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EDITORIALS

LEDGER OPINIONS

[LAKELAND POLICE SCANDALS]

Officers' Sex On Duty

On Tuesday, 10th Judicial Circuit State Attorney Jerry Hill delivered a two-page

letter and 55-page report to Lakeland Police Chief Lisa Womack. They describe the Lakeland Police Department as an agency in which a swath of officers and supervisors sought sex, consummated their quests and, in two instances, were accused of committing rape.

Part 1 of 2

Hill said the investigation focused on "officers engaging in sex acts" while on duty.

They did so at the Police Department in a closet and on a desk, in city buildings, in police cars, in city parks and — most reprehensibly — in an idle church building and in a vehicle in the parking lot of The Lakeland Center directly after a reception following the funeral for Officer Arnulfo Crispin. He was shot on duty Dec. 18, 2011, and died three days later.

Cellphones of the 10 Lakeland Police officers who had sex on duty were not used so much for phone calls, but for taking pictures of their sexual organs and transmitting them to the cellphone of the object of their sexual pursuits.

She, said the state attorney's report, was Sue Eberle, a civilian criminal analyst for the department.

ACCUSATIONS ACCURATE

Eberle, 37, who was placed on paid leave, proved largely accurate in her accusations against the officers, investigators said. Including the 10 officers to whom Hill referred, more than 20 officers and employees, and a Fire Department inspector who is also a reserve police officer, had sex or were sexually suggestive, said the report: www.theled.gr/QQ.

"An overwhelming majority of the sworn testimony of Eberle was corroborated through sworn testimony of others," it said.

In his letter to Womack, Hill said: "I cannot ignore the fact that several of the officers involved in this matter are high-ranking officers in your department. Some of the officers were directly responsible for training other officers at LPD."

Hill added, "I call on the city of Lakeland leaders to immediately take steps to provide Lakeland with law enforcement that is truly 'committed to excellence.'"

TRUST

In a news conference Wednesday, Womack said she is "extremely disappointed" in "those employees who may have known about it and did not come forward."

She was asked, "Do you feel like you've been betrayed in a certain way by the people underneath you that they didn't have the confidence somehow in the department or you to come to you before this and tell you what's going on?"

"No, quite the opposite, I feel like it was brought forward under my watch," Womack said.

The investigation, however, provided a different reason for Eberle coming forward with her complaint.

She had sexual intercourse with Officer Steve Sherman at the shuttered Without Walls Church in North Lakeland in September. Sherman's sergeant, Jeff Gary, came across Sherman's police car and Eberle's sport-utility vehicle outside the church, and identified them. Sherman was on duty.

This resulted in an internal investigation, turned over to the FDLE. Sherman resigned. Eberle came forward with her full eight-year history of sex with officers, which led to the 12-week state attorney's investigation.

The issue of timing is important because dates of the incidents, which are needed for prosecution, have been lost from memory. Also, statutes of limitations have expired in some cases.

Womack, who came to the department in March 2011, is failing to make substantial headway against the department's problems of long standing or newer problems that keep coming to light. She was right, however, to call in the Florida Department of Law Enforcement in response to Eberle's complaint.

City Manager Doug Thomas, who came to Lakeland in 2003, was present for the eight years covered by the investigation.

Womack must map out an immediate-and-major change of course for her department.

Both Womack and Thomas must find ways to stay in touch with goings-on in their midst, despite efforts to keep misdeeds from them.

The City Commission should review and continuously monitor the two leaders' plans and progress to ensure rapid revival of the Police Department.



RIC LEONARD

VOICE OF THE PEOPLE

READER OPINIONS

Cleaning LPD House Must Be Done By An Outside Agency

As a concerned and long-time citizen of the city of Lakeland, I am shocked and appalled by what I read in a recent Ledger about the Lakeland Police Department.

It is inconceivable to me how this kind of behavior could have been tolerated for such a long time, and it appears to have permeated LPD at the highest levels, as well as to other city agencies such as the Fire Department.

