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## Fifield town board 'oversteps' chief's decision in disciplining first-responder

### Sloane suspended from Pike Lake Fire Department for one year

By Trevor Greene  
OF THE LAKELAND TIMES

Fifield town chairman Bill Felch and town supervisor John Smith agreed at an Aug. 15 town board meeting to suspend Pike Lake Fire Department emergency medical responder (EMR) Mike Sloane

for one year.

Town supervisor Ann Sloane, the wife of Mike Sloane, recused herself from the discussion and vote.

Felch confirmed with *The Lakeland Times* Wednesday that the board's action "oversteps" the decision the Pike Lake Fire Department's chief

Warren Johnson made on July 3, which was to place Sloane on a six-month probationary period.

A contentious buoy issue among residents and the Pike Lake Chain Lakes Association is what led to Sloane's suspension.

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## Presque Isle town supervisors disagree over computer investigation

By Trevor Greene  
OF THE LAKELAND TIMES

Presque Isle town supervisor Carl Wolter asked town supervisor and interim town chairperson Cathy Logan Weber to re-open or continue a third-party investigation with regard to town computers during an Aug. 17 town board meeting.

The investigation, which was initially approved by the board in May, consisted of sending the town laptop and two desktops to a third-party investigation firm based out Madison, Special Investigation and Forensic Technology (SIFT).

Ultimately, the town board agreed to pay the company about \$11,000 to conduct forensic audits on each computer. As it was noted at the board's Aug. 3 meeting, SIFT completed \$11,000 worth of work but essentially told the town it would need to pay more money for it to continue.

Some residents, in the public comment portion of the Aug. 17 meeting, lobbied for the board to continue SIFT's investigation.

Wolter made the motion to do just that, Weber said she wouldn't second it.

The town chairman's seat remains vacant after incumbent town chairman John MacLean challenged an April 12 recount of the April 4 election results that saw longtime town clerk Lorine Walters winning by one vote, 242-241.

With the board only consisting of two members currently, unanimous decisions between both supervisors need to be made for the board to take any action.

A decision regarding MacLean's appeal is expected to be made on Aug. 31 in Vilas County circuit court.

Investigating the town's computers came about after the April 4 election, as well, when a new town treasurer and new clerk took office.

Typically, according to both town supervisors, an audit of the town's finances is done when a new treasurer and clerk are elected.

When the financial audit was being discussed, new town treasurer Jill Eesley expressed concern with regard to town records and property being destroyed from the computers' hard drives after it was learned Walters's son Jim had been working on the computers offsite at his computer maintenance company in Michigan for roughly the past 20 years.

Subsequently, the Vilas County Sheriff's Office conducted its own investigation in late June of the matter and determined there was no evidence "at this time" to support claims of any criminal activity.

Wolter, though, believes something could still come of the computers investigation.

"I read the SIFT report and there's a lot of questions, there's some outright lies, and I want it to come to a conclusion," he said, right before he made a motion to continue the investigation with SIFT.

He told Weber he "figured" she wouldn't second his motion.

"It will come up again because I will persist," he said. "And I did instruct SIFT to hang on to the computers. I signed the contract, I feel I had some obligation to the taxpayers that back me, and therefore they will keep it."

Speaking of the forensic audits SIFT has conducted so far, Weber read a prepared statement.

She said she read through all of the records requests filed by residents regarding the report, the SIFT report and the sheriff's office

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*Racer leaves competition in the dust*

BRETT LABORE/LAKELAND TIMES

Bron Badavinac of Cloquet, Minn. goes hard into the corner on the seven-mile cross country track of the FDSCR race series on Sunday, Aug. 13, at Area 31 in Minocqua.

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## Rebecca Bradley blasts Protasiewicz for not recusing in redistricting case

### Supreme Court could take case; Bradley says its pre-judged and pre-determined

By Richard Moore  
OF THE LAKELAND TIMES

The state's Supreme Court has ordered the Wisconsin Elections Commission to respond to a petition for the court to take original action on a case challenging the state's redistricting maps, as conservative justice Rebecca Grassl Bradley denounced liberal justice Janet Protasiewicz for not recusing herself from the case.

In a withering dissent, Bradley also said the case itself was rigged — prejudged and pre-de-

termined — using the very description that Protasiewicz has used about the redistricting maps themselves.

The petition asking the high court to take the case directly could have been accepted, or rejected. In this case, the court ordered the respondent, the Wisconsin Elections Commission, to file a response no later than August 22.

"Our standard approach when

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TREVOR GREENE/LAKELAND TIMES

## CAMP CONDUCTOR

Lakeland Union High School senior Willie Lade conducts other band camp members in the lobby of the school's theater on Friday, Aug. 18, in Minocqua.

### Computer

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report. The sheriff's office report, Weber said, was "closed as unfounded," the Wisconsin Department of Justice was contacted by several people, but declined to investigate and state Rep.

Rob Swearingen's office was contacted, but "that has gone nowhere."

Weber said she feels, from all the information that was provided to her, Eesley's concerns over the computers is with regard to the April 4 election.

"This computer matter is not about the treasurer's

records, it is about the election for town board chair," Weber said, also claiming SIFT's intentions, she feels, are not to conduct an "independent audit," but rather, Eesley's attempt to use SIFT to "support her unfounded allegations."

"Unless there is some new and concerning issue or in-

formation that you (Wolter) or Jill can bring forward, this investigation, as far as I'm concerned, is over. And the computers, town equipment, has no business being kept by (SIFT) or nobody else. ... But as far as I'm concerned, I'm through with ... SIFT, and not another penny should be spent."

