

# OPINIONS

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## THE LAKELAND TIMES • OUR VIEW

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**GREGG WALKER, Publisher | RICHARD MOORE, Columnist**

### Ground zero in the fight against government control of northern land

The next three months will be an important window of time here in the Northwoods because it has the potential to determine just what kind of future there can be in northern Wisconsin.

It can be one of economic prosperity, with a diverse industrial infrastructure and a growing population that delights in partaking of our unparalleled natural resources. Or, it can be poverty-stricken and barren, with little industry or jobs, save for pockets of elite enclaves, who use the region as their playground.

The former scenario is one in which the people control their destiny by controlling the land. The latter scenario is one in which the government owns and/or controls the land.

Every day, the contest between the people and the government over land is becoming more fierce, and it might be that Oneida County is becoming ground zero in the effort to save the North from the government's clutches.

As we report in today's edition, the Oneida County Board of Supervisors postponed this week a resolution opposing the state's purchase of a conservation easement on 55,000 acres of the Pelican River Forest. The purchase would cast 70,000 acres total into a conservation easement.

That would be in perpetuity. As in forever. As in no development.

Instead, the county formed a committee to examine the resolution and to study the issue. This gives all of us a unique opportunity to learn about what is and has been going on for a long, long time in northern Wisconsin — a state government effort to depopulate the north by buying up so much land, or controlling it with easements that prohibit development, that living up north is unsustainable.

Getting this ordinance passed, sending a message that people are not going to stand for government land grabs any longer, and then mobilizing our fellow residents to fight the good fight once again: That time has come.

As we said, the depopulation effort has been going on a long, long time, and it has been multifaceted. It started seriously under Gov. Jim

Doyle, who created an industrial policy that divided the state geographically into economic sectors, or niches, such as manufacturing, agriculture, technology, and tourism. Rather than let the market work, the idea was to channel state subsidies to companies and projects who agreed to work in the favored region. In other words, the state was picking winners and losers, and the North was a big loser.

As one might imagine, the Northwoods was considered a tourism only zone, and manufacturing firms that might want to locate here were not on the most favored list to receive government help and start-up or re-location funds.

As a result, over the years state government subsidies have flowed disproportionately to southern Wisconsin at the great expense of northern Wisconsin. This continued even in the Walker years, with Foxconn being the obvious example.

The critical flaw is, a tourism economy is unable to thrive on its own, without core industries that can provide the capital and human infrastructure needed to sustain a region. Tourism is a vital industry that must be supported, but it cannot provide the year-round jobs or wage tiers central to a sustainable economy. And tourism itself suffers without that core economy because it cannot find the labor it needs to run its own businesses.

So the Doyle era industrial policy was a death knell, literally, even then. But then, that was the goal.

And there is state railroad policy. Simply put, the North lacks the rail infrastructure needed to attract manufacturing and technology enterprises. Long ago the state and the railroads abandoned any notion of sustaining freight lines in the north, and no one has made any move to do anything about it.

In terms of owning and controlling land, who can forget the great land grabs, again during the Doyle years, when the DNR changed the way it defined the ordinary high water mark of a water body, and imposed other definitional changes, thereby magically transforming thousands and thousands of acres of wetland, which can be privately owned, into lakebeds, which are

state owned.

And then there is the actual higher ground. Since the Doyle years, the DNR has been a veritable land-buying machine, so much so that the state and other governments have now gobbled up 5.9 million acres of land. Conservation easements are gobbling up thousands of acres more, prohibiting development.

Speaking to the Oneida County board on Tuesday, Sen. Mary Felzkowski (R-Irma) said words that could not be truer: "The purchase of land north of Hwy. 64 has got to stop if we are ever going to see economic vitality up here. The towns can't afford EMS services. Our schools have declining enrollment."

The senator offered up some shocking statistics. Those 5.9 million acres of land are larger than the state of Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, Rhode Island and is equal to the state of Vermont, Felzkowski said.

The counties of Forest, Florence, Langlade, Lincoln, Oneida and Vilas have 1.3 millions acres of public land.

