have a right to see. Prehn is not respecting the state's open government traditions, so essential to the NRB.

The case involving Prehn points to ways to better implement the public records law to avoid litigation.

Prehn regularly communicated about NRB business on personal email and text. Of course, he is not alone in using personal accounts for public business, which is not illegal, even though all such communications are still public records.

Officials should be discouraged from this practice. When public records exist on private accounts, we are forced to rely on the word of the official who created the records. Compliance officers at state agencies should consider requiring officials who created public records on personal accounts to attest under oath that they complied with their duties to search for and disclose records. Doing so would make officials think twice before attempting to skirt the law and it would promote transparency.

Your Right to Know is a monthly column distributed by the Wisconsin Freedom of Information Council (wisfoic.org), a group dedicated to open government. Tony Wilkin Gibart is the executive director of Midwest Environmental Advocates, a nonprofit environmental law firm.

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OPINIONS

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THE LAKELAND TIMES ... OUR VIEW

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GREGG WALKER, Publisher | RICHARD MOORE, Columnist

Roll up your sleeves for liberty now, or for tyranny later

It has been raining lawsuits this past week, ever since the Biden administration released its emergency temporary standard compelling larger businesses to require their employees to be vaccinated or tested weekly, and liberals have been doing their best to camouflage and lie about what the proposed mandate is all about.

They say it's about protecting public health. What it's really about is the growing medical dictatorship that our elite rulers are using to gain complete control over the population, and to dismiss once and for all such inconvenient documents as the U.S. Constitution.

Truth is, though, a masked population is a subservient population, and a population that must ingest whatever the government wants it to is a population of lab rats.

So the "progressives" are talking a lot of nonsense, and when a "progressive" talks, it's usually a lie or one sigh shy of a lie (also known as a Maddowism), so let's unravel some of the deceit.

First, they claim we are twisting things around by calling the just-released OSHA temporary emergency standard a "vaccine mandate." The rule doesn't require an employee to be vaccinated, they say; you can get tested instead.

Technically, that's true for most private-sector workers. But then there are little liberal gifts attached to the choice not to get vaccinated: Employers don't have to pay for your testing, and, so long as you remain not fully vaccinated, you have to wear a mask indoors at work or in a vehicle while working with another person, and the employer is not required to pay for the mask, either.

In other words, you have to wear a Scarlet letter and pay for the right to do so. Sure, you can choose not to get vaccinated, but your government is going to make sure it costs you dearly.

As they say, a choice made with a gun to your head is no choice.

Even so, the Karens of the world say, the courts have long ago ruled that government can compel vaccinations. Cased closed, they argue, and it's not even close. They generally cite the 1905 Jacobson case.

Actually, that was way before privacy rights came to be influential in Supreme Court decisions, but, even so, that decision only declared that government could make a person get vaccinated OR force the person to pay a nominal fine. Jacobson never did get vaccinated; he paid the fine.

More important, the court did not rule on any federal power; it upheld a state's right to compel vaccination or levy a fine.

And that gets us to the heart of the legal challenges to the OSHA interim final rule: They aren't about compulsory vaccination, no matter how much the left wants that to be the case. Politically, sure, it's about compulsory vaccination, but legally it's about excessive federal power, a conversation the left does not want to have.

It's about whether there is any grave danger that justifies an immediate emergency standard that avoids public notice and comment. As Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis put it: "If this was such a 'grave danger,' why did it take 57 days from the announcement by President

Biden to publish the rule and why won't it take effect until January 4 — another 60 days?"

It's about whether OSHA, whose mission is to protect workers from hazards arising in the workplace, can tackle public health threats not specific to the workplace. That's why it's called an occupational health and safety agency. Giving OSHA the power to impose sweeping rules in a pandemic transforms it into a public health agency, which Congress never intended and which, if it were to happen, would allow the agency to do almost anything, as the Wisconsin Institute for Law and Liberty said in its own challenge:

"If OSHA can use this authority to force 80 million American workers to vaccinate or test weekly, then it is hard to imagine what OSHA could not order. American businesses could be ordered to monitor and intervene in virtually any employee behavior that might pose a risk to others, whether directly related to the workplace or not."

Indeed, as Doug Badger and Paul Larkin of the Heritage Foundation have written, OSHA's mandate is narrow: "Congress created OSHA to promote workplace safety. OSHA inspectors look for hazards that can potentially harm employees, such as improperly stored chemicals, inadequately lighted or ventilated workstations, or lack of protective equipment (e.g., gloves and hard hats). Vaccines against viruses are an entirely different form of protection and are beyond the scope of OSHA's mandate."

