

OUR VIEW

## District's equity antics failed Eau Claire

The belated release of information about the Eau Claire school district's equity committee is welcome. But that doesn't absolve the district of its utter failure to follow the clear requirements of the state's open meetings and records laws, nor should it be mistaken for a signal that the district will follow the laws in the future.

Formed back in July, the district has done virtually everything it could to cloak the committee's actions behind a self-serving façade of fatuous legalisms. When the district announced the committee, it said the members would advise it on a review of existing policies and create a three- to five-year plan. The goal in itself may be laudable. But it is indisputable that the committee was formed to guide the district's steps.

From the very start the district went out of its way to try to dodge open meetings and records requirements. How? Officials claimed that the committee was the district's creation, not the school board's. In their faulty interpretation of the statutes, that meant the committee wasn't subject to the same public scrutiny as every other committee.

A comment from Board President Tim Nordin from July suggests that stance was part of the strategy from the beginning:

"It's not led or overseen by the board," Nordin told the Leader-Telegram. "The board works with the superintendent, essentially, so we're certainly going to be interested in the work of the committee because it will apply to overall equity and antiracism work."

The strategy was in clear conflict with other statements, which claimed the committee was enhancing "the ability to get involved and bring people's voices to the table." That seems unlikely, given the lengths to which the district went to conceal the committee members' identities and the meetings they were holding. The evidence suggests the district knew which voices it wanted at the table, and took steps to ensure those were the only ones heard.

More recently, the district said it had placed the committee's membership on the website, a step whose quiet nature stands in stark contrast with the proclamations that heralded the committee's creation. While still claiming the documents were not subject to the open records law, it also finally handed over the meeting agendas the Leader-Telegram had been seeking for several months.

When you know you're right, you stand by your position. When you know you're wrong, you comply with requirements while claiming you don't really have to do so. The district's actions are the latter, and are revealing.

Importantly, the documents belatedly released by the district do not include minutes. It claims none were kept. Again, this is a clear violation of the state's legal requirements. That's not just our opinion. The Wisconsin Freedom of Information Council said the same, and the council said the ruling the district continues to point to as justification is being badly misapplied.

The district's dilatory approach, designed to postpone the inevitable public release of information, even included its offer of an interview with the superintendent. The offer was only made after we told the district the article we were preparing was going to print — with or without an official comment.

The district then made the offer conditional on us submitting our questions in advance. We refused and, confronted again with the possibility of the article going to print without the district's input, they backed down on the demand.

Time and again the district has approached requests for information, both from media and the public, with an approach best described as deny, deflect and delay. It has consciously sacrificed credibility and the public interest in order to defend the indefensible.

Whether the committee is itself a good idea isn't the issue. Nor is it whether the committee's work is beneficial. The issue at hand is the district's blatant refusal to follow the requirements of Wisconsin's legal statutes. Only when the district backed itself into a corner, when it had no further options, did it finally do what it should have done months ago.

Folks, when you're an elected official — and make no mistake, that's precisely what school board members are — you do not have the option of blithely tossing aside the law. District officials should be deeply ashamed of how they have hidden things from the public.

But, if this circus is any guide, it's going to take them six months to admit they are.



## The true cost of Biden agenda

President Joe Biden and Capitol Hill Democrats are racing to pass their massive social spending bill, known as Build Back Better, before Christmas. Maybe they'll succeed, and maybe they won't — a lot depends on whether Democratic Sen. Joe Manchin hops on board. But no one should have any illusions about what BBB, the final piece in the Democrats' COVID-year spending orgy, costs. After a lot of deceptive claims from Democrats, we finally have an answer.

Biden has claimed, falsely, that the bill is "fully paid for." But last month, the Congressional Budget Office released an analysis saying BBB would add \$367 billion to the deficit over the next 10 years. So much for "fully paid for."

But it's much, much worse than that. According to a new assessment from the CBO, the cost of the bill under real-world conditions — that is, if it is ultimately extended for a decade, the way Democrats want — will add not \$367 billion to the deficit but \$3 trillion. That's more than eight times the deficit spending Democrats are citing.

Here's how it works: In order to keep the costs of the bill down, Democrats have inserted a lot of "sunsets" in it — that is, arbitrary dates at which provisions would end. For example, the centerpiece of Build Back Better is the child tax credit, a program under which the government sends monthly checks to families with children, with no requirement that recipients work, or look for work, or anything. It is a new dole, and it has long been a goal of some Democratic policymakers. Democrats want to make it a permanent feature of American life.

This year, passing the enormous COVID relief bill, Democrats inserted the child tax credit — but only for a year. Now, there was no way in the world that Democrats believed the country should have a child tax credit for just one year. No, the idea was to pass the bill, get the policy into law, and then renew it year after year. After all, what heartless lawmaker would want to take sustenance and support from children? At this moment, the child tax credit is scheduled to expire on Dec. 31, and Democrats are working frantically to extend it. "It's as important

a thing as there is in the Build Back Better bill, and to me it was the most important thing we did in calendar 2021," Democratic Sen. Sherrod Brown said recently.

