

MARIETTA DAILY JOURNAL

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COMMENTARY

Cobb school system is ...

LACKING IN SENSE

What has happened to common sense in our country? Or to be more specific — in our county school system?

There isn't much I can add to the well-deserved shellacking of the Cobb County school system on the by the editors of the MDJ on the editorial page this past Thursday for the system's shoddy treatment of former Kell High School Principal Trudie Donovan.

Donovan, a 34-year veteran of the school system was charged with failure to report "in a timely fashion," as required by state law a teacher who allegedly had slapped two students. She abruptly "retired" in June 2012 under a cloud of suspicion.

Now, the Cobb Solicitor's Office has announced that it will drop the charges against Donovan due to "a lack of evidence." Assistant Solicitor General Latonia Hines wrote, "After an extensive investigation, the state is unable to pursue this charge due to a lack of facts or supporting evidence to prove beyond a reasonable doubt that the defendant violated the 'willfully and knowingly' portion of (the mandatory reporting law)."

Everybody from the Cobb County school board to Superintendent Dr. Michael Hinojosa to the faceless bureaucrats behind the keel-hauling of Ms. Donovan owes her a public apology.

This isn't the first time the CCSD has rushed to judgment. Equally disturbing is the case of elementary teacher Gregory Leontovich, who was fired by the Cobb school board in 2005 on charges he sexually assaulted a 7-year old girl, despite the fact that her teacher swore the girl had not left her classroom on the day the assault supposedly took place and that a hospital exam confirmed no signs of an assault. It took Mr. Leontovich three years to clear his name in Cobb County Superior Court, not to mention 26 days in jail.

And let's not forget Tapp Middle School Principal Jerry Dority, counselor Yatta Collins, and Awtrey Middle School Principal Jeff Crawford being hung out to dry by the CSDD as described in the MDJ editorial.

Suffice it to say that it is not the teachers who are the villains here. It is a school system that presumes one is guilty until proven innocent. I can't believe that somewhere along their paths to the education mountaintop at least one of the faceless bureaucrats didn't take a course in political science and learn how our democratic system is supposed to function.

As the MDJ editorial so rightly put it, "Police officers who shoot someone in the line of duty typically are put on

desk duty with pay until the matter is resolved. Cobb educators, however, are presumed guilty unless they can somehow prove their innocence."

Equally guilty are our legislators, who seem more interested in promoting their educational self-interests (read: private schools) than in supporting public school teachers who bust their butts daily trying to educate our young people in spite of a myriad of complex rules and regulations coming at them from every

government entity with an oar in the education water.

Perhaps I missed something but I have not heard a peep out of one single legislator over this shameful episode. Remember, a state law is the root cause of the problem. Don't be shocked, however, if our intrepid public servants make no effort to change the law next session. For whatever reason, public school teachers don't seem to be very high on their agenda these days.

The worst part of this whole mess is the lack of loyalty shown to Cobb County educators by the Cobb school board, the superintendent and the bureaucrats in the central office. Cobb school teachers can certainly identify with that great Okefenokee philosopher Pogo the Possum who opined, "We have met the enemy and it is us."

I appreciate the fact that the Cobb school board and school system officials are wringing their hands over the financial decisions facing them in the upcoming year. That is important stuff to be sure, but nowhere near as important as assuring teachers and administrators that somebody has their back. First things first.

I have four public school teachers in my family — none in Cobb County. In addition to dealing with the myriad social issues that don't stop at the school house door and apathetic parents, bureaucratic red tape, politically-motivated school boards, make-work central offices and unsupportive legislators, they and the rest of their colleagues around the state shouldn't have to live in fear that the slightest accusation, no matter how spurious, will cost them their jobs, their reputation and the meager money they get paid in order to defend themselves.

So, back to my original question: What has happened to common sense? If you are looking for it, look some place other than the Cobb County school system. It doesn't live there anymore.

