

OPINIONS

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THE LAKELAND TIMES : OUR VIEW

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GREGG WALKER, Publisher | RICHARD MOORE, Columnist

More abuse of power; wake up voters

Earlier this year, we wrote about potential issues in Minocqua town government, which at the time we characterized as a clear abuse of power.

The issue then involved a possible walking quorum concerning the sale of the Campanile parking lot to the town, but, as we wrote, there was a whole lot more going on than just a potential walking quorum. Among other things, supervisors elbowed a developer who had a contract to buy the property out of the picture, without the slightest effort to get public input.

Along the way, the board held discussions in closed session that should have been open, they likely committed two separate open meetings violations, and one supervisor flat out contradicted his own statement.

As we wrote, the town shed all pretense of due process: “The issue is due process and public participation, and this is simply no way for public officials to act, regardless of whether any laws were technically broken.”

We know, too, that discussions about the Campanile property, and about the town owning it, occurred at least between town supervisors John Thompson, Bill Stengl, and Mark Hartzheim. Supposedly, though, Thompson never discussed the matter with supervisor Brian Fricke, according to them, even though the two went on a fishing trip during that time. As we noted, it was a ludicrous claim, though we acknowledged we couldn’t prove it.

Now the town is back up to its old tricks, and — wouldn’t you know it? — Fricke is again at the heart of the matter.

This situation involves the plan commission, of which Fricke is a member, and a tourist rooming house (TRH) permit application by Minocqua property owner Amy Davis, and once again there was not even a pretense of due process.

At the plan commission meeting at which the permit was considered, members tried to tie Davis’s pier, which the commission believed to be noncompliant with state regulations, to the TRH permit. We have already written that that is illegal, not least because the town has no jurisdiction over piers.

Beyond that, any condition placed on a TRH permit must be related to the tourist rooming house’s impact upon neighboring land or public facilities, and, specifically, related to its location, development, and operation. The pier condition was extraneous to all that.

But just as important as the legality of the plan commission’s actions is the ethical conduct of some of its members and the town’s ongoing dismissal of due process, especially its devolution into a totalitarian system whereby citizens are presumed to be guilty of crimes against the state — in this case, of crimes against some commission members’ political agenda — and the burden falls on them to prove their innocence.

In this case, the town moved from requiring compliance with all state regulations — again, an illegal condition itself — to forcing Davis to prove her compliance. That’s a big shift of burden onto property owners, and it’s a telling mindset for government officials because its fundamental starting point is that everybody is guilty unless they can prove otherwise. That effectively stands the foundation of democratic due process on its head.

When the burden of proof is not on the government, it’s a lot easier to target individuals the government doesn’t like for whatever reason. That’s the biggest rationale for demanding adherence to due process principles.

In the Davis case, the town even admitted it was blatantly discriminating against Davis. We know of people who were not required to prove pier compliance to receive a TRH permit, and, lest some argue that specific complaints had been raised about Davis’s pier, the only agency

with jurisdiction over the pier had made no such complaint and committee members repeatedly said they didn’t know if the pier was compliant or not.

As such, commission members were merely speculating, and taking official action on nothing more than non-evidence-based conjecture.

At one point, town chairman Mark Hartzheim even admitted discrimination, saying the commission had approved another TRH permit even though “they had a pier there that you can argue had no business being there.”

All that is bad enough, but it gets worse. From the outset of the meeting, Fricke pursued the compliance of the pier. That in itself was not surprising because, in pre-meeting texts between Hartzheim and Fricke obtained by The Times, Fricke was asking Hartzheim to print out pictures of Davis’s pier for the meeting, so he was clearly going to attack the tourist rooming house permit using pier compliance as a weapon.

But was the pier Fricke’s real concern, or was it the TRH permit that he was trying to derail? It’s a question to be asked because, in those texts, Fricke sends Hartzheim news of a temporary moratorium on short-term rentals in the Lake Tahoe area, to which Hartzheim responds that the town likely had no power to enact a similar one.

