

The Ledger editorial page

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EDITORIALS

LEDGER OPINIONS

[LAKELAND POLICE SCANDALS]

Fire Thomas, Womack

When Lakeland Police Officer Julio L. Pagan was arrested Thursday, and

charged with two counts of armed sexual battery and with aggravated stalking, that arrest was made on the basis of a criminal investigation by the Lakeland Police Department.

Part 1 of 3

Pagan was accused of forcing a Lakeland woman to have sexual intercourse and oral sex with him — while he was in uniform and armed — in the bathroom of her home Aug. 12. He was also accused of seeking more sex by returning to her home uninvited for more than a month. The crimes described are terrible and coercive.

The fact that the city's accusations follow a Lakeland Police Department sex scandal involving 10 on-duty officers over a period of eight years and more than 20 officers altogether is an indictment of department and city leadership: Police Chief Lisa Womack and City Manager Doug Thomas, to whom she reports.

OUT OF CONTROL

Over the summer, Womack and Thomas repeatedly and in detail told the Lakeland City Commission and the Lakeland Police Advisory Commission that policies and training — including an anti-fraternization policy — were put in place to make sure that all in the Police Department know that sexual activity in connection with the department is impermissible.

They also told how lengthy internal investigations resulted in police officers and employees being fired, or resigning to avoid being fired, and how those results serve as examples of behavior to avoid.

The Womack-and-Thomas solutions did not work. The Lakeland Police Department is out of control.

For these reasons, the City Commission should fire Thomas and Womack.

Replacement of the city manager and police chief would allow the City Commission to focus on finding replacement leaders with the skills to bring the Police Department — and any other wayward segment of Lakeland city government — under control, and within the confines of the law and propriety.

DELIVERY OF TRUTH

Friday morning, State Attorney Jerry Hill wrote a letter to Thomas and had it delivered by hand.

Hill described how the woman found by the police investigation to have been raped and stalked, and a friend, both called the Lakeland Police Department for help Aug. 23. The phone calls proved fruitless. The police did nothing.

Hill said Pagan had returned to the woman's home, seeking sex. In response to the calls, he said, "your 911 dispatcher laughed at the citizens calling for help and made fun of the way one of the individuals was speaking.

"I'm sure you will recall my letter to Chief Womack of March 26, 2013, wherein I set forth my concerns regarding the Lakeland Police Department's handling of the Tonyo Evans case. There, a Lakeland citizen had to call three times to get police to respond to her finding a gun near children."

Hill was blunt in his assessment: "Mr. Thomas, it is past time for action. Chief Lisa Womack continues to prove she is incapable of leading the Lakeland Police Department."

Friday afternoon, Thomas called a news conference at City Hall so he and Mayor Gow Fields could make a statement.

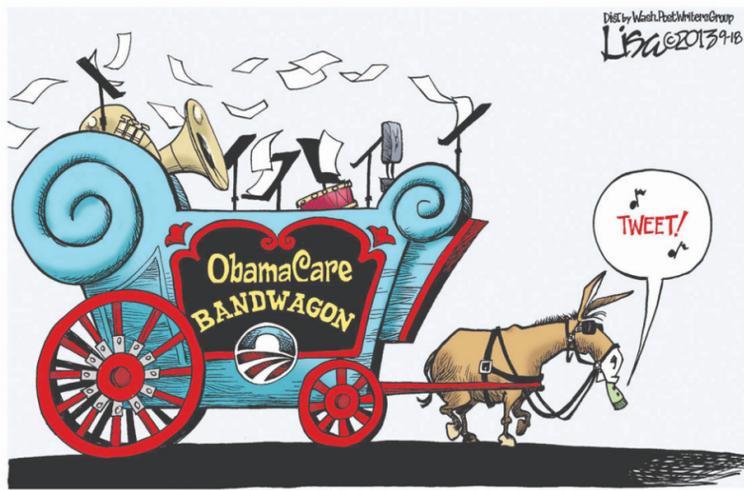
Rather than the appropriate announcement of firing Womack for failing to establish a departmental culture of virtue that few would breach, Thomas and Fields mounted a defensive and shameful attack on Hill for pointing out the failures that are clear for everyone in Lakeland and far around to see.

"We're certainly very concerned with the tenor and tone of the letter, and feel that many of his attacks reflect comments specifically of a personal nature against Chief Womack, who is a nationally recognized leader in the law-enforcement community," Thomas said.