The challenges are also about whether the Biden administration is illegally legislating without any congressional authority, and, Congress aside, whether the federal government has any power whatsoever to issue any kind of vaccine mandate. If it did, Biden would just have had the Department of Health and Human Services issue such a mandate rather than trying to dress it up as a workplace standard.

So it is not so much about compulsory vaccination as it is about federal police power in general.

To be sure, no government at any level should be able to force anyone to put something into his or her body. My body, my choice is indeed a fundamental tenet of individual liberty. Vaccination mandates are antithetical to freedom.

But, on a deeper level, the administration's illegal use of federal power in this case poses an existential threat beyond vaccines, for it is the latest in a pattern of actions abusing the constitution and abusing federal authority to undermine the rule of law and democracy itself.

Remember, it wasn't long ago that the CDC attempted to sustain an eviction moratorium that a federal district court had already decided the CDC had no statutory authority to do. The Supreme Court had to step in.

Biden also killed the Keystone pipeline, though Congress regulates interstate commerce. He's being sued for that, too. More recently, the administration has supported giving the IRS an open door into your bank account to

There they go again with the 'tax the rich' ruse

Be honest. Does anyone really believe that any of these new schemes that President Joe Biden conjures up every few days to "tax the rich" will cause Bill Gates, Elon Musk or Warren Buffett to pay more taxes?



Stephen Moore
COLUMNIST

It's clear why the super-rich are a tempting target to, as Biden puts it, "pay their fair share." We have billionaires with almost unfathomable riches. Sen. Elizabeth Warren, a Massachusetts Democrat, calls their wealth "obscene."

Amazon founder Jeff Bezos has attained a wealth that exceeds some countries. Amazon's stock is now worth close to \$1 trillion. He owns perhaps 15% of the stock, which would mean his net worth is somewhere near \$150 billion. But as he has correctly pointed out, it also means that he has collectively created some \$850 billion of wealth for all of the millions of people who own Amazon stock — which is probably close to one-third of all Americans.

That's not all. Amazon has added, conservatively speaking, \$1 trillion of consumer surplus for all of the tens of millions of people in the United States and around the world who go online and click to buy products on Amazon. A "consumer surplus" is the value of a product that people buy beyond the price they pay for it. If I can buy a can of tennis balls for \$3 but I derive \$10 of pleasure from playing with those balls, that \$7 difference is my net benefit. Multiply that by the billions of purchases people make from Amazon every day.

Or consider Sergey Brin, the co-founder of Google. He is a billionaire many times over, but he provides an intricate search engine that finds for you nearly any information you want in about five seconds. And the miracle here is that he charged you *zero* for it. So maybe there is an elusive free lunch after all.

Progressives like Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez argue that people like Musk and Facebook's Mark Zuckerberg became multibillionaires thanks to government programs, such as schools and roads. Maybe. But it is arguably more accurate to say that they could reach their empire of riches because the government *didn't* stand in their way. There's a good reason eight of the 10 most valuable companies in the world were sprouted here in the land of the free, the U.S., and not in China, Japan, Germany or France.

The Democrats argue that raising income, capital gains or wealth taxes on these rich people to as much as 55%, or

half their annual earnings, is good for the economy because it will help pay for social programs to help the poor, such as free child care. But if you had to choose someone to invest your money in a way

that will reward you with a high payoff, who would you choose? An entrepreneur with a proven golden touch like Musk or a politician like House Speaker Nancy Pelosi?

Higher tax rates on the rich are almost sure to make our society poorer, not richer. The government can't even run a railroad, stop \$75 billion of unemployment fraud or build a health care website.

Then there is the question I asked above: Will the rich really pay more if the top tax rate goes to 55% on millionaires? Doubtful. Billionaires like Buffett and Gates hire squadrons of lawyers, lobbyists and tax accountants who find or invent new loopholes in the tax system to shield them from the IRS tax collectors. This is why over the last 50 years, higher tax rates have generally corresponded with lower tax collections from the rich.

The scheme we should all be on to by now is that higher tax rates on the rich are always unfailingly gateways to taxing everyone else.

The original 1913 income tax was 1% for people with incomes above \$3,000 (about \$83,000 today) and \$4,000 in income for married couples (about \$111,000 today). The top rate was 7% on \$500,000 or more (\$13.8 million). About 3% of the population was taxed. Congress promised the public two things:

Tax rates would never go above 10%, and the middle class would never pay the tax. A few short years later, the highest rate was 70%, and almost everyone got socked with this new income tax to be paid by the rich.