If the TRH permit was Fricke’s real concern, that is highly problematic, for it would mean he was trying to kill a perfectly legal rental using a completely unrelated issue, and it’s the very reason that extraneous conditions cannot be allowed on conditional use permits and administrative use permits — they offer too many avenues for officials to concoct frivolous reasons to deny certain otherwise legal projects.

To wit, if Fricke could not use the pier as an excuse to withhold the TRH permit, and that permit was his real objection, he would have to be forthcoming and honest about his dislike of tourist rooming houses in order to object to the project.

Even worse, Fricke said at the meeting that “friends” of his had asked him to take up the matter at the town level. There is absolutely no worse conflict of interest for a public official than acting officially on behalf of friends.

The state’s ethics code for local officials prohibits officials from acting “in a matter in which s/he is privately interested,” and yet that is exactly what Fricke did, as evidenced by his own words at the plan commission meeting.

And his was a conflict of interest on steroids. Not only did Fricke vote to tie pier compliance to the TRH permit for his friends, but immediately following the meeting he officially complained — using his official title and office — about the pier to the DNR on behalf of those friends.

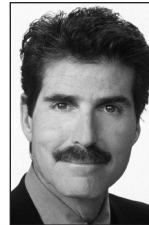
Think about that action. The plan commission had just voted — again, illegally we think — to require Davis to provide proof of DNR compliance within 60 days. So why did Fricke feel compelled to make a complaint 19 minutes later, and to follow up with another email some three weeks later?

To be sure, he had no official reason to, unless he was on a personal vendetta driven by his desire to appease these “friends” of his.

To use his official capacity to do so is an ethical breach of the highest order. To make matters worse, Fricke had been informed at the plan commission meeting that the town could not itself vote to complain to the DNR because it wasn’t on the meeting agenda, yet signing his complaint to the DNR as a town supervisor effectively, if not technically, imprinted the complaint as a town action.

Fricke was also told that citizens having pier

Toxic victimhood



John Stossel
COLUMNIST

Are you a racist?

All white people are, says “White Fragility” author Robin DiAngelo. Race explains everything, says bestselling “How to Be an Antiracist” author Ibram X. Kendi. “Every policy is either racist or anti-racist.”

Kendi’s and DiAngelo’s books are now recommended reading at schools, corporations and in the military. Both authors command high speaking fees.

Isn’t that good? It’s important to educate people about racism.

But John McWhorter, author of “Woke Racism,” says, “The way we’re being encouraged to think, *hurts* Black people.”

In my new video, he gives this example: “There is a disproportionate number of suspensions of Black boys in schools for violence. (Kendi says) that must be racist ... a stereotype of Black men as violent. But ... the data makes it very clear that Black boys do commit more violent acts in schools. If you don’t suspend those boys, the violence is being perpetrated (mostly) against other Black kids.”

Kendi’s positions “leave Black kids in the lurch,” says McWhorter.

Kendi and DiAngelo call most every disparity between races “systemic racism.”

White people live longer than Black people? Racism. Income inequality? Racism.

White and Asian students get higher test scores? Systemic racism.

In the past, says McWhorter, civil rights leaders asked, “How can we make it so that Black kids are better at the test?” Now they want to “eliminate the tests” because they “make Black people unhappy.”

This just makes the problem worse, he says, because it encourages people to think of themselves as victims. If you believe you are a helpless victim of racism, why study?

The idea that it is “unreasonable to expect Black kids to use analytical thinking in a rigorous way. ... This is a new way of thinking. It’s a religious way of thinking.”

Blaming racism for low test scores ignores “aspects of Black culture that don’t stress getting good at those tests — the way that South Asian immigrant culture clearly does.”

Nigerian and Caribbean culture, too. People from those places are often just as dark or darker than Black Americans. They “come here and deal with the same racism that everybody else does. Yet they make the best of the worst. That means: so could Black Americans.”