Fields said Hill's approach was like using a "sledgehammer when a scalpel is the more appropriate tool."

The Lakeland leaders' defensiveness, denial and personalization of a professional matter of immense importance to the city's residents were inappropriate.

The Lakeland City Commission should call an emergency meeting Monday. The commissioners and mayor should vote to fire City Manager Doug Thomas and Police Chief Lisa Womack.



LISA BENSON | SYNDICATED CARTOONIST

VOICE OF THE PEOPLE

READER OPINIONS

Dennis Ross and His ilk Should Quit if They Won't Do the Work

The last week of summer was a bummer for Americans hoping for sanity out of Washington. That was the week the House, and our local member, U.S. Rep. Dennis Ross, R-Lakeland, went totally off the deep end.

At this point, I'd settle not for their help, but for them, and particularly him, to stop hurting those who have no voice.

In that week chock full of legislative misery, they voted to cut \$40 billion in food stamp aid. What could be worse than cutting off aid to those on the edge of survival, after voting to increase huge tax breaks for the farming industry?

Voting to defeat the Democrats' bill to extend food stamps to qualifying veterans, seniors, pregnant women and minors if they should lose benefits because of that other idea they had to shut down the government.

Also, there were votes to fast-track mining permits on federal lands that would ease environmental rules, but they rejected a Democratic bill that would prevent sales of the critical minerals to China, Iran and others. Ross also voted against a Democratic bill aimed at preventing spending any more money to privatize Social Security or voucherize Medicare.

After 41 votes to end the law of the land known as the Affordable Care Act, one would think they would know how that would end. Not Ross and his like-minded friends, who this time decided to take a hostage if they don't get their way — all of us.

I'm pretty sure shutting down the government is not in the Constitution they swore to defend when they went to Washington.

To Ross: If you don't or won't do the job, please resign and let someone who has ideas do it.

ANDY CROSSFIELD
Lakeland

Abortion and Syria

Let's be clear. The use of poison gas in Syria, whether directed by the President Bashar al-Assad regime or the rebels, is a disgusting, cowardly and immoral act.

The vision of 1,500 people lying dead, with many of them children, staggers the moral conscience. Thus Secretary of State John Kerry, in an emotional appeal to this nation and the world, attempted to gain the moral high ground.

Unfortunately, as author Alfred Alcorn once stated, "The moral high ground to which I aspired had turned

into a slippery slope."

You see, it takes more than words to overcome decades of hypocrisy in an effort to take the moral high ground. As Gregg Cunningham wrote, "More Americans were killed by abortionists on Sept. 11 (about 4,300) than were killed by Islamic terrorists (about 3,000)."

While Assad has killed more than 100,000 with conventional weapons and several thousand with poison gas, Barack Obama and Mr. Kerry have vigorously supported Planned Parenthood and the subsequent killing of 50 million of their fellow citizens, many by chemical means much more barbaric than poison gas.

These chemicals burn the flesh and suffocate and, if insufficient, the pre-born child is then ripped apart to prevent the unwanted pregnancy.

In contrast, the Bible teaches that the fruit of the womb is God's reward. What hypocrisy.

Therefore, how does the U.S. assume the hubris to claim the moral high ground that presumes the authority to punish those who have inflicted similar pain, but on far fewer people?

DAN C. FRODGE
Alturas

Health Care Access

Florida's executive and legislative branches bow at the altar of capitalism. Moral behavior is a component of capitalism.

Twenty percent of Florida residents do not have health insurance.

Florida's leaders are stonewalling access to enrollment in the Affordable Care Act.

What is wrong with this picture?
FLORENCE DEANER, R.N.
Winter Haven

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

Roll Out Your Own Radio Station

By **JIM HIGHTOWER**
OTHER WORDS

Are you tired of hearing nothing but the corporate news and mainstream views on commercial, mass-market radio? Well, go get your own station.

That's not as preposterous as it might sound, thanks to a freelance, free-range, free-form collective of mostly young activists known as the Prometheus Radio Project.

This nonprofit group banded together in the past decade after participating in the low-power FM "pirate radio" insurrection, which consisted of local progressives who set up unlicensed stations that operate on only about 100 watts of power (yes, a light bulb's worth).