The Alternative Minimum Tax in the late 1960s was aimed at a handful of multimillionaires. However, it wasn't long before this tax gadget was squeezing millions of people.

Biden promises he will never tax anyone making less than \$400,000. Really? Then why does he want to audit the transaction of every person with \$10,000 or more in their bank accounts?

It turns out that you may not think of yourself as rich. But Washington does.

Stephen Moore is a senior fellow at FreedomWorks. He is the co-founder of the Committee to Unleash Prosperity and is a contributor to the *Washington Examiner*.

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NORTHWOODS POLITICAL DIGEST

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Tiffany: Biden must act against foreign governments fueling border crisis

U.S. Rep. Tom Tiffany (R-Wisconsin 7th) and three of his House colleagues have sent a letter to President Biden demanding that he take decisive actions against the Mexican government and other Central American governments that they say are contributing to chaos on the southern border.

The letter requests that the Biden administration reinstate the successful Trump-era "Remain in Mexico" policy, and put economic pressure on other governments in the region who they say are allowing millions of migrants to pass through their territory on their way to the United States.

The lawmakers also pressed Biden to halt the issuance of visas to nationals of countries encouraging illegal migration and consider rescinding 'temporary protected status' for nationals of illegal migrant source countries.

"Recent news reports indicate that yet another massive group of illegal migrants — as many as 100,000 — are approaching the United States," Tiffany said. "Central American governments appear to be actively participating in this massive, transnational human trafficking operation by facilitating the passage of migrants through their territory. In order to avert this catastrophe, President Biden must take swift and decisive actions to put pressure on the government of Mexico and those in Central American nations to stop them from contributing to this worsening disaster."

In the letter, Tiffany and his colleagues said it was time for tougher policies to secure the border.

"The carrots are not working, Mr. President," they wrote. "It is time to use the sticks."

Wisconsin tourism spending growing again

Gov. Tony Evers and Wisconsin Department of Tourism secretary-designee Anne Sayers celebrated news in Wisconsin's tourism industry this week as national travel spending data for September revealed Wisconsin's first growth in monthly year-over-year tourism spending compared to 2019, while the national average continues to lag at a 9-percent drop.

They said the growth signals a strong economic rebound for the industry as overtaking tourism spending in Wisconsin's record-setting 2019 has long been the Department of Tourism's goal for the industry's recovery, which was one of the industries hit first and hardest by the pandemic. Wisconsin was one of only 13 states to post positive growth over 2019, according to the United States Travel Association's monthly tourism spending data.

"The tourism industry is an essential part of our state and our economy," Evers said. "We've put more than \$200 million in federal recov-



ery funds toward helping our tourism and hospitality industries get through this pandemic and bounce back, and I'm proud of our work to help support our economic recovery."

According to the report, both Illinois and Minnesota lagged the national average at 21 percent and 20 percent spending declines while Iowa and Michigan exceeded the national average, losing five percent and three percent traveler spending compared to 2019. Wisconsin at one percent growth was the only state in the Midwest set to exceed spending for any month compared to 2019 since the beginning of the pandemic.

"We expect to see more bumps in the long road to recovery, but we are on the right path and we want to celebrate this moment for the tourism industry workers whose livelihoods depend on this rebound," Sayers said. "While meetings and conventions and other large group gatherings are slow to return, leisure travelers are making up for it by spending their time and their dollars in Wisconsin to experience the unexpected and when that happens, Wisconsin wins."

In 2020, Wisconsin tourism's \$17.3 billion industry saw a 22-percent decline compared to 2019, the state's best year on record. While September is just a snapshot of one month and the Department of Tourism anticipates 2021 to still be down compared to 2019, the shift to increased spending is another indicator of Wisconsin tourism's strong recovery.

DSPS secures funding for fund to repair or replace aging septic systems

The Department of Safety and Professional Services is re-opening grant applications for the Wisconsin Fund, a program that provides financial assistance to homeowners and small businesses with failing private on-site wastewater treatment systems (POWTS).

Even when still operational, failing POWTS, commonly called septic systems, are a health concern because they contaminate well and

ground water with disease-causing bacteria and other microbes. Systems easily cost several thousand dollars or more to repair or replace, and this can be an extreme hardship to homeowners and small businesses.

The Wisconsin Fund exists solely to help Wisconsinites with limited resources handle those expenses.

"We are pleased to be re-opening applications for the Wisconsin Fund," said DSPS secretary Dawn Crim. "We recognize that this funding is invaluable for many rural communities."

Eligibility is based on several criteria, including household income and age of the POWTS. Currently 67 counties of Wisconsin's 72 counties, the city of Franklin, and the Oneida tribe of Wisconsin participate in the program. County government officials assist interested individuals in determining eligibility and in preparation of grant applications.