The media label Kendi and DiAngelo “leading scholars,” but their arguments are rarely tested in the marketplace of ideas. Both refuse to debate opponents. McWhorter calls their work far from scholarly — “more like a toxic religion, a cult.”

In fact, he adds, “Kendi is dim.”

I argue that, even if Kendi is “dim,” he’s winning hearts and minds. Companies now donate millions to his Center for Antiracist Research. His book sales and success with students show that his arguments convince people.

McWhorter disagrees. “As we come out of the pandemic and we’re less bored, less anxious, I suspect that a lot of the extremes that we saw are going to start retreating because there’s going to be pushback.”

The idea of anti-racism is “charismatic,” he adds. “It makes it seem like you’ve got one answer to a bunch of things that look disparate and difficult. But all disparities between white people and Black people are *not* due to something unfair that was driven by whites.”

I’m puzzled that DiAngelo’s and Kendi’s message is so popular today, when life for racial minorities seems to be better than ever before. With some exceptions, there’s less racism, more intermarriage, more opportunities for minorities, etc.

“Why now?” I ask.

There’s an advantage to being identified as a victim, says McWhorter. “An emotional balm to be treated as this victimized person. The problem is that it’s anti-Black.”

Anti-white too.

If the “systemic racism” cult wins, says McWhorter, “we all lose.”

John Stossel is author of “Give Me a Break: How I Exposed Hucksters, Cheats, and Scam Artists and Became the Scourge of the Liberal Media.” For other Creators Syndicate writers and cartoonists, visit www.creators.com.

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NORTHWOODS POLITICAL DIGEST

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Tiffany sends letter to Wisconsin Afghan refugee resettlement organizations

U.S. Rep. Tom Tiffany (R-Wisconsin) has sent a letter to several resettlement organizations throughout the state requesting that they thoroughly vet Afghan refugees before they are resettled in Wisconsin communities.

Due to the White House's lack of planning, Tiffany says the resettlement groups are filling in major gaps and responding to an influx of Afghans coming to the United States.

In the letter, Tiffany raises concerns about the lack of preliminary screening capabilities at the Kabul airport and what he calls the Biden administration's vague and inconsistent answers to questions about the nature and timing of the screening.

Vetting procedures that in the past took months or years now are being hastily conducted in just days or hours, Tiffany said.

"My office has assisted, since this crisis began, with getting those Afghans who participated in sensitive U.S. military, diplomatic and intelligence activities out of the country," Tiffany wrote. "I strongly support admitting these individuals to the United States and will continue to assist with that effort however I can. However, not every Afghan national seeking to enter the U.S. fits into that category, and we must all work together to ensure that those who did not directly support American efforts are thoroughly screened and vetted before being released into American neighborhoods."

Those receiving the letter include the International Institute of Wisconsin, Lutheran Social Service of Wisconsin and UP, Jewish Social Services of Madison, World Relief, Conference of Catholic Bishops, Bethany Christian Services, Human Rights First, HIAS, Church World Service, International Rescue Committee, and Episcopal Migration Ministries.

Kleefisch to step down from the 1848 Project, new leadership to be named

The 1848 Project has announced that organization founder and president Rebecca Kleefisch would be departing from her role and will announce new leadership in the coming weeks as the organization says it will continue its mission to advance the conservative movement in Wisconsin.

"When we founded the 1848 Project, it was our mission to listen, learn, and lead for the people of Wisconsin," Kleefisch said. "With the introduction of the Forward Agenda, I am confident that we have begun the process of creating a roadmap for the conservative movement to follow."



Conservatives have had many victories over the last decade, Kleefisch said.

"However, we cannot look to the past if we want to have success in the future," she said. "We must offer an optimistic vision for Wisconsin. I am confident that the 1848 Project will continue to be a leader in that space and that the conservative movement's best days are ahead of us."

