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October 27, 2020

## BOC PASSES A DRACONIAN TELECOMMUTING POLICY

Considering that the pandemic has drastically reduced parents' access to childcare and schools, you would have thought the telecommuting policy that the Board of Commissioners passed last week would recognize the double duty that many moms and dads are doing as both parents and workers.

Sadly, you would be wrong.

In a vote that demonstrated once again the depths of the insensitivity of the Republican majority, the



BOC, over the strenuous objections of Betsy Coffia, passed a policy that forbids county employees from spending any part of their eight-hour workday tending to the needs of their

children if the children are home.

Here, as Coffia pointed out, is the policy's offending passage: "Telecommuting workers will not act as primary caregivers for dependents during the agreed-upon work hours. This does not mean

dependents must be absent from the home during the Telecommuting work hours. It means the dependents may not require the Telecommuting worker's attention or supervision during work hours. Telecommuting workers must make dependent care arrangements to permit concentration on their work assignments. Emergency situations will be handled by the supervisor on a case-by-case basis."

So, no changing your infant's diapers or making lunch for your children during working hours. No helping them with their homework. No sitting on mom's or dad's lap while they're working on their laptops or on the phone with a client.

As usual, it was left to Coffia – the only woman on the seven-member board – to point out to a group of clueless men that, in the extraordinarily stressful times we're living in, this is not exactly a worker-friendly policy.

"If I have to sign a policy that basically says I can't care for my infant or child or help them with their schoolwork during working hours . . . that feels like a barrier for people to continue doing what they've been doing and feels punitive to me," she said.

Human Resources Director Donna Kinsey pointed out that Congress passed the Emergency Family and Medical Leave Expansion Act in April, which allows employees to use FMLA leave if their child's school or childcare facility is unavailable due to the pandemic. However, she acknowledged that the law expires on December 31.

Coffia responded that the law's expiration made it even more necessary for the county to make some changes to the telecommuting policy. She asked Kinsey whether she was comfortable with tabling the issue to allow for some "tweaking" of the policy. Kinsley responded that she was.

But BOC Chairman Rob Hentschel, whose hostility toward Coffia is exceeded only by Commissioner Gordie LaPointe, would have none of it. After correctly telling Coffia that her motion to table the issue was out of order because there was no motion on the floor, he called a recess so that he could count votes during the break.

When the session resumed, Hentschel sicced his attack dog, LaPointe.

"I also did read through the policy and I thought Donna did an outstanding job in putting this together . . . so I will support the policy as is," LaPointe said. "We could wordsmith this until the cows come home."

Commissioner Ron Clous followed LaPointe by making a motion to pass the policy as written, which was seconded by the fourth member of the Caveman Caucus, Brad Jewett. Hentschel then permitted Coffia to make her motion to table the issue, which she did, but it was all over except for the crying.

The votes on the two motions – first, to table the issue, and second, to pass the telecommuting policy as written – were 6-1, with Coffia in the minority on both votes.

Disgraceful.

## **TOMORROW'S BOC AGENDA: WHAT TO WATCH FOR**

**STUDY SESSION TO DISCUSS IT BUDGET RECOMMENDATIONS** – The BOC has scheduled a study session for Wednesday to discuss a migration from the county's antiquated AS/400

IBM iSeries to a new Enterprise Reporting Platform (ERP).

Documents submitted to commissioners by county IT Director Cliff DuPuy indicate that the AS/400, introduced in 1988, is no longer supported by IBM and has been victimized by four known hacks and losses of data.

DuPuy's budget request calls for ERP expenditures of \$309,251, \$264,006 and \$203,854 in the first three years of the conversion.

## **HIGH (AND LOW) LIGHTS FROM THE LAST MEETING**

**MASKS? WE DON'T NEED NO STINKING MASKS!** – During the public comment period, Carol Shuckra, an East Bay Township resident, called in to chastise commissioners Hentschel, LaPointe, Clous and Jewett for showing up unmasked at the first in-person commission meeting since March. Everyone else in the room – as well as county administrative staff who were in another room – wore masks.

