

# TALK AROUND TOWN

Opinions and commentaries about issues of the day

## WHAT IS "LOUD & CLEAR" ABOUT?

**The Daily Press letters policy?** Letters to the editor must be limited to 500 or fewer words and are subject to editing for grammar and clarity and headlining as appropriate. Letters must be typed. Those who submit letters must include a full name, city of residence and phone number for verification. Contributors are limited to one letter every 14 days.

**Your view:** Letters to the editors should be viewed by our readers with a critical eye and thoughtful mind. They are meant to provide a beginning point for dialogue, not as an ending point for belief. We must caution our readers that letters to the editor are only mere opinions.



## Public deserves school explanation

Who else thought immediately of Gwyneth Paltrow when they read the Ashland School District's press release saying the district and Superintendent Erik Olson were "separating."

Paltrow, of course, announced her divorce a few years ago by saying she and husband Chris Martin were going through a "conscious uncoupling."

But as ridiculous as Paltrow is, the school district farce is equally serious and troubling.

Was Olson fired? Did he resign? Why? Did it have anything to do with the legal action being taken against him and the district, as reported on today's front page? Was he in conflict with the School Board's reckless and dangerous decision to start the school year as if we weren't in the middle of a resurgent

pandemic that has claimed 600,000 American lives?

"Separating" covers a whole lot of ground, and residents have every right to know what led to his departure.

"The school board is elected to serve the community, the public school system is a public institution whose employee's wages are paid by us, this man was paid a generous

salary," one reader wrote on our Facebook page linking the story about Olson's departure. "I think the public deserves to know what happened here. He received a severance package due to disagreements with his last district...what happened here?? To clarify, the man is a wannabe dictator and I'm happy to see him go, just crazy how often our board meets behind closed doors and information is kept from the public and the staff." For the record, Olson was

hired at a salary of \$144,000 — almost quadruple the median household income in Ashland County. I'm not sure about the "wannabe dictator" allegation, but I do know the school board does a lot of business, occasionally illegally, behind closed doors.

The board is asking residents to believe that suddenly and without any previous problems, it met in closed session to discuss Olson's performance. Days later, with no public vote or comment, he was gone.

This is the same board that voted behind closed doors in 2019 to close two local charter schools at a meeting at which it said it would be discussing "contract negotiations." After a complaint by the Daily Press, Ashland County District Attorney David Meany found the board had violated open-meetings law and directed members to rescind their illegal vote and vote again, this time in public.

The Daily Press now has filed open-records requests seeking any severance agreement that district reached with Olson, copies of Olson's performance evaluations and copies of communications between board members about Olson, because if they discussed getting rid of him via what is called a "walking quorum" — an agreement reached away from the eyes of the public — then they violated the law again.

We're doing this not because we enjoy being a pain in the board's behind or forcing it to jump through a bunch of hoops, but because residents have a right to know what their elected representatives are doing and why they're doing it.

As educators, they should be setting an example for students and the people they serve. And the example they're setting is a poor one.

*Peter J. Wasson is managing editor of the Ashland Daily Press.*



PETER J. WASSON

## Laboring forward through a pandemic

Every Labor Day, I write a column to commend and show gratitude to the hard-working men and women of the 74th Assembly District. Last year, I opened my column with "This Labor Day, we are more than six months into a global pandemic that has changed all of our

lives." Now, a full year and nine months later and we are still grappling with the throes of the coronavirus pandemic. It is hard to find continuity in today's day and age. So much of what we do now is based on the evolving circumstances of the virus.

Through the mess of this past year and the rocky recovery we embark on today, one through-line remains a constant in an ever-changing world:

working men and women who push us forward. "Forward" is a word so deeply ingrained in the people of Wisconsin that we display it on our state's flag. Since it was adopted in 1851, Wisconsin's motto has been a reminder that forward progression and change would not wait for Wisconsin.

We could not move forward without our labor force pushing us toward a better future.

But progress, moving forward, the direction itself, does not always mean we will move in a straight line. There is nuance in who moves forward and whether we move collectively or as individuals. In so many ways, Wisconsin workers show us how we can do both.

To every ICU nurse and medical professional who supplies oxygen to keep people alive and wear make-shift protective gear during shortages of PPE to keep themselves and their families safe: despite the worst conditions, they move forward.

To the business owners moving to the Northland to start a new business to provide for themselves and sell the product that is

just the thing someone was looking for: adjusting to shut downs, mask mandates, and local health guidance, they move forward.

To the retirees who have worked for decades and deserve to live out their days with dignity: age old wisdoms shared with the younger generations move us all forward.

To the parents who now have to take on more care duties while their children can't always attend in-person school or daycare and the caregivers of aging or sick family members who sacrifice so much to care for their loved ones: the work that is being done to care for those that need it moves us forward.

This Labor Day, let us remember as we

continue down the long road of recovery from the pandemic, working men and women, young and old, families and individuals, have brought us this far. Without their dedication and sacrifices, we would be a far different state and in a far different place. This Labor Day, thank you to everyone who labors to keep Wisconsin moving forward!

As always, please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions or concerns about issues relating to state government. I can be reached at 888-534-0074 or Rep.Meyers@legis.wisconsin.gov.

*Beth Meyers represents the 74th Assembly District that encompasses much of the Northwoods.*



BETH MEYERS

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## What do you think?

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Established 1888

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The Daily Press is published biweekly on Tuesday and Friday by APG Media of Wisconsin, LLC.

### NEW RATES STARTING JAN. 1, 2021

EZpay 4 weeks = \$10.25  
13 weeks = \$37.00  
26 weeks = \$72.00  
52 weeks = \$140.00  
EZpay 52 weeks = \$133.25

Periodicals postage paid at Ashland, Wisconsin 54806 and additional mailing offices.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to THE DAILY PRESS, 122 W. 3rd St., Ashland WI 54806. (USPS 144 880) | (ISSN: 1050-4095)

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