It is indeed disheartening that this and other recent unruly activity in which the department has engaged is reprehensible and embarrassing. I'm sure this will become national news in the next few days and will certainly shed a dark image on the city of Lakeland.

The police chief has to be held accountable and dismissed as a result of this activity — and quickly. The department has to be thoroughly investigated by an outside agency. We certainly cannot trust any internal investigation that the department would undertake.

The Lakeland City Commission must take appropriate action, and cooperate with appropriate outside agencies, to see to it that every action is taken to uncover all people who have been involved in this nefarious activity — and ensure that they are prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law.

TOM BAROODY
Lakeland

Parties and Pathogens

Whatever happened to the good old days when the worst things we had to fear on the Fourth of July were traffic jams and wayward fireworks?

The Department of Agriculture's Meat & Poultry Hotline says this year's top threat is food poisoning by nasty E. coli and salmonella bugs lurking in hamburgers and hot dogs at millions of backyard barbecues.

The hotline's advice is to grill them longer and hotter. Of course, they don't bother to mention that the high-temperature grilling that kills the bugs also forms lots of cancer-causing compounds.

Luckily, a bunch of enterprising U.S. food manufacturers and processors have met this challenge head-on by developing a great variety of healthful, delicious and convenient veggie burgers and soy dogs.

These delicious plant-based foods don't harbor nasty pathogens or cancer-causing compounds.

They don't even carry cholesterol, saturated fats, drugs, or pesticides. And, they are waiting for us in the frozen food section of our supermarket.

This Fourth of July offers a great opportunity to declare our independence from the meat industry, and to share wholesome veggie burgers and soy dogs with our family and friends.

LYLE LOVITT
Lakeland

NSA Monitoring

The media frenzy and the predictable posturing by the politicians over National Security Agency's monitoring of communications would be funny if it wasn't so pathetic.

The government would have us believe that the disclosure that the NSA was monitoring all our communications was a major security breach. Nonsense. Anyone who had the slightest interest was fully aware of the fact.

Several years ago we learned that Osama Bin Laden knew all communication channels were monitored and only used couriers to communicate with his underlings.

In fact, it was by tracking one of his couriers was the CIA finally able to locate the man.

Much concern is being expressed with

the loss of privacy. Unfortunately, all too many Americans couldn't seem to care less. They are more than willing to sacrifice privacy for security. One can only wonder how much freedom they are willing to trade for how much security, and at what point is there no longer freedom or security.

The communication collection and storage capability developed by the NSA is a magnificent technical achievement that undoubtedly cost an incredible amount of money.

It is most interesting to watch the government struggle to justify the system by claiming how many potential threats the system uncovered. But can we believe them? Or are they so overwhelmed with data that they cannot see the needles in the haystack.

Certainly, the system did nothing to avert the Boston Marathon bombings.

According to the government, the only information recorded is the origin and destination of the communications. Content is read only when they see just cause.

On the other hand, my Internet server reads all my email and alerts their advertisers to anything which might be of interest to them. Is it possible that Microsoft and Google can provide better security than the NSA?

FRED PICUS
Lake Wales

No Savings

What is going on? When it was offered by Lakeland Electric I signed up for the Shift to Save plan.

Recently, I received a letter (my first) telling me that this billing period I am charged 55 cents more with the "savers" plan that I would be on the regular service.

I have always done everything they recommend to save energy: laundry on the line before 10 a.m., use no clothes dryer, set the air conditioner at 85, and last year I bought a new air conditioner, washer and refrigerator — all energy-savers. To show how prudent I am, my inflated savers charge is less than \$40.

I called Lakeland Electric and got a waltz around about peak time usage, etc. I asked what I can do, was told all the things I already do, and to wait and see if things change — or I can revert to the regular electric plan.

Just one more paperwork gimmick that doesn't work for a conservative user. Would I be charged or fined for reverting?

You have to love Lakeland and its planners and managers, who do things to benefit themselves but care nothing for the poor, everyday working person trying to eke out a living in this unbalanced economy.