Crim says the agency is eager to extend the program to the remaining five counties and all 12 recognized tribal nations in Wisconsin.

"There is not another funding source like this," Crim said. "We want to make sure that those who need it have access to it."

The department has administered the Wisconsin Fund since its inception in 1978, and the program has been a lifeline for homeowners who would not otherwise have been able to afford to repair their failing POWTS. However, the program sunset at the end of the 2019-21 biennium and no grants were awarded this year.

Recognizing the importance of the Wisconsin Fund, the governor signed 2021 Wisconsin Act 67, which reauthorized the program. Due to the timing of the reauthorization, the department was unable to accept grant applications for the 2021-22 budget year. Because grants were not awarded last year, the department will award up to \$1,680,000, or two years' worth of grant funding, in a single round.

Applications are now open and close on January 31, 2022. Funds will be disbursed after July 1, 2022. These dates are set by statute.

Individuals and small business owners interested in applying for Wisconsin Fund grants should contact their county administration or tribal government.

The Department of Safety and Professional Services issues more than 240 unique licenses, administers dozens of boards and councils that regulate professions, enforces state building codes, runs the state fire prevention program, and maintains the award-winning Wisconsin Enhanced Prescription Drug Monitoring Program, which is a key tool in the multi-faceted public health campaign to address the opioid epidemic.

Evers signs education transparency bill into law

Gov. Tony Evers has signed into law a bill authored by Sen. Mary

Felzkowski (R-Tomahawk) that will provide Wisconsinites with access to information and details regarding how their school district is spending their taxpayer dollars.

"I am thrilled that this bill is being signed into law today," Felzkowski said. "Over the last several years, I have worked with stakeholders throughout the education community to forge a consensus on making school district spending information accessible to the public."

The aim of the legislation is to make it easier for the public to track exactly how their school district is spending the funding they receive. The end will be an easy-to-access school expenditure portal that the Department of Public Instruction shall maintain on their website.

Any member of the public, parent, or teacher can look up their school district and see what funding their school is receiving and where the money is going. The bill will create an advisory committee comprised of individuals selected by the governor, Assembly, and Senate who will make recommendations on categories DPI must include in the school expenditure portal.

"At its core, our bill is about transparency and access, and about every taxpayer, parent, teacher, reporter, and school board member who has at one point or another found our school funding data difficult to comprehend," Felzkowski said. "Every member of the public should have the opportunity for an informed discussion about school spending with their school's leadership."

The Wisconsin Institute for Law & Liberty (WILL) also supported the legislation.

"WILL is proud to work with Sen. Felzkowski and Rep Gae Maganfeci (R-Dresser) to craft and champion legislation to create much-needed transparency about public school funding," said WILL director of education policy, Libby Sobic. "For the first time, the public will be able to determine just how taxpayer funds are allocated and whether it is benefitting our students and teachers."

WILL said it supported the legislation because citizens want to know what is working at the district level.

"They deserve to know which districts are proving efficient and which ones are wasteful," the group said. "They want to know how spending correlates with academic outcomes. So, it's time to give them the proper tools. The first step is accessible, uniform information on public school district spending."

Currently, WILL states, Wisconsin's system does not provide enough transparency on public school spending, and it is nearly impossible to meaningfully compare one school district's expenditures to another since the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction only reports information on general finance data for school districts.

Our View

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see what you are doing with even modest amounts of your money, while, over at the Department of Justice, the attorney general has signaled his intention to track down terrorist soccer moms.

So the battle is oh-so-important. It's about medical freedom and medical choice; but it's also about all fundamental liberties. As the lawsuits argue, if the Biden administration can get away with this sweeping dictate, it can get away with almost anything.

Finally, do not count on the courts to stand at the barricades for liberty. Per-

haps they will, and there are excellent and all important legal arguments against the proposed emergency standard.

Just remember that conservatives were sure a conservative court would overturn Obamacare, and it didn't. And anybody who has witnessed the votes of so-called conservative Brian Hagedorn on the

Wisconsin Supreme Court should know better.

No, the battle will be won or lost ultimately at the ballot box, and that's why anti-authoritarian activism is so important right now — more important than ever. Activism for election integrity. Activism for civil liberties, and that means standing up for people's right to say things and take

positions that you hate with all your heart. Activism for open government. Activism for the U.S. Constitution and the freedoms it guarantees.

One way or another, it seems, we Americans will all be rolling up our sleeves — either for the hard work of taking our government back, or for endless injections of tyranny if we fail.