The signals of these renegade broadcasters have a range of up to 10 miles in diameter — enough to cover a town or urban neighborhood.

They can create a very localized, democratic and inexpensive micromedia, providing a way for communities to put their own voices, issues, music and stories on

the dial.

But there was that outlaw factor, which allowed powerhouse corporate chains to dispatch the authorities to shut down the tiny units.

Prometheus proceeded to battle the big-media giants with a grass-roots campaign to legalize and license low-power, non-profit stations. It took 10 years of uphill slogging, but their tenacious organizing paid off in 2011, when President Barack Obama signed the Local Community Radio Act.

With rules and staff now in place, thousands of low-power licenses will be up for grabs by nonprofit, community groups in October. Act quickly if your group wants one, because the window will only be for just two weeks in a sort of Oklahoma land rush of the air.

Find out more at www.prometheusradio.org.

Jim Hightower is a radio commentator, columnist and author. Internet: www.jimhightower.com.]

COLUMNIST OPINIONS



Paul Krugman

THE NEW YORK TIMES

www.nytimes.com/krugman

Plutocrats Are Enraged at Our Lack of Respect

Robert Benmosche, the chief executive of the American International Group, said something stupid the other day. And we should be glad, because his comments help highlight an important but rarely discussed cost of extreme income inequality — namely, the rise of a small-but-powerful group of what can only be called sociopaths.

For those who don't recall, AIG is a giant insurance company that played a crucial role in creating the global economic crisis, exploiting loopholes in financial regulation to sell vast numbers of debt guarantees that it had no way to honor.

Five years ago, U.S. authorities, fearing that AIG's collapse might destabilize the whole financial system, stepped in with a huge bailout. But even the policymakers felt ill-used — for example, Ben Bernanke, the chairman of the Federal Reserve, later testified that no other episode in the crisis made him so angry. And it got worse. For a time, AIG was essentially a ward of the federal government, which owned the bulk of its stock, yet it continued paying large executive bonuses. There was, understandably, much public furor.

So here's what Benmosche did in an interview with The Wall Street Journal: He compared the uproar over bonuses to lynchings in the Deep South — the real kind, involving murder — and de-

This isn't libertarianism, it's a demand for special treatment. It's not Ayn Rand, it's ancien régime.

clared that the bonus backlash was "just as bad and just as wrong."

You may find it incredible that anyone would, even for an instant, consider this comparison appropriate. But there have actually been a series of stories such as this.

In 2010, for example, there was a comparable outburst from Stephen Schwarzman, the chairman of the Blackstone Group, one of the world's largest private-equity firms. Speaking about proposals to close the carried-interest loophole — which allows executives at firms such as Blackstone to pay only 15 percent taxes on much of their income — Schwarzman declared, "It's a war. It's like when Hitler invaded Poland in 1939."

You know that such publicly reported statements don't come out of nowhere. Stuff like this is surely what the masters of the universe say to each other all the time, to nods of agreement and approval. It's just that sometimes they forget that they're not supposed to say such things where the rabble might learn about it.

Also, notice what both men were defending: namely, their privileges.

This is important. Sometimes wealthy people talk as if they were characters in "Atlas Shrugged," demanding nothing more from society than that the moochers leave them alone. But these men were speaking for, not against, redistribution — redistribution from the 99 percent to people such as them.

This isn't libertarianism, it's a demand for special treatment. It's not Ayn Rand, it's ancien régime.

Incidentally, in another interview — conducted at his seaside villa in Dubrovnik, Croatia — Benmosche declared that the retirement age should go up to 70 or even 80.

The thing is, by and large, wealthy people have gotten their wish.

So why the anger? Why the whining? And bear in mind that claims that wealthy people are being persecuted aren't just coming from a few loudmouths. They've been all over the op-ed pages and were, in fact, a central theme of the Romney campaign last year.

Well, I have a theory. When you have that much money, what is it you're trying to buy by making even more? You already have the multiple big houses, the servants, the private jet. What you really want now is adulation. You want the world to bow before your success. And so the thought that people in the media, in Congress, and even in the White House are saying critical things about people like you drives you wild.

It is, of course, incredibly petty. But money brings power — and, thanks to surging inequality, these petty people have a lot of money. So their whining, their anger that they don't receive universal deference, can have real political consequences. Fear the wrath of the 0.01 percent.