

## OUR VIEW

### Public access the true litmus test of city council's transparency message

Meeting after meeting, year after year, we hear about how the city's elected leaders want transparent, open government with the public's involvement. Mayor Paul Esser has tasked city staff with a "How to Run for Public Office" session each year in an effort to instruct candidates on what to expect as well as what paperwork to fill out. The mayor takes his annual "State of the City" message on the road each January, trying to get the message to as many people as possible. The mayor has preached a message of diversification of city government and seeking to include as many minority residents of the community as possible in the decisions that city government is making. Last Tuesday, however, we heard none of that.

Instead, we heard alders say they wanted to support their apparently panicked fellow alders -- not the folks they were elected to represent. We heard nothing about how the city wants public comments about the upcoming 2022 city budget -- which we heard when the budget itself was introduced. City Council President and District 1 Alder Steve Stocker asked for the public to complete its "homework" assignment and provide the input needed for the council's decision-making process. Instead, we saw the council complete a tie vote, 4-4, against allowing the public back into the council chambers. If the irony wasn't so bold-faced, it would almost be laughable.

Where is the concern about equity and inclusion -- which are supposed to be the so-called guiding factors in the mayor's policy and decision making? There are more questions the council members who voted against public being allowed back into the council chambers need to answer: Where is the concern for public input? Not everyone has a computer or cable TV to be able to watch council meetings live. Not everyone has the technical savvy to be able to let the city know they want to have their concerns heard during these online/virtual meetings. What is the city doing to ensure these people are not only heard, but that any lingering concerns are being addressed? Many of those whose voices are not being heard can neither

afford a computer nor cable TV access. It seems these people are being permanently excluded if they can't attend meetings in person to express their concerns at council meetings. Is the city council really serious about open, accessible city government? This is perhaps the most important question of all for alders to answer. Of course, the answer should be an enthusiastic, "yes, absolutely!" If alders want to comply with the spirit and the letter of the Wisconsin Open Meetings Law, this shouldn't even be a question worth consideration. Other area municipalities -- including the Sun Prairie School Board -- have returned to in-person public meetings? Why does

the city council persist? There is one more question that needs serious discussion and debate by the council: What message does our Oct. 19 tie vote send to the public? By voting against open government, our city elected officials are speaking loud and clear to the voiceless and under-represented: We don't care what you think, and we don't want to hear from you. That is perhaps the most disturbing and unaddressed outcome from the Sun Prairie City Council's Oct. 19 Committee of the Whole vote. While four members of the council wanted to let the public in, four did not. That's a sad, twisted, foolish message for municipal elected officials to send.

## THE RICH LOWRY COLUMN

### Joe Biden and the new missile gap

The Biden administration is hesitant to call our competition with China a new Cold War, even though Beijing has zero qualms about making the parallels with our decades-long struggle with the Soviet Union abundantly clear. We are once again discussing a "Sputnik moment," a nuclear arms race, and a missile gap -- all throwbacks to the 1950s-1980s -- thanks to China's aggressive pursuit of military capabilities designed to deter and defeat the United States. Whatever Beijing may say and however we may try to comfort ourselves with cushioning delusions, the Chinese have repeatedly made it plain that they intend to hold U.S. bases and our homeland at risk. The example of Sputnik, the primitive Soviet satellite launched in 1957 that raised the prospect of the U.S. losing the space race, was on everyone's lips with a bombshell Financial Times report over the weekend. According to the FT, the Chinese tested a nuclear-capable hypersonic missile that circled the Earth once before descending on its target, thus demonstrating "an advanced space capability that caught U.S. intelligence by surprise." It's not clear why



Rich Lowry

anyone would be shocked. It wasn't a secret that China and Russia were developing these technologies, and indeed, it wasn't a secret that China had leapt ahead of us. (The Chinese, bringing the same transparency they've shown regarding the origins of COVID-19, say it was just a routine space launch.) Hypersonic missiles bring a new element to the ever-evolving competition between missile offense and defense. As former state department official Christian Brose notes in his book "The Kill Chain," ballistic missiles travel fast but in a predictable parabolic path. Cruise missiles, on the other hand, travel relatively slowly but are maneuverable and therefore unpredictable. Hypersonic missiles are both unpredictable and fast -- six times faster than a Tomahawk missile. That means they are uniquely suited to defeat our missile defenses. Not only can't we counter them, we can't track

