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EDITORIALS

LEDGER OPINIONS

[LAKELAND POLICE SCANDALS]

Lisa Womack's Resignation

When Lakeland Police Chief Lisa Womack delivered her resignation

to City Manager Doug Thomas on Friday, the letter said, "I have come to the conclusion that it is in the best interest of me and my family for me to transition out of my position of chief."

By resigning, Womack also acted in the best interest of the Lakeland — in the sense that its residents, Police Department and municipal government now can make a clean break from 2013, the worst year since the city's establishment in 1885.

Lakeland's horrible year of 2013 started with the Police Department repeatedly breaking Florida's Public Records Law by withholding public records. In the first week of the year, Womack told Ledger reporter Jeremy Maready that the department played a "cat-and-mouse" game with news organizations when it did not want to release public records it considered sensitive, which he reported in an article Jan. 6, 2013.

Following publication of the article, State Attorney Jerry Hill convened a grand jury to investigate the Police Department's handling of public records. As part of the process, the State Attorney's Office sent three undercover investigators to the department. They requested records, but what they received was incomplete. As the grand jury's presentment said, "There is no reason to believe that any other citizen walking into LPD to request records would have a different experience." The investigative report remained sealed until opened Dec. 13 by order of the 2nd District Court of Appeal. Finally, the public learned how deeply the 18-member grand jury had criticized the Police Department and Womack.

Public records were only the start. Over the year, residents of Lakeland learned that important criminal investigations were incompetent; officers falsified court documents; female drivers in traffic stops were ordered to lift their upper clothing, pull their bras away from their breasts and shake, and in one videotaped instance shake a second time when the officer was dissatisfied; an officer was arrested on two charges of armed sexual battery by a law-enforcement officer and one charge of aggravated stalking while on a police call; and too much more.

Collectively, the year's police misdeeds made up the city's worst scandal.

However, the single worst scandal was the eight-year indulgence of sexual activity by 10 on-duty police officers and more than 20 officers altogether.

NO NEED TO WAIT UNTIL MAY

With Womack's resignation Friday offering separation from the many Lakeland Police wrongs, there was no need for Womack to specify in her letter that "My transition from my position as chief of police will be effective May 1." Nor was there reason for Thomas to accept that provision by expressing continued "confidence" in Womack during a press conference Friday afternoon and saying that his confidence is "evident in her continuing role serving as chief over the next three months."

Thomas should move directly to his plan of placing one of the department's two assistant chiefs — Larry Giddens or Mike Link — in charge. He should do so immediately, not as a slight to Womack, but to move quickly and decisively into a new future for the department, one in which it puts scandal as far in the distance as possible.

COMMISSION ACTION NEEDED

Even after the Police Department's miserable 2013, the City Commission did not have the stomach to press for action against Womack. Just Mayor Howard Wiggs and Commissioner Don Selva opposed her continuance.

Wednesday, when the department's union tied 80-80 in a confidence vote on Womack, and a separate nonunion vote among civilian employees and nonunion officers went against Womack 152-123, Commissioner Keith Merritt called for the chief to resign.

Nonetheless, Thomas did not seek Womack's resignation. Indeed, he said Friday, "I've worked very closely with Chief Womack during her three-year tenure and have consistently supported her leadership of the Lakeland Police Department, even during what has arguably been its most challenging chapter."

With Thomas' ongoing support for Womack's actions and policies, and consistent agreement with her decisions, he is not the best person to choose a new police chief — or to serve as city manager.



RIC LEONARD

VOICE OF THE PEOPLE

READER OPINIONS

Lakeland Speaks Double-Talk for McNabb On Lie Detector Test

The Lakeland Police Department's and the city commissioners' defense of Sgt. Bryan McNabb is mind-blowing to me. Here is a guy who was nabbed and decided his best defense to keep his job was to pit his word against Sue Eberle's, all the while refusing to take a lie detector test that could clear him.

