

VIEWPOINT

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OUR VIEW

The time for healing still pending

OUR POSITION: Punta Gorda Police Chief Tom Lewis was acquitted of culpable negligence in the death of Mary Knowlton. But the bad dream is not yet over.

This should be a time for healing. Tom Lewis, one of Punta Gorda's favored sons, has been found not guilty of culpable negligence in the death of Mary Knowlton. Knowlton, a 73-year-old retired librarian, was shot to death last August by former Punta Gorda police officer Lee Coel in a civilian demonstration. He was one of Lewis' officers.

But the wound in the side of the city still seeps. Lewis' job as chief of police still hangs in the balance, pending the outcome of an internal affairs investigation by the city.

As long as the results are pending, so is the healing.

A jury's decision Thursday to acquit Lewis did nothing to bring together a town sharply divided. The trial lasted five days, but it was over in five minutes when Judge Devon George ruled the state would be required to prove that Lewis knew or should have known Mary would come to great bodily harm.

The day bled into lunch and the middle afternoon. The jury deliberated for three hours, asking to review the video of the shooting, doing its job. But there was no way those six jurors could have returned a conviction. Tom Lewis had known nothing of what would unfold that fateful night.

There are those who believe Lewis should never have been in court, should never have been charged in the first place. He acted properly in the wake of the shooting. A good man was betrayed by those he trusted, people he had worked with for years, an officer he had protected following an indiscretion involving a K-9 and a drug addict.

Lewis could not help it that his aides suddenly stopped doing their jobs, that safety protocols — written or unwritten — were shrugged off. He could not be blamed for Coel's lack of common sense in using his own revolver in the demonstration.

His supporters backed him with energy. They staged public demonstrations. They held fundraisers to help pay for his defense. They rooted for him on social media.

Mary Knowlton was not the primary consideration. And that offended her survivors — husband, Gary, and sons Steve and Bill — who believed it trivialized Mary's death.

Mary, after all, is the victim here.

Others believe Lewis is ultimately responsible for Mary's death because he was the man in charge. Period. It goes no further than that. A tragedy occurred on his watch. This was no dog bite. This was a shooting death.

He is 100 percent accountable. He said so himself.

Tom Lewis has been on paid administrative leave since he was charged in February. He may get his job back. He may go on to repay the city's loyalty by serving it. But no matter what the decision, his reputation is forever tarnished. He will always be the commander whose soldier shot an innocent woman to death.

Coel may have pulled the trigger, but Lewis allowed it to happen. How could he? How can Lewis be trusted to lead here again? Many believe he can't, that despite the verdict he should resign. This newspaper has presented this view in the past and remains steadfast in its belief. It's not a matter of guilt and innocence. It's a matter of right and wrong.

Until the right thing is done — until Lewis steps down or is let go — the time for healing must wait.



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Democrats: Work to solve problems

Editor:

Borrowing the first four words from Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., I have a dream; that Democrats will put aside hate and resistance and join together with Republicans to work on solving our country's problems. By joining forces look what they might accomplish.

Peace among all people, stop the racism and realize that there are good and bad in every race.

A health system that works for all people.

Work together on a good plan to protect our nation from terrorists.

We need a better system for helping people to enter our country legally and pledge their allegiance to this country.

We need to protect all life from conception to death. Killing unborn children is not the answer to irresponsible sex.

We need a better system of welfare that helps and encourages people to get jobs to support themselves and their families.

We need to be friendly but firm with foreign nations and protect our citizens who travel abroad.

My list could go on and on. We do not need party against party. We need to join

together.

Below is a saying I learned at a conference: TEAM — Together everyone achieves more.

Carol Mulholland
Port Charlotte

Many questions to be answered

Editor:

Where were those calling for affordable housing when prices tanked and there were affordable properties at low mortgage rates? Is it, when we don't need it we have it and when we need it we don't have it, a reasonable answer?

What happens to the Charlotte Mall if most retailers close or leave?

Do "planners" consider drastic changes in our shopping habits to determine how much retail/commercial space we need?

If traffic circles are a good idea, why all the confusing approach signs?

Does anyone monitor park usage reviewing results for closings, expansions or new uses?

Have you benefited from the huge increase in value of Amazon, Apple, Google and other tech stocks, or are you just increasing their value by using their products and services?