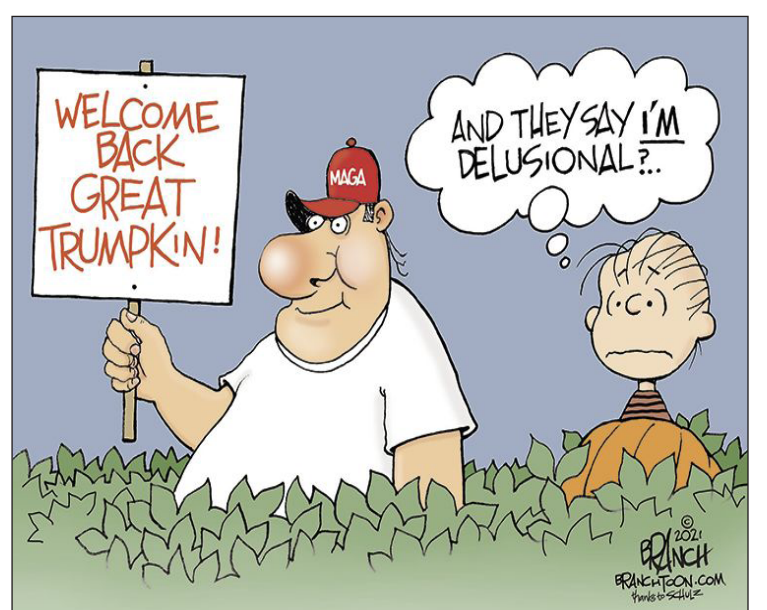
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## THE BOB FRANKEN COLUMN

### Mom distortions and the Virginia gubernatorial election

Moms for Liberty -- an ultraconservative group that identifies with parental rights in schools -- started in Florida, but they've settled in Virginia right now because Virginia is the most important game in town politically -- in fact, in the whole country. Their name and cause are a teeny bit bogus. I mean, is there an organization called Moms AGAINST Liberty? And does anyone oppose parents' rights in schools? The questions are how far do our liberties go and parents' rights to do what. Are our liberties absolute? Of course not. Should they extend to questions of public health? Of course not. So when it comes to the right of government to establish rules about face masks and vaccines, aren't those who disrupt meetings of local boards of education just making the board members' jobs harder, just like when they shout over advocates of a particular progressive curriculum? Of course. But that's going on around the country, and, in Virginia, it's coming most potently from Glenn Youngkin, who is a candidate for governor and a surrogate for Donald Trump. Youngkin has done everything he can to hide the connection, but it's there to see. Youngkin is a Republican, the party taken over by Trump, and the GOP no longer cherishes truth any more than Trump does. So Glenn Youngkin, like his mentor, has hidden his real agenda, which is to be a stand-in for the Trumpster.



Bob Franken

From his first TV ad onward, his Democratic opponent, former Gov. Terry McAuliffe, has tried to KO Youngkin with Trump. Meanwhile, Youngkin has attempted to bob and weave with parents. In the meantime, the Democrats are pursuing their usual agenda, which is snatching defeat from the jaws of victory. You would think that winning would be a cakewalk for McAuliffe by associating Youngkin with a discredited Trump and his "Big Lie" -- that he had the election stolen from him by Joe Biden. But McAuliffe and his fellow Democrats ran a tired campaign, and only now, when it might be too late, are they realizing it. So Virginia will be the stomping grounds for any

Dem heavyweights like Barack Obama, and even the lightweights, as they try to rescue the commonwealth (state) from Donald Trump lite. In the process, they might rescue the country from Trump the heavy. Virginia has an odd election year. It amounts to a midyear midyear. It also means that it takes on an inordinate significance. So if Youngkin wins the election and pulls off an upset -- and it's trending that way, which calls into question whether it would be an "upset" at all -- then Trump will claim all the credit. And we will see all the craziness return. If Youngkin loses the election, the camouflage will be that he's a dilettante, not a Republican, as opposed to just some regular guy with a potent jump shot. Did I mention that his first

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## LETTERS POLICY

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