

The Paducah Sun

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Editorial

CRISIS MISMANAGEMENT

When MCSD needed a leader most, none was to be found

The classic Rudyard Kipling poem “If” comes to mind when considering the controversy — scandal is another word for it — that has consumed the McCracken County School District much of this year. The line that particularly resonates, one district leaders ought study given their stumbles in crisis management until recently: “If you can keep your head when all about you are losing theirs ...”

That, of course, wasn’t the concise, united approach district administrators and board members chose in handling the ongoing troubles that have cascaded since mid-January. Instead, the public has been left with the impression leaders mostly buried their heads, hiding from the problem, hoping it would go away. It didn’t, then it reached critical mass.

The district has been under law enforcement and public scrutiny from misconduct allegations against two McCracken County High School staff members and a student, and a failure to report allegation against an administrator.

Troubles deepened Friday when Kentucky State Police confirmed a district official is being investigated for potential misuse of a school vehicle. A name wasn’t released.

Superintendent Brian Harper resigned last week after less than two years on the job. The school board hosted an emergency meeting to accept Harper’s resignation, then adjourned without having an interim replacement ready to step in.

Members eventually turned to Assistant Superintendent Heath Cartwright, who will serve as interim until he retires June 30.

When the misconduct allegations surfaced, communication to parents and the media — which could have been used strategically as a conduit to the community — was limited, parsed out in scattered snippets, if at all. The district’s silence was deafening, its inability

to adapt spanning from administrators to the school board to the public spokeswoman.

In a Facebook comment, School Board Chairman Steve Shelby didn’t seem to grasp the seriousness of what was happening, badly misreading the landscape when he implied the controversy was a byproduct of the media that “continues to ride this story as hard as possible.”

To be fair, district officials were dealt a difficult hand with the rash of alleged incidents. Nonetheless, the mess was theirs to clean up, as serious and real-time as a natural disaster. But when a leader was needed to own not only the problems but the solutions, no one was to be found.

Thankfully, Cartwright has taken some steps in the right direction.

After he was named interim superintendent, he emailed school district parents: “Please know that I understand that the 7,000 students that attend school in this district are YOUR children. It is with great sincerity that I say to you that we will stop at nothing to treat each and every student the way we would expect our own children to be treated.”

He wrote again days later, this time informing parents of a new interim principal at the high school. He opened that letter with a refreshing, and for the school district, *new*, approach: “I want to do what I can to keep you informed of the important issues going on in our school district.”

The district’s problems have been, frankly, an embarrassment, though it should be noted, not representative of the majority of teachers and staffers who work diligently every day on behalf of local students. Unfortunately, few have sullied many, and we’re still possibly months away from any sort of resolution.

Until then, we hope Cartwright remains transparent, learning from the myriad mistakes of his predecessor and colleagues.



Fentanyl changing war on drugs

WASHINGTON — On Feb. 12, Joaquin Guzman Loera, aka “El Chapo,” was convicted of multiple crimes related to running the Sinaloa drug cartel, Mexico’s largest. Thirteen days before his conviction, authorities seized enough of the synthetic opioid called fentanyl for 100 million lethal doses. It was hidden in a truck carrying cucumbers through the Nogales port of legal entry. On Feb. 28, authorities at the port of Newark inspecting a container ship that had arrived from Colombia found inside a container supposedly filled with dried fruit 3,200 pounds of cocaine, worth \$77 million on U.S. streets. This was two days after Don Winslow published “The Border,” the final volume in his 1,900-page trilogy of novels (“The Power of the Dog” and “The Cartel”) about the cartels and the U.S. “war on drugs.” He could hardly have arranged a better launch for his book, which is already on best-seller lists.

His thesis is that the war on drugs resembles the Vietnam War in its futility and its collateral damage to Mexicans, more than 250,000 of whom have died and another 40,000 have disappeared, according to the Financial Times, in the past dozen years from violence associated with rivalrous cartels and law-enforcement measures. Those endless photos of confiscated sacks of drugs *do* resemble old photos of dead Vietcong — body counts of replaceable bodies. El Chapo, 61, will die in a U.S. “supermax” prison, and his incarceration — he has been in custody since 2016 — will make no difference regarding drug flows.