Things that commissioners say to defend putting him back on the street simply make me shake my head with astonishment.

In a recent article, Commissioner Justin Troller said, "Why require a law-enforcement officer to take a test that is inadmissible in court?" ["LPD to Reinstate Sergeant McNabb Despite Credibility Issue," Jan. 16].

Wait a minute here because, as State Attorney Jerry Hill said, the LPD, and therefore the city, required McNabb to take the polygraph test to get his job on the LPD.

I guess McNabb had nothing to hide then, but if the polygraph test isn't worth anything as Commissioner Troller hints, why is it required to get a job at LPD? So, if you don't pass the polygraph to get a job at LPD, can you sue LPD because the polygraph is inadmissible in court?

Police Union President Nick Marolda said the "polygraph is off the table."

For him and McNabb it has to be because, let's face it, they aren't fooling anyone here. There is one reason and one reason only why McNabb won't take the polygraph test. He'll fail it, and they know it. That's unlike the one he willingly took to get on at LPD, which he knew he'd pass.

Yes, the city needed to get rid of Police Chief Lisa Womack and needs to get rid of City Manager Doug Thomas, but it also need to get rid of McNabb. It's just unbelievable to me the city defends McNabb when he should be gone. Commissioners should say take the polygraph or go away.

ROBERT SNYDER
Lakeland

Big Thanks to VISTE

Over the past few years, while looking to make a difference in the lives of some local senior citizens, I came across a charitable organization

named VISTE.

I would like to extend a big public thank you to the executive director, Alice O'Reilly, and all the numerous staff and volunteers at this fine organization, especially Sister Carmen Rose and Sister Joanne.

Anytime an elderly citizen is in need, the staff at VISTE comes to the rescue with various types of assistance, always delivered with a big smile.

For many senior citizens in the community, VISTE is a last and only resource for items they need such as food, home-care equipment, medical supplies and basic transportation for shopping and appointments. This organization has a huge-and-positive impact on the lives of the elderly population in Imperial Polk County.

To all the large and small businesses that make this assistance possible through their generous donations and contributions, you can be assured that all the time, effort, merchandise and funds are being put to a good use helping senior citizens cope with some of the most difficult issues and times of their lives.

I can assure you that somewhere there is an elderly person sending you their blessings.

To anyone who wants to make a difference working through a service-oriented charitable organization, volunteering through VISTE is a great way to be of service to the community.

ALCIRA "MIMI" McCONNELL
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

'Teen Mom' Has Measurable Impact

The new season of "Teen Mom 2" premiered on MTV last week. You may know this from the breathless coverage in OK! Magazine ("Teen Mom Week in Review: The Teen Mom 2 Cast Hangs Out in NYC, Maci Wears Booty Shorts to a Wedding and More").

Or maybe you've heard that a study released this month by the National Bureau of Economic Research declares that MTV's "Teen Mom" franchise — which also includes the original "Teen Mom" and "16 and Pregnant" — had a measurable effect on reducing teen-pregnancy rates.

There has been some fury about the study's findings. However, we might want to look to the show for lessons about how to talk to teens.

The study came about as a way to explain a baffling statistic, said Phillip Levine, a Wellesley College economist, who cowrote the report with University of Maryland economist Melissa Kearney. Since 1991, teen pregnancy rates nationwide had been declining by about 2.5 percent per year. But around 2009, the drop suddenly grew more dramatic: about 7.5 percent per year.

"You just don't see numbers like that," said Levine, who has long researched the

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economics of reproductive health. A poor economy was a likely factor. But he and Kearney also stumbled across a news release from the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, crediting "16 and Pregnant."

So they ran the numbers, analyzing Nielsen ratings and related tweets and searches. They cross-referenced teen-birth data and did some regression analysis. They concluded that — while the economy played a role — the show itself caused a 5.7 percent reduction in teen pregnancy rates.