Can Englewood Beach be expanded by acquiring adjacent properties?

How can visitors to our area find the new All Veterans Memorial Park in Placida?

Will North Port suck surviving major retailers from Port Charlotte?

Can West County be a regional destination for tourism and home buyers if separated from Charlotte County with a good marketing plan?

Did you know searching our county appraiser's site for all types of vacant lots you get 134,000?

Is the 1 foot difference in the driving lanes on Boundary Boulevard and Rotonda Circle causing so many damaged mail boxes?

Andy Leonard
Rotonda West

Treasonous acts in the White House

Editor:

We know that Russia tried to influence our election and that they favored candidate Donald Trump.

Trump openly encouraged Putin to hack Clinton's emails and display them for the world to see. Once in office, Trump mocked the intelligence agencies for doing their jobs in exposing the interference and has tried to block the investigation.

He fired the FBI director and twice stated his reason being the Russia investigation. He handed classified

information to Russian officials in the Oval Office. Before and after the election, Trump praised Putin and other despots while insulting many of our allies.

In a few hours, I compiled a list of over 20 individuals, including Trump, his family, appointees and campaign officials and their connections with Russia, including business dealings, representation of Russian interests or frequent contacts with Russian officials, often unreported and sometimes secretive. The list of individuals and their connections with Russia runs 17 pages, single-spaced. Many of those people now have security clearances that allow them access to classified information necessary to protect America, if that matters anymore.

Trump's lack of curiosity about the Russian attack on democracy may be because he already knows all the answers. Yet, his chumminess, past and present, with Russian spies/diplomats, oligarchs and Putin doesn't faze his supporters.

Had Obama or Clinton acted anything like Trump and his inner circle, either would have been accused of treason — for good reason. He or she would have been called a Russian agent — for good reason.

Tom Butler
Port Charlotte

ANOTHER VIEW

Using Twitter as an act of kindness

The following editorial appeared in the *Minneapolis Star Tribune*:

Within 24 hours of President Donald Trump's disgusting Twitter outburst targeting MSNBC's Mika Brzezinski and Joe Scarborough, two stories making the rounds on social media provided a very different take on life in America in 2017.

That got us thinking: What if Trump used Twitter as a tool to hold up acts of kindness and generosity instead of as a vehicle to attack those who have in some way offended his delicate sensitivities? What if he used Twitter to highlight what's already great about this country?

Sure, it's naive to think a

Minneapolis Star Tribune
Another View

Trump social media transformation will begin anytime soon, if ever. But let's just ponder those two aforementioned stories for a minute and consider the impact they might have had on the president's nearly 40 million Twitter followers.

There's motorist Andy Mitchell, who could have ignored Justin Korva, the young man in a fast-food uniform he recently noticed walking along a road on a 95-degree day in Rockwall, Texas. Instead, he offered Korva a ride and learned that

the 20-year-old made the 3-mile walk to and from work each day. Mitchell recounted the experience on Facebook, prompting strangers to donate more than \$5,000 to buy Korva a new car.

Then there's Major League Baseball umpire John Tumpane, who instinctively grabbed a 23-year-old woman who had hopped over the railing of the Roberto Clemente Bridge in Pittsburgh on Wednesday and appeared to be planning to take her own life.

"You'll forget me tomorrow," the woman said, asking Tumpane to let her go. "I'll never forget you," he told her. "You can have my promise on that."

The woman was eventually

lifted back over the railing, and Tumpane tried to comfort her before paramedics took over. "I told her, 'I didn't forget her, and we'd be here, and she's better off on this side than the other side.' I just want her to know that," he recalled in an interview with the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*.

Trump's use of Twitter amplifies his voice while revealing much about his character. He too often comes across as a self-absorbed, insecure bully. In other words, the antithesis of Andy Mitchell and John Tumpane — two everyday heroes whose stories would have provided a refreshing change of pace for realDonaldTrump.

HOW TO SUBMIT A LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Letters are welcome on virtually any subject, but we do have some rules. Please keep them to less than 250 words. Letters will be edited to length as well as for grammar and spelling. All letters must be signed with full name — not initials. An address and telephone number must be included. The phone number and address are not for publication, but must be provided. Due to the number of letters received, we are able to run only one letter per person per month.

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