"Four of our commissioners chose not to wear masks at the October 13 in-person meeting at the Governmental Center," Shuckra said. "Wearing masks in the building is an expectation and a rule. . . . The four commissioners who chose not to wear a mask displayed more evidence of their recurring problem with the issue of ethics. Government employees and citizens are mandated to comply with rules and regulations. Repeatedly, these commissioners feel they can exempt themselves from the rules. The implication is, 'Do as we say, not as we do.'"

"At a time when our Grand Traverse County COVID cases, positive test results and deaths are rising, we citizens need to be reassured that the Board of Commissioners take our welfare to heart. We expect you to demonstrate genuine concern for the citizens who elected you. That calls

for you to follow the best practices of COVID prevention. Wear a mask.”

Hentschel’s response? Nada.

**OK, I SURRENDER! WE’RE GETTING BODY CAMS!** – As we were the first to report last week, Sheriff Tom Bensley, after refusing for years to consider the purchase of body cameras, has relented and has reluctantly agreed to purchase them.

Administrator Nate Alger told the commissioners during a budget presentation last week that Bensley is currently testing body camera systems. Near the end of the session, after listening to a dozen speakers during the public comment period urge the sheriff to join the ranks of modern police agencies and equip his deputies with body cams, Bensley called in to report that he is testing and costing out two systems. He said he would have a recommendation for the commissioners on which system he would like to purchase within a month.

“Some people . . . were concerned about us not moving forward with the body cameras, but I can assure you that we are and we have been for some time,” he said.

Sure, Sheriff, sure. We’re willing to give you credit for coming to the right decision. As the saying goes, better late than never.

**CASS ROAD DRAIN** – Commissioners voted to pledge the county’s full faith and credit to back the issuance of up to \$2,838,000 million in bonds to finance repairs and improvements to alleviate flooding along Cass Road. The vote came just two days before torrential rains caused Miller Creek to overflow its banks, once again flooding several businesses in the drainage district.

Although the vote was unanimous, it came only after Clous unloaded on his favorite whipping boy, Drain Commissioner Steve Largent, after Largent explained that assessments would be levied against

500 property owners in the drainage district to pay for the repairs.

“I think that what you are doing to these folks, I’d have a hard time sleeping at night if I was putting these kinds of dollars on the backs of our citizens,” Clous told Largent.

Largent said 16 property owners attended a recent day of review to see what their assessments would be over the next 20 years. He said they were offered a right of appeal but said none of the property owners appealed their proposed assessments.

**A PARTISAN CHEAP SHOT** – During the second public comment period, Clous used his bully pulpit to indignantly announce that (horrors!) he had to remove not one but two “Greg Hall for Sheriff” signs from property that he owns.

Clous, of course, supports Bensley, the Republican incumbent, for sheriff. He said it was “disturbing in itself that somebody who is running for the Sheriff’s Department either is putting signs on properties without permission or he has somebody working for him doing the same and not having oversight. Just a suggestion to you, Greg Hall: Get permission.”

And here’s a suggestion to you, Commissioner: Don’t use your perch as a senior county official to take political cheap shots at members of the opposing party over issues as staggeringly trivial as this.

And that’s a wrap. Stay safe, mask up and remember to vote. Our long national nightmare is almost over. Thanks for reading.

## BOC LINKS

1. You can find a link to the agenda, packet, and minutes of BOC meetings at:

<https://grandtraversecounty.civicweb.net/Portal/MeetingInformation.aspx?Org=Cal&Id=163>

2. You can watch the meetings live and see replays of previous meetings online at:

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCiB1eEx7uvQn7L1LM1kShGQ>

The next scheduled meeting of the BOC is a study session on October 28 beginning at 8 a.m.

3. You can dial in to make a public comment on BOC meetings or listen on your