"Florence County is 45.7 percent publicly owned, or 32 acres per resident," she said. "Forest County is 59.7 percent publicly owned, or 42 acres per resident. Langlade County is 32.6 percent publicly owned, or 9 acres per resident. Oneida County is 30 acres publicly owned, which equates out to 6 acres per resident."

With the establishment of this committee, we will all be able to scrutinize not merely the specific easement that would be the Pelican River Forest but all easement purchases in northern Wisconsin before it's too late economically.

It's going to take citizen involvement, but with that involvement Oneida County can indeed become ground zero in putting a stop to the great government land grab. The examination and debate and deliberation of this resolution is a perfect opportunity for the public to engage on the larger question of government ownership and control of land.

A few words about that involvement in the process. During the Doyle years, when the government

launched its last major assault on people's property rights, there was a huge groundswell of popular support to protect property rights. It was not uncommon to see hundreds of people show up to debate local and state issues related to the government's land grabs.

At one meeting in Oneida County, so many people attended that the courthouse could not accommodate the crowd, and the event had to be moved to a local school. Some 400 people showed up.

These days, property rights advocates are nowhere to be seen, outside of a handful. We're not sure why — maybe because the movement was successful back then — but the energy fizzled. While the majority of people may still be avid supporters of property rights, few people get excited to attend meetings to protest things like the easement purchase of the Pelican River Forest.

That's a shame, because the environmentalists are sure mobilizing their forces, as was evident this week with a packed courthouse and scores of speakers. Not one opposed the environmentalists and the DNR. It was the exact opposite of what was it was 15 to 20 years ago.

It's not an overstatement to say that, if this battle is lost — and can't be fought again because of perpetual conservation easements — it's toast for the Northwoods. What is now our home will become our former home, a private wilderness where only the privileged elite can afford to come and play. After all, the elites are not shutting down economic development in the north so the urban poor down south can have a place to recreate.

It will be for the elite by the elite.

We know, as one supervisor said at this week's meeting, there is a silent majority out there who do not want to see this happening. But over the next 90 days, it is time for the silent majority to speak up again.

As supervisor Mike Roach said so well at Tuesday's meeting, this is a fight about saving our right to thrive and prosper. But, as he also said, it's about more than that: "What we are really talking about are our freedoms."

Amen to that.

## Robbins

From page 14

simply that the allegations against Dominion were "incorrect." Asked under oath about the claims published on Fox, the network's own political editor replied, "No reasonable person would have thought that."

But that didn't stop Fox from continuing its barrage of trash — because it concluded that if it didn't, it would lose viewers, and revenue, to Newsmax, the fledgling ultra-conservative network that makes Fox look like the house organ of the Democratic National Committee. When Fox called the Arizona elec-

tion for Biden on election night, the full fury of Trump World was unleashed on Fox, and Fox management panicked that its base would turn to Newsmax. "Do the executives understand how much credibility and trust we've lost with our audience?" an alarmed Carlson texted his producer. "We're playing with fire for real... an alternative like Newsmax could be devastating to us." Internal Fox documents warn of "the Newsmax surge" happening in real time, referring to Newsmax's "theft" of Fox viewers as "vandalism."

When a Fox reporter tweeted "There is no evidence that any voting system deleted or lost votes, changed votes or was in any way

compromised," Carlson was furious. "Please get her fired. Seriously." he texted colleague Sean Hannity. "It needs to stop immediately, like tonight. It's measurably hurting the company. The stock price is down. Not a joke." A Fox executive agreed. "She has serious nerve doing this," he responded about the reporter-gone-rogue, "and if this gets picked up, viewers are going to be further disgusted."

The next day, the reporter deleted her tweet.

"We can't make people think we've turned against Trump," one Fox executive admonished. Carlson's producer made the same point, only slightly differently. "Many viewers were upset tonight that we

didn't cover election fraud," he warned. "It's all our viewers care about right now." Turns out that the only fraud was that which Fox was promoting — for profit.

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