Some have questioned, with good reason, whether correlation really is causation. Still, it's hard to underestimate the power of the "Teen Mom" reach. Tuesday's premiere was the No. 1 show on all of television for viewers between 12 and 34. That makes it worth asking, what makes the show stick?

Levine said "a lot of the show is about conflict" — between a girl and her boyfriend, a girl and her ex, a girl and her parents, a girl and herself.

COLUMNIST OPINIONS



Dana Milbank

THE WASHINGTON POST

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Apologize, And Then Blame Someone Else

I am sorry. I am sorry that so many people have been making insincere apologies. I hasten to add that I am not to blame for these terrible apologies, but I regret them deeply all the same.

Chris Christie is terribly sorry that his staff lied to him about things they did without his knowledge and he feels remorse that the partisan media are targeting him with a witch hunt.

Bob McDonnell is really sorry that an overzealous federal prosecutor is going after him for doing perfectly legal things.

And Glenn Beck feels just awful that people were so "fragile" that they allowed his rhetoric to tear the country apart.

Christie's problem is the fault of MSNBC, McDonnell's problem is the fault of the U.S. attorney and the damage caused by Beck is the fault of the people who listened to him — and besides, he says, he didn't have a choice.

Christie at least began with a nominal acceptance of responsibility. Even as he pleaded innocence in the bridge scandal — "I'm telling you, I had nothing to do with this" — he acknowledged that, at least in the technical sense of being New Jersey's chief executive, "I'm ultimately responsible." But this changed on Jan. 18, when his office issued a statement saying the mushrooming scandal was

The "generosity" included a shopping spree for the first lady at Oscar de la Renta and Louis Vuitton.

the fault of the liberal media.

"MSNBC is a partisan network that has been openly hostile to Gov. Christie and almost gleeful in their efforts attacking him," the statement said. It also said the burgeoning accusations of intimidation by Christie's administration mean "partisan politics are at play here."

Ultimately, the scale of the Christie administration's wrongdoing will be sorted out by a federal prosecutor. But, as McDonnell made clear on Tuesday, a federal prosecutor is just another person who can be blamed for one's own transgressions.

The former Virginia governor, indicted along with his wife, days after leaving office in a corruption scandal involving gifts from businessman Jonnie Williams, issued a statement saying he would "prevail against this unjust overreach of the federal government."

Said McDonnell: "I deeply regret accepting legal gifts and loans from Mr. Williams, all of which have been repaid with interest." He then went on television to say "I did nothing illegal for Mr. Williams in exchange for what I believe was his personal friendship and his generosity."

Uh-huh. The "generosity" included a shopping spree for the first lady at Oscar de la Renta (\$10,999), Louis Vuitton (\$5,685) and Bergdorf Goodman (\$2,604), a \$50,000 loan without documentation, \$15,000 for his daughter's wedding, the use of a vacation home and Ferrari, the Rolex inscribed "71st Governor of Virginia," and golf outings. By total coincidence, the benefactor allegedly got help with state scientific researchers and support at various company events — including a product launch at the governor's mansion.

This brings us to Beck, who on Tuesday night went on his former network and told Megyn Kelly that, before Fox News dropped him in 2011, "I made an awful lot of mistakes ... I think I played a role, unfortunately, in helping tear the country apart."

Ya think? The nightly Nazi metaphors, the routine race-baiting, and sponsorship of conspiracy theories and apocalyptic visions that, it appears, drove some to desperate violence?

But hold on: Beck said the real trouble was that he "didn't realize how really fragile the people were. I thought we were kind of a little more in it together."

Beck is nothing if not adaptable. He was a ponytail-wearing liberal before he saw a commercial opening in conservative talk radio. Now that an improving economy has cast doubt on his end-times visions, he's recasting himself again.

Last week, he unveiled a new mission statement for The Blaze: "We tell stories of love and courage where the good guys win."

And now we're supposed to believe he's genuine?

I'm sorry.



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