

OPINION

OUR VIEW

Do the right thing

The International Falls School Board and administration in June dropped the ball in its handling of an incident that not only risked the safety of students, but also risked the district's liability and credibility.

On Monday, the board and the school administrator need to pick up the ball and finalize the non-renewal of Bill Mason as the school's golf coach.

We want to stress our opinion is not personal and isn't about Mason. We believe Mason felt he was doing a good thing by providing a ride to a stranger who appeared to need one. But he showed extremely poor judgment in doing so when he was charged with ensuring the safety of this community's children. Instead, he could have given the man money for a ride or offered to call someone to give him a ride.

The fact no one was hurt or injured, for which we should all be grateful, isn't the point. They could have been — and that goes for students, Mason and the stranger. No one wants to think bad people hurt children, but they do. People employed by our school district must keep the safety of students at the forefront at all times. Mason put this school district and the taxpayers who support it at risk of being sued should the van have been involved in an accident and the stranger injured and filed suit against the district.

But even beyond Mason's action is the poor handling of the situation by the school board and its administration. It's troubling the board allowed the June hearing to proceed the way it did, and we suspect it may have been a violation of the Minnesota Open

Meeting Law. The hearing was closed at Mason's request, which is allowed under the law. However, Mason asked it be opened after some members of the public, including the representative of this newspaper, left the meeting, and the board did so.

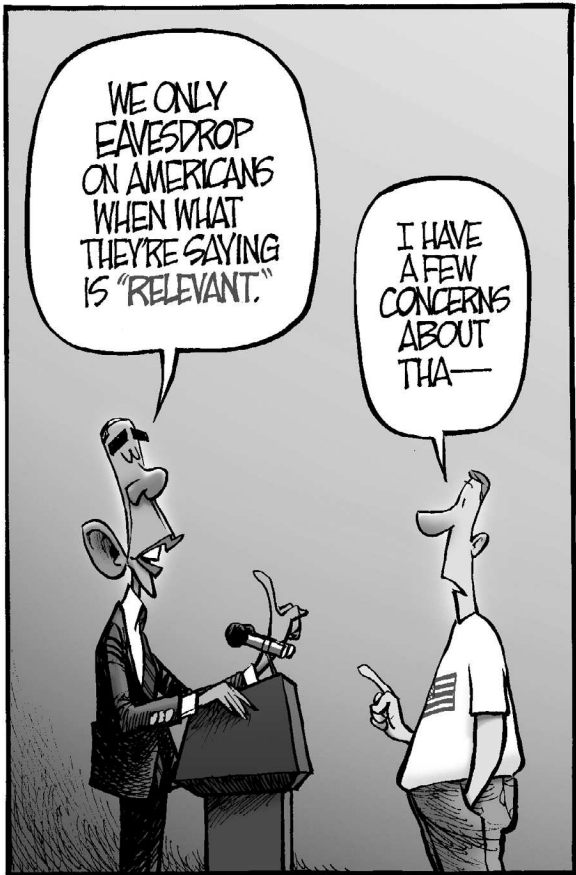
Instead, the board should have hit the pause button when Mason reversed his decision, adjourned the meeting and conducted the hearing at another time after appropriate public notice was given.

The Open Meeting Law is intended to protect the public's right to access government activities. In this case, the public had the clear impression the hearing would be closed for its full course, and it was misled when the hearing was opened. Government bodies like the school board should always lean toward open access to the public, especially in instances like this that draw interest and concern by the public.

Clearly, nothing would have been delayed by ending the meeting and conducting the hearing at another time, with public notice. Especially since the board agreed with Superintendent Nordy Nelson that the issue should be allowed to settle for nearly two months before taking action.

Instead, swift and strong decisions send a clear and powerful message and allow the community and the people involved in the incident to move forward. Delaying the decision accomplished nothing.

Monday is the time to do the right thing for this school district and its students by finalizing the non-renewal of Mason as golf coach and posting the position for others to seek.



MLK's "I Have A Dream" speech turns 50

Mark your calendar for Aug. 28, the 50th anniversary of Martin Luther King's iconic "I Have A Dream" speech, which was delivered to more than 250,000 civil rights supporters from the steps of the Lincoln Memorial.

I'll be thinking of Dr. King on that anniversary of the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom— and I'll be thinking about my late father, Lewis Tyree.

Dad once told of a conversation (circa 1970s) with a man from our hometown. The fellow was trying to organize a neighborhood movement to keep any ("N-word") families from moving onto his street.

Puzzled, my father named a particular African-American who had been an honored guest in the man's home on many occasions.

"Oh, replied the man, "he ain't a ('N-word'). He's my buddy. I KNOW him!"

So, although much progress has been made toward a colorblind society in the past five decades, we still need a lot of "buddies" to continue the advances.

Ask yourself, "Am I truly the sort of person a member of a different race would consider for a friend — or could even tolerate for two minutes on the elevator?"

Stray from your comfort zone and give an open-minded reading to some opinions outside your insulated world. Whites, stop patting



Danny TYREE

TYRADES!

yourself on the back for watching "Roots" when Jimmy Carter was president and read about contemporary cases of job discrimination, voter barriers and police harassment. Blacks, read an economist's report on the negative impact of the War On Poverty or affirmative action.

Whites, count to 10 before saying "That was a long time ago" or before taking your advantages for granted. Blacks, count to 10 and give someone the benefit of the doubt before musing, "I wonder what kind of veiled racial slur THAT was?" In other words, we all need to steer away from both cluelessness and hypersensitivity.

Whites, do you ever speak glowingly of black scientists, educators and businessmen — or is it just athletes and movie stars? Blacks, are there any Caucasians you admire besides politicians who pander for your vote?

It may seem silly, but try

honing your descriptive skills. Adopt a habit of identifying a person in a group using characteristics other than race. "The white dude" or "the black woman" does not have to be your first impulse.

Can the races learn to appreciate one another's cuisine, fashion, slang, media, hobbies, values and companionship without fear of ostracism? Can we condemn pejoratives such as "(N-word) lover" and "Uncle Tom" to the dust heap of history?

If a few more of us could rise to the occasion of being potential "buddies," Dr. King's dream of harmony and equality could come even closer to fruition.

But it will require the courage to disavow the worst elements of your own race, whether it be the redneck who jokes about lynchings or the African-American who gloats over the stores he's going to loot if the verdict in a racially charged case doesn't go his way.

If we feel obligated and duty-bound to cheer on (or at least tolerate) the walking, talking stereotypes among us, such as the "blacks can apply, but..." Human Resources director or the swaggering, Ebonics-spewing, welfare-cheating gang leader wannabe, we're all still in a form of slavery.

Tyree's weekly column is distributed exclusively by Cagle Cartoons Inc. newspaper syndicate.

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