BBB would extend the child tax credit, but only for one more year, until the end of 2022. As a "temporary" measure, the CBO said it would add \$185 billion to the deficit. Estimating its cost for just one year keeps the stated overall cost of the bill down. But guess what will happen at the end of 2022? Democrats will say it is absolutely necessary that the child tax credit be extended. And the cost will go up.



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So Republican Sen. Lindsey Graham and Rep. Jason Smith recently asked the CBO: What would provisions of the bill add to the deficit if they were extended for 10 years, as Democrats originally intended and hope to make a reality? For the child tax credit, the added deficit goes from \$185 billion to \$1.597 trillion — a huge increase. That's the real cost of just one part of the Build Back Better bill.

Graham and Smith asked about other provisions as well. Democrats say child care and preschool subsidies would add \$381 billion to the deficit, ending after 2027. But they will actually add \$752 billion to the deficit if extended a full decade, as Democrats intend. Democrats say health insurance subsidies will add \$74 billion to the deficit, ending after 2025. But they will actually add \$220 billion to the deficit for the decade. Increasing the earned income tax credit would add \$13 billion to the deficit, ending in 2022. But it would actually add \$135 billion to the deficit for the decade, as Democrats intend.

You can see what is going on. Using their bare majority in the House and their not-really-a-majority in the Senate, Democrats hope to pass a massive spending bill that is actually far more massive than it looks. The estimated \$367 billion addition to the deficit — which is bad enough — would actually be a \$3 trillion addition to the deficit. Whenever you see Democrats estimate the cost of Build Back Better, multiply it by eight or 10, and you'll be getting close.

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## Trump team frantic on Jan. 6

Former White House chief of staff Mark Meadows joined Fox News host Sean Hannity on Monday in denouncing the House select committee investigation of the Jan. 6 insurrection, with Hannity repeatedly calling it a "sham" and Meadows insisting the bipartisan probe is all about "going after" former President Donald Trump. Despite all of Meadows' denials and avoidance tactics, he's right on that point: It is about Trump. It's about the president's overt efforts to foment insurrection and his refusal, for 3 hours and 7 minutes, to tell the rioters to stand down. And it's about determining whether the Trump White House helped plan the attack with collaboration by pro-Trump members of Congress.

Forcing Meadows to testify is essential to determine who conspired in a deadly attempt to subvert democracy. So, yes, it is about Trump.

Despite Meadows' protests, he has no credible claim of executive privilege, having just published a book in which he reveals all kinds of privileged information from his White House days. Meadows also has already cooperated with the House committee, having released messages sent by prominent Fox News personalities and even Donald Trump Jr. begging Meadows to intervene with the president.

Perhaps more to the legal point about executive privilege: It doesn't extend to former presidents, and President Joe Biden has already declined to invoke it on Trump's behalf. Two separate court rulings have rejected Trump's claims of executive privilege regarding Jan. 6. So Meadows' refusal to appear before the committee absolutely deserved the contempt-of-Congress proceedings before the House on Tuesday.

Meadows' appearance on Hannity's show was doubly curious for the host's own avoidance of any accountability for his frantic efforts — along with hosts Laura Ingraham and Brian Kilmeade — to encourage Trump's intervention. On Monday's show, Hannity went to such lengths to denigrate the select committee's work that he ran a headline across the bottom of the screen calling it a "sham."

But at the time, the invasion was anything but a sham for Hannity. He messaged Meadows to urge the president to stop it. "Can he make a statement? Ask people to leave the Capitol."

Ingraham, who has been particularly vitriolic in attacking the select committee, warned Meadows on Jan. 6: "Mark, the president needs to tell these people in the Capitol to go home. He is destroying his legacy." Ingraham certainly seemed to be suggesting in her message that Trump bore culpability by refusing to intervene.

Even Trump's son joined in the chorus of urgent appeals to the president. "He's got to condemn this (expletive) ASAP," Trump Jr. texted to Meadows.

Yet, amazingly, the same chorus is now singing that Jan. 6 was much ado about nothing. Their hypocritical underscores why the select committee's work is so vital in communicating the truth to the American public and bringing any White House and congressional conspirators to justice for their roles.

— *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*

## FROM OUR FILES

### 5 years ago — 2016

Eau Claire's Action City, 2402 Lorch Ave., opens a 30,000-square-foot trampoline park.

### 10 years ago — 2011

UW-Eau Claire will honor former men's basketball coach **Ken Anderson** by naming the court at Zorn Arena after him.

### 20 years ago — 2001

American forces hear **Osama bin Laden** talking on short-range radio in the Tora Bora area of eastern Afghanistan, a U.S. official says.

### 35 years ago — 1986

CIA Director **William Casey** suffers a seizure on the eve of questioning about an Iran arms deal.

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