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Dick Yarborough
COLUMNIST

Barr, Lindsey, Pridemore (?) and more point toward ... A BARN-BURNER AHEAD

WHAT A DIFFERENCE two years can make. Last year's 11th Congressional Republican Primary saw incumbent Rep. **Phil Gingrey** of Marietta sleepwalk his way to a crushing victory over under-funded and little-known tea party challenger **Michael Opitz** and even lesser-known

CPA William Llop of Sandy Springs.

Next year's 11th District race, on the other hand, is already looking like a barn-burner.

Gingrey plans to run for U.S. Senate next year. And the race to succeed him is fast shaping up as one of the most interesting ones in Georgia on next year's political platter.

Already announced is former Republican Congressman **Bob Barr** of Smyrna, who represented west Cobb for four terms starting in 1995. Jumping into the race on Wednesday was Georgia House Majority Whip **Ed Lindsey** (R-Buckhead), who is a stranger to most of the district's voters but has the tools needed to change that by Primary Day. And waiting in the wings are several other potentially strong candidates.

Cobb's **Tricia Pridemore** nearly unseated **Sue Everhart** as Georgia GOP Chairwoman two years ago, has very close ties to Gov. **Nathan Deal** and resigned her post this week as executive director of the Governor's Office of Workforce Development.

Also said to be looking strongly at running are freshman state Sen. **Barry Loudermilk** (R-Bartow/Cherokee) and state Sen. **Judson Hill** (R-east Cobb), although Hill is thought to prefer a run for the 6th District seat held by Rep. **Tom Price** (R-Roswell) if Price decides to run for U.S. Senate. Opitz has talked of running again as well, and there could be others as well.

THE RACE TO REPLACE Gingrey had a third announced candidate for about 16 hours late this week. The MDJ received a press release late Thursday from a **Susan Davis** of Kennesaw announcing her candidacy — although it failed to indicate which party's primary she planned to run in. And the decision to send out such an email announcement at 10:20 p.m. in the midst of a tornado watch was curious, to say the least.

In response to a query from Around Town, Ms. Davis emailed back Friday afternoon saying there was no need for a story and the release "should not have gone out like it did. This was an internal working document."

BARR CLEARLY has the name-recognition advantage thanks to his years in Con-

CITY BEAT: Mayor Tumlin might be wishing he had "a big ol' arm" to go with that "big ol' brain" this morning when he throws out the first ball at the 10 a.m. game at Turner Field pitting the Marietta High Blue Devils baseball team against Alpharetta.

"I don't know if I can pitch it that far or not," he told Around Town. "I asked Coach (Chris) Stafford if he has a catcher that can handle a 20 mile-an-hour 'fastball.'"

TUMLIN IS CONFIDENT his \$35 million bond proposal to remake the Franklin Road corridor will clear its next hurdle next week. The council is expected to vote at its monthly meeting Wednesday on whether to hire financial consultant **Diane McNabb** and bond attorney **Teresa Finister**, and also is expected to cast the first of two required votes on an enabling ordinance for the referendum process. If approved, the council would then begin formulating a priority list for how the bond proceeds would be spent; and then would have to vote once again, possibly in May, to finalize the details. The proposal would have to be approved by the council by August in order for the proposal to make it onto November's municipal election ballot.

Tumlin would use the bulk of the bond money to buy and demolish several of the seedy apartment complexes along Franklin, then sell the land to the private sector.

"It should be attractive to UPS or Publix and big companies like that for a distribution center since it's so close to I-75," he said. "The upside just glares in your face."

Passage of the bond would also make it more likely the high-rise Holiday Inn that has stood vacant at I-75 and Delk Road near

PEOPLE: Lassiter High grad/pro soccer player **Mark Bloom** will be on the field for today's season opener of the Atlanta Silverbacks. Bloom, 25, is son of retired Cobb Magistrate Judge **Joan Bloom** and husband **Neil Bloom**. Lassiter's retired soccer coach. ... MDJ columnist **Roger Hines** will be speaker at the Monday meeting of

gress, leadership of the Clinton impeachment fight and high-profile advocacy for gun rights. He also can tap connections nationwide when it comes to raising campaign cash.