Nass digs in on suing UW System

State Sen. Steve Nass (R-Whitewater), the co-chairman of the Joint Committee for Review of Administrative Rules (JCRAR), is asking the legislative leadership to sue the UW System for officially refusing to comply with Wisconsin administrative law.

Nass made his comments after the deadline passed for the UW System to submit an emergency rule to the Legislature regarding its Covid-19 mandates.

"Based on the UW System's refusal to comply with the JCRAR motion and with the provisions of Wisconsin's administrative rules law, I will be submitting a request to Assembly speaker Robin Vos and Senate majority leader Devin LeMahieu seeking legal action on behalf of JCRAR and the Legislature to force the UW System to comply with state law," Nass said.

Nass acknowledged that some Republicans were not in favoring of suing to force compliance.

"I recognize that a few legislative Republicans have already gone soft over fighting the UW System's potentially unlawful Covid-19 mandates," he said. "Last year, the Legislature went to court to end unlawful Covid-19 mandates issued by Gov. Evers's Department of Health Services. I will continue to oppose and fight unlawful Covid-19 mandates issued by any state

agency regardless of being led by a Democrat appointee or a former Republican governor."

Sadly, Nass said, some in his party would only oppose unlawful Covid-19 mandates when issued by the other party.

Fitzgerald, Foxx introduce CRT Transparency Act

U.S. Reps. Scott Fitzgerald (R-Wisconsin) and Education and Labor Committee Republican leader Virginia Foxx (R-North Carolina) have introduced the Curriculum Review of Teachings (CRT) Transparency Act.

The legislation would ensure that local school districts post the curriculum for each grade of their elementary and secondary schools on a publicly accessible website as a condition of federal funding. The lawmakers contend that lack of awareness and accountability for what is being taught in schools has allowed controversial and factually inaccurate ideas, like critical race theory, to be taught to students while keeping parents in the dark.

They say the CRT Transparency Act would address that problem by ensuring that schools make their curriculums publicly available online, so parents can see what their children are learning in school.

"Decisions about what to teach students in school are being made by bureaucrats and teachers unions, often without input from parents," Fitzgerald said. "As a result, parents across the country are flocking to their local school board to demand transparency and to oppose dangerous ideologies, like critical race theory. Parents should not have to fight for access to the curriculum their students are learning, especially when the curriculum promotes divisive and backwards theories."

Fitzgerald said the bill would help parents get a straight answer about what their children are being taught.

Foxx said that elementary and secondary education is a collaborative process between teachers and parents but too many school districts were dissolving that communication and hiding behind an opaque curriculum ripe for left-wing indoctrination.

"Parents, students, and community members deserve to know what their children are learning," she said. "Knowledge is strength, and the CRT Transparency Act strengthens both educational freedom and school choice by arming parents with the information necessary to choose the school option that works best for their child."

Evers, DHS announce extension of the \$100 Covid-19 vaccine reward program

Gov. Tony Evers and the Wisconsin

Department of Health Services (DHS) have announced that eligibility for the \$100 Covid-19 Vaccine Reward program will be extended to Sun., Sept. 19.

The program opened Aug. 20 and is available to anyone ages 12 and up in Wisconsin who gets their first dose of Covid-19 vaccine by Sept. 19. Between Aug. 20 and Sept. 1, more than 65,000 Wisconsinites have received their first dose of the Covid-19 vaccine, the state reported. The extended deadline provides an opportunity for even more people to get vaccinated.

"We're excited to see so many Wisconsinites across the state rolling up their sleeves to get the Covid-19 vaccine to help protect the health and safety of themselves and others and claiming their \$100 reward," Evers said. "I'm glad to be able to extend this program to give others the opportunity to take advantage of this great offer, and to do their part to help protect our state and stop the spread of the Delta variant."