The mayhem and sadism Winslow describes are, he says, derived from credible reports. Wonder what the



George Will

Central Americans who trek through Mexico to the U.S. border are fleeing? Read Winslow’s description of a 10-year-old Guatemalan living off a garbage dump, alert for trucks bringing garbage from the better neighborhoods.

Winslow might be right about sinister involvements of some U.S. financial institutions in handling the cartels’ billions. He could, however, have omitted the thinly — *very* thinly — disguised President Trump, and his son-in-law who knowingly uses cartel money to rescue himself from a bad Manhattan real estate bet. One reason to read fiction is to avoid reading about those people. However, the upward of \$40 billion in profits made from the \$150 billion U.S. market — 30 million consumers of illicit drugs — must go somewhere. First, to Mexico, “so much cash,” Winslow says, “they don’t even count it, they *weigh* it.” But then where?

Every day 4,500 trucks pass, necessarily with usually minimal inspection, through three legal entry points along the U.S.-Mexico border. Any wall would be irrelevant to interrupting drug shipments. As is the strategy of bringing down cartel kingpins. The New York Times reports that in 2016 and 2017, when El Chapo was in custody, “Mexican heroin production increased by 37 percent and seizures of fentanyl in places like Nogales more than doubled.”

The “supply side” attack on drugs is frustrated by, among other things, geography and the torrent of south-north commerce. The “demand side” is frustrated by declining prices (the supply-side failure) for increasingly potent products, such as fentanyl, which has passed prescription opioids and heroin in overdose deaths. Made from chemicals, not crops, and patented almost 60 years ago, it is mixed with heroin for an extra kick — and if doses are not carefully calibrated, a lethal kick. Says New York University’s Mark A.R. Kleiman: In 1979, a milligram of pure heroin sold for about \$9 in today’s prices; today it costs less than 25 cents. “Fifty grams of fentanyl — just over an ounce and a half — has the punch of a kilogram of heroin, and it’s way, way cheaper.” Three hundred micrograms — “roughly the weight of a grain of table salt” — can kill. And dealers are not precise chemists.

“We have,” Kleiman says, “about 30 times as many drug dealers behind bars today as we had in 1980” but today’s dealers employ cellphones, texting, social media and home delivery. In the most recent Global Drug Survey, Kleiman says, “cocaine users around the world reported that their most recent cocaine order was delivered in less time, on average, than their most recent pizza order.”

He notes that serious cultural change has taken 50 years regarding tobacco, yet it is “still much more widely used than any of the illicit drugs except for cannabis.” And “the fentanyls aren’t going to be the last class of purely synthetic and super-potent recreational chemicals; they’re just the first.” Worse living through chemistry, even if it disadvantages the crop-growing cartels of Winslow’s epic.

Letter

Tell representatives we need to impeach Trump

EDITOR:

According to public polling, Donald Trump continues to lose support. I, from the beginning, anticipated a failed presidency. What I did not expect was a constant chipping away at the foundations of our democracy. He decries “socialism” yet admires Communist dictators Putin and Kim; he declares a “national emergency” to justify fulfilling a campaign promise to his loyalists, effectively declaring himself an authority higher than the other supposedly co-equal branches of government. His moral compass doesn’t work and has modeled behavior that encourages expression of the worst in human nature.

There is a legal and appropriate way to stop further erosion of the American way of government. On Jan. 29, close to 300 attendees from 118 congressional districts to the first-ever Need to Impeach Summit in Washington, D.C., delivered complete Articles of Impeachment to all 435 U.S. House offices; I spoke to James Comer’s legislative director, Jim Goldenstein. The

10 Articles are:

- Obstructing justice.
 - Profiting from the presidency.
 - Conspiring with foreign actors to steal the 2016 election.
 - Advocating political and police violence.
 - Abusing power.
 - Engaging in conduct that grossly endangers the peace and security of the U.S.
 - Encouraging partisan enforcement of the law.
 - Attacking the free press.
 - Violating immigrant rights to due process.
 - Violating campaign finance laws.
- Detailed explanations of these can be found at NeedtoImpeach.com.

The Mueller Report may not be enough to remove this wannabe dictator from office in a timely manner. All our U.S. House representatives have the information and justification needed to begin an exploratory investigation into impeachment; they need to know we support that action.

REV. JAMES H. GEARHART
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