But Lindsey has advantages as well. He's a known quantity in the portion of the 11th

District that has the deepest pockets — Buckhead — and might be able to match Barr dollar for dollar. He's every bit as articulate as Barr and just as conservative, and possibly more so.

Barr says he's been assured by House Speaker **John Boehner**

that in terms of seniority he would start out not as a freshman but with the eight years he accrued during his earlier stint in Congress.

Lindsey, not surprisingly, downplays that: "Quite frankly I think you need to drill down on some of his comments," he said during a meeting Wednesday with the MDJ editorial board. "You need to look at how he chose to govern when he was there, and how I have chosen to govern since I've been in office. The relationships that I've built up both within this district with other elected and other leaders in this community versus how Bob chose to govern when he was there. I think that is what's more important than the number of years someone has been in Washington."

LINDSEY LIVES (with wife **Elizabeth**, also a lawyer) on the Fulton County side of the Chattahoochee, which makes up only about 10 percent of the 11th District. (Cobb and Cherokee each make up 40 percent and Bartow the other 10

percent.) So one of his biggest challenges will be to introduce himself to voters in areas where he's pretty much an unknown quantity.

"The advantage of coming from one of the smaller areas in the district is that I can't be lazy," he said. "I have to go out and work and prove myself in every corner of this district and fight for every vote. I can't sit back and say, 'Oh, I'm from this particular area so I'll get all my friends to vote for me and I'll get elected and I can ignore the other parts.' No. 1, I think that's a horrible way to get elected and No. 2, from a practical standpoint I can't do that."

LINDSEY PAID a courtesy call while in Marietta to his former House colleague **Steve "Thunder" Tumlin**, who's now mayor. Tumlin said he is not endorsing anyone, but told Around Town, "Ed is a good friend, and he's a very effective legislator because he has a big ol' brain."

Franklin (following a fire five years ago) might finally be sold and renovated, he said.

"Buyers have been kicking the tires on that hotel for five years," he said. "The bond might finally put 'em over. It amazes me that it has been empty so long, right at a major gateway to Marietta and east Cobb and Lockheed. If it had been open, it would have been full last weekend for the Final Four."

The mayor also suggested some of the land might be attractive for a new exit off I-75 from its planned reversible lanes. He also complained that a few critics have compared his plan to the city's ill-fated fiber optics and conference center ventures of the late 1990s, which turned out to be fiascos.

"There's a big difference," he said. "Those were decisions by the council, not by referendum. I think with the public looking over our shoulders we'll be more likely to dot all the 'i's.'"

Does his proposal have sufficient votes to pass muster with the council next week?

"Yes," he said after a pause. "But I will still have to prove to one or two that this is the wisest use of taxpayer dollars. But if you can't sell it to all of the council, it would be real hard to sell it to the community. The council is sort of a mini-sample."

MARIETTA SCHOOL BOARD member **Stuart Fleming**, who was gerrymandered out of his Ward 5 seat during the city's recent redistricting, is said to be weighing a run for the Ward 1 City Council seat now held by two-term incumbent **Annette Lewis** or the Ward 1 school board seat held by **Brett Bittner**. Fleming, 36, works for Deutsche Post DHL, an international logistics company.

the Cobb/Marietta League of Women Voters at 7 p.m. in the conference rooms at the Marietta Fire Station. The public is invited. ... Author **Steven Davis** will sign his book "What the Yankees Did To Us: Sherman's Bombardment and Wrecking of Atlanta" today from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the Acworth Book Store, says owner **Guy Condra**.



Lee B. Garrett **Joe Kirby** **Otis A. Brumby III**



Ed Lindsey



Steve Tumlin

The Marietta Daily Journal encourages letters to the editor on topics of general interest, but reserves the right to edit them for content and length. Letters should be no longer than about 250 words and must include the writer's name, address and daytime telephone number for verification purposes

THE DRAWING BOARD

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