Another thing, a neighbor who lives two blocks away was told that address is not eligible for the Shift to Save plan. Lucky for that person, there is no special rate to save money.

ANNE KEARTON
Lakeland

WRITE TO US

The Ledger welcomes letters for publication in the Voice of the People Column. Only original letters written directly to The Ledger will be considered, and preference is given to discussion of contemporary issues. Volume precludes acknowledgment or return of unpublished letters. All letters are subject to editing for clarity, length, taste and libel. Letters should be signed and contain the writer's full name, address and telephone number. Anonymity is granted only under unusual circumstances. Letters should be kept to 300 words or less, and brevity is encouraged.

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COLUMNIST OPINIONS



Dana Milbank

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Darrell Issa's Scandal Mongering

This is how a scandal implodes: First, the head of the investigation overpromises. "This was a targeting of the president's political enemies, effectively, and lies about it during the election year so that it wasn't discovered until afterwards," Rep. Darrell Issa, R-Calif., chairman of the House oversight committee, said in May of the IRS targeting scandal. He later declared President Barack Obama's press secretary a "paid liar" for stating otherwise.

Next, facts emerge to undermine the investigator's presuppositions. Documents released by Ways and Means Committee Democrats last week show that the IRS, in addition to targeting tea party groups, also had on-the-lookout lists for groups using descriptors such as "progressive," "health care legislation," "medical marijuana," "paying national debt" and "green energy."

Finally, evidence surfaces that the investigator stacked the deck.

Last Tuesday night, The Hill newspaper quoted a spokesman for the Treasury Department's inspector general, Russell George, saying the group was asked by Issa "to narrowly focus on tea party organizations." The inspectors knew there were other terms, but "that was outside the scope of our audit."

Certainly, something went badly wrong at the IRS that caused groups to be targeted because of ideology. But it's nothing

But what often begins as a legitimate inquiry turns quickly into a lunge for the Oval Office.

like the conspiracy Issa cooked up.

A full release of information by the administration at the outset would have put the controversy to rest quickly. But the collapse of the Issa-driven scandal has reinforced a growing impression in the capital that ultimately will help Obama: The chairman is full of it.

When I covered President Clinton's second term, White House officials were delighted to have the eccentric Dan Burton in charge of the House oversight committee. He gained prominence by shooting a melon to try to prove that Clinton aide Vince Foster hadn't killed himself but had been murdered.

Now Issa has fallen to Burtonian levels of credibility. He's launched a dozen or so probes, but what often begins as a legitimate inquiry turns quickly into a lunge for the Oval Office, missing each time.

Even before the Republican victory in 2010 gave him the chairmanship, Issa announced the discovery of "Obama's Watergate" — the White House floating an administration job for a Democratic congressman to keep him out of a Senate primary. Issa backed off after learning that the Bush administration had done similar things.

Shortly before the 2010 election, Issa told Rush Limbaugh that Obama "has been one of the most corrupt presidents in modern times." He later said Obama isn't "personally corrupt" but his administration is.

Issa then set out to prove it. He led a probe into the failed "Fast and Furious" gun sting by the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives. Issa declared that "it went all the way to the White House," insisting that the plan was approved "at the highest levels of the Obama appointees," and that the Justice Department "has blood on their hands."

The Justice Department inspector general determined that Attorney General Eric Holder didn't even know about the program until after it was shut down.

After the killing of American officials in Benghazi, Libya, Issa accused then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton of giving false information to Congress when she said she wasn't involved in denying the Libyan diplomats' security requests. He also said that it was "perhaps the White House" that later changed talking points to make it appear that the assault had begun as a protest.

It turned out Clinton wasn't involved in the security decision and the White House wasn't behind the change in the talking points.

Then came the IRS. Instead of delivering on Issa's promise to reveal politically motivated harassment of conservatives by the Obama administration, the committee instead turned up evidence (including the account of a "conservative Republican" who managed IRS screening) that the actions weren't political.

The most Issa et al can hope to prove now is that conservatives were hassled by the IRS more than liberals. That's a worthy topic, but it's no Watergate.