To receive the \$100 reward, Wisconsin residents will need to register by filling out the form available at 100.wisconsin.gov or call 844-684-1064 to register over the phone. Information submitted will be used to verify that individuals have a valid first Covid-19 vaccine dose reported to the Wisconsin Immunization Registry (WIR) between Aug. 20 and Sept. 19.

Rewards cards will be mailed to the individual's Wisconsin address and may take six to eight weeks to be mailed to participants. Registration for the program will remain open until Sept. 30, 2021, but only those who receive their first Covid-19 vaccine dose within the program window are eligible for the \$100 reward.

For more information on the reward program, visit the DHS \$100 reward page or call 844-684-1064. Language assistance is available.

"The science and data are showing us that we can protect ourselves and our loved ones from the highly contagious Delta variant by getting vaccinated," said DHS secretary-designee Karen Timberlake. "All three Covid-19 vaccines are extremely safe and highly effective at preventing severe illness, hospitalization, and death. Getting vaccinated now can help protect our state as we brace for this current surge, and it can put \$100 in your pocket."

The \$100 Covid-19 Vaccine Reward Program is part of the ongoing effort to stop the spread of the highly transmissible Delta variant by encouraging Wisconsinites to get vaccinated, DHS states..

Our View

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complaints should be told to take those complaints themselves to the DNR because the town has no pier jurisdiction, but rather than convey that to his friends, Fricke decided to run interference himself, again in his official capacity.

All totaled, the magnitude of this ethical breach, this abuse of power, is breathtaking. Brian Fricke has disgraced himself and should resign or be removed from office.

We have other concerns. For the outset of the plan commission meeting, just after Fricke brought up the pier issue, commission member Mark Pertile seemed intent on making and sticking to a motion that Davis prove

her compliance to get the permit, almost as if it was a scripted play.

Throughout the meeting, Pertile controlled the discussion, leading it back to his motion. This leads us to wonder, at the least, if Fricke and Pertile had discussions about the issue and/or coordinated a plan of action prior to the meeting.

That in itself would not necessarily be illegal, but it concerns us that, outside of the exchange between Fricke and Hartzheim that we have cited, no other written communications about this matter appear to exist, at least as far as records turned over to us in response to our open records requests.

We find it hard to believe that there were no prior communications simply because of the obvious energy Fricke had about the matter in his

text exchange with Hartzheim and because Pertile quickly made his motion prior to comprehensive discussion about the legality of tethering the pier to the permit and about other options.

He seemed dialed in and determined from the get-go, again as if scripted.

Plus, we wonder why Fricke would only communicate with Hartzheim and no one else. Perhaps that is the case, or perhaps any other discussion was verbal and never set down to create an official record, but it makes us wonder if town officials have really turned over all the records that exist on this matter.

We can't say for sure, but given the town's conduct in the Campanile parking lot situation earlier this year and the strong suspicion that the plan commission meeting it-

self was pre-arranged, this week we will be asking the Oneida County sheriff's office to investigate that possibility.

The town cannot say it wasn't warned. In the aftermath of the Campanile debacle, we warned that such a step could be forthcoming if the town did not change its ways. It has not.

In that earlier editorial, we wrote that the town board's role is to facilitate due process, not to pursue pre-arranged private outcomes, and that "this incident should be used as a template for how not to conduct town business in the future."

And yet, given the lack of due process here, the ethical lapses, and the seemingly pre-written meeting — at least for some of the commission members — all that makes us think the same template is being used, and that the town

and its plan commission are still dedicated to pre-arranging private outcomes.

We wrote: "This incident has raised serious questions about the conduct of the town board and its commitment to public input and due process. They cannot ignore these issues and let such a thing happen again. Indeed, if they do not take corrective action to demonstrate to the public that they understand how inappropriate, out of line, and illegal these actions were, ... rest assured that a complaint will be forthcoming to the district attorney."

We're not headed to the district attorney but to the sheriff, but, the bottom line is, enough is enough at the town level, whether it's the town board or the plan commission, and this sad incident deserves a law enforcement look..