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Saturday, April 24, 2010

This week in West Bend: The Purges begin.

Hi everyone,

A small gaggle of social conservatives were elected to office in West Bend last week and, in city council at least, haven't wasted any time settling the score with any opponents left over from last [year's self-inflicted library mess](#). Gaggles like this tend to spread like [Asian millfoil](#) so I'm predicting they won't stop while there's a stone left standing in public education or in local government services.

If I'm wrong, I'll be happy to eat crow publicly -- and crow will never taste sweeter.

[Saturday's column](#)

Let the purges begin

Last week was a tough week for conservatives in America, although not in West Bend, Wis.

First, President Obama cancelled the National Day of Prayer ceremony at the White House and then a federal judge in Madison ruled the National Day of Prayer was unconstitutional.

Second, the Milwaukee paper came out with a big report on the real tax burden in Wisconsin. It turns out that Wisconsin is no longer quite the massive flaming tax hell the professional anti-tax protesters need to get their ideology out of first gear.

Wisconsinites do get clobbered on their property taxes, but there's no traction here for conservatives hoping to make hay about the business climate. Wisconsin only ranks 14th in terms of total tax burden and although residential property taxes put us in the top 10, taxes on industrial property owners "rank in the bottom half and sometimes the bottom third nationally." A common complaint among conservatives is that Wisconsin is unwelcoming to business but business taxes in Wisconsin are roughly in the middle nationwide. Maybe business doesn't like tax complainers.

Third, some new members of local government attended another one of those Tea Party rallies in Madison, once again hosted by Americans for Prosperity, the front group for Koch Enterprises' fear-manipulation profit center. With media attention finally shedding light on the degree to which the Koch family is exploiting the Tea Party movement these rallies have become increasingly embarrassing.

For example: in what reporter John Nicols characterized as an appearance "steeped in irony" consider the mere presence of Tommy Thompson up there on the platform announcing his non-

candidacy for the Senate. When an Olympic-class Washington insider like Tommy appears at a Tea Party rally, we get a peek at the ideological decay underneath the pearly white enamel of conservative America's beautifully veneered smile. Tommy's making money for his clients these days by working with the Obama administration and all that nonsense about being "regular folks" collapses the minute you start following the money and counting up the indoor swimming pools.

So, a tough week for conservatives – but not in West Bend. Here, they are tearing up the place. After working up a Tea-soaked appetite in Madison, at the ideological equivalent of The Biggest Loser competition, what better way to satisfy that hunger than head home and take out your frustrations on anyone who's disagreed with you over the last few years?

In a move that scans as payback for past sins, the Common Council, with help from newly elected Common Sense Citizen Ed Duquaine, voted 5-2 to remove Barb Deters from the Library Board. Ms. Deters gained national recognition last year for her brave and successful effort to preserve our Constitutional rights in the face of a mean and well orchestrated assault by local fundamentalists. As a reward for her principled and courageous service, the Common Council dumped her off the board. Only one member of the original board now remains, and they'll get him next time.

Some additional attempts to put a stamp on city government included Mr. Duquaine's attempt to remove Jed Dolnick (police chief of Jackson) from the Planning Commission, and Steve Hutchins equally queer request for the removal of Douglas Fitzgerald and Mike Palm from the Redevelopment Authority.

These last three were voted down, but already we can read the wind: April's electoral victories portend a new direction for the civic life of West Bend.

In addition to Mr. Duquaine's election to the Common Council, two of his Common Sense Citizen comrades – Mr. Weigand and Mr. Marquardt – were elected to the School Board. We can now expect that the School Board, led by these new members, will try to get rid of anyone who has crossed them in the past. A safe bet would be that, at their first meeting, businessman and civic leader Joe Carlson will be voted out as School Board president and, presumably, our brilliant and fiscally disciplined district superintendent Pat Herdrich is also on their list. Perhaps Mr. Weigand and Mr. Marquardt will simply cut the superintendent position in order to save money and help fund the new Intelligent Design curriculum.

This is, of course, the worst thing that could happen and is, therefore, the most likely series of actions these newly empowered Citizens might pursue.

It is instructive that in most revolutions, the first people voted off the island are the smartest and most capable.

After cleaning house in the school district's administration, they'll go after the teachers next and, finally, the curriculum.

Let's hope I'm wrong.

In the meantime, I nominate [Dave Weigand](#) for School Board president.

And so it goes.

And so do we.