Vilas County sheriff Joe Fath reiterated to *The Lakeland Times* Thursday, the sheriff's office will not continue to pursue the computer investigation at this time.

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### Fifield

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Following a June 26 lakes association meeting and hearing regarding the replacement of four buoys the town and lakes association illegally placed on Pike and Round lakes last summer, Sloane told two residents he disagreed with — Nate Ramker and Jason Morris — that he could respond as fast or as slow as he wanted to if they ever needed emergency care, if he responded at all.

While residents called for Sloane's immediate dismissal at the board's July 11 meeting, Johnson imposed a six-month probation on Sloane following an initial investigation. Provided Sloane complies with the contingencies of his probation, Johnson said he would automatically be reinstated as a member "in good standing."

Felch said at the July 11 meeting there would be an update at the Aug. 15 meeting regarding Sloane and what came of the face-to-face interviews, if anything, even though Johnson already made a decision.

When asked at the Aug. 15 meeting how the face-to-face interviews went, Johnson said what he was told was basically the same as what was said in the emails.

"They basically said the same thing they said in their email except probably a little more emotional," Johnson said, asking Smith what he thought of the interviews.

"To read something is one thing, but to actually listen to people, and what happened, and how they felt about it, I think is a lot more compelling than it is to just read something," Smith said. "That was my feeling."

Felch questioned Johnson's interpretation of the fire department's policies.

"That's where I'm sitting at right now, making sure we have everything (done right)," Felch said. He then asked Smith if Sloane's six-month probation was justified. "Because if we would have had an HR

(human resources) person at that time, Mike would of been fired, right then and there."

Even though Sloane has done a lot for the fire department and town, Felch said "he crossed the line" with the comments he made.

"Like John said, basically, if a police officer came in here and told you that he wasn't going to come to your house because you said something bad to him, he would get fired right on the spot," Felch continued. "That's where we're sitting at is if everything has been handled properly and you want the board to accept your (decision), are we suppose to accept that?"

Smith, who has prior experience of 10 years in law enforcement, said if he ever made comments similar to Sloane's, he "would've been fired right then and there."

"I think, in all honesty, Mike acted out in a bad situation, he was hot or whatever, but that doesn't make it right," he said. "You can't do that. He's not an ordinary citizen. He's an EMR and he's a fire department employee."

Smith said he thinks from the start, the incident wasn't handled correctly.

"Do we learn from this going forward? Probably," he said.

If a law enforcement officer does something wrong, Smith said a third-party is typically called in to investigate.

The first thing he said he thought of when Johnson brought his decision regarding Sloane to the board at its July 11 meeting was "how are you (Johnson) allowed to do due process in this situation."

"You're the fire chief, he (Sloane) works for you," he said. "He's an EMR, he works also for your part of the department. So my feeling was you should've distanced yourself from that situation."

Johnson told Smith the department's policies and procedures would need to be changed, indicating that's what the policy and procedures manual called for.

"I'm not saying you're wrong, I'm just saying that's the ... way I saw this go down," Smith said. "This should've been handled by somebody else investigating

everybody that was involved. ... My feeling is, and I'm going to say this and this is the way I feel about it, I think Mike should be suspended for a year."

After a year, Smith added he thinks Sloane, if he wants to, should tell the board why he wants to continue as a member of the Pike Lake Fire Department. "And I think an apology goes a long way," he said. "I don't think anybody I talked to, or you listened to in these interviews, would disagree with that."

One last thing Smith said was that he felt Johnson threatened him prior to the Aug. 15 board meeting.

"You made the comment to me that 'If we don't follow (the six month probation decision), I think there's going to be a lot of people walking from this department,'" he said, asking Johnson if he remembered saying that.

Johnson said he did.

"There's a lot of emotion running within this department as well," he told Smith.

"Well there's a lot of emotion going on on that lake, for god-sakes," Smith replied.

He said since being elected to the town board, some sort of issue involving residents of Pike and Round lakes has come up in every meeting he's attended.

"There's a lot of emotions in that community, and I think we have to come to a closure of it, personally," Smith said. "Because if we don't, it's just going to continue."

"So, at this point, I know Ann can't say anything because of their relationship, but I believe the board should make the recommendation that Mike stand down for a year."

Bill Felch  
Fifield town chairman

Sloane, Felch said, told him he offered to step down from the department, but was told he didn't have to.

"So, at this point, I know Ann can't say anything because of their relationship, but I believe the board should make the recommendation that Mike stand down for a year," Felch said.

Smith said he thinks sometimes people forget it's the town that's liable in situations like this.

"If something would happen, and this came back that Mike made these statements and somebody ended up (in) critical (condition) ... they could come back after the town," he said. "I don't think we need that risk."

Ironically, Felch and Smith pointed out, there was a subsequent situation where the town's first responders didn't arrive on scene to an emergency call, though the Price County Sheriff's Office took responsibility due to one of its dispatchers making a mistake.

"And we got ... bullets on our back to make sure we do everything correct," Felch said. "And this board is trying its very best on trying to do everything to make the public happy. You guys elected us and we're trying to do the best job we can. And if we're continually harassed because we make a decision somebody doesn't like, it's hard to be a board member, very hard. Every two years there's an election. Everybody complains about the board, but nobody comes and wants the job, but they're there to criticize us and it's getting very, very disgusting."

At some point, Smith said, Sloane should make an apology to Ramker, Morris and anyone else who witnessed what happened.

"I can't make him do that, but it would be my suggestion," he said. "I think it would go a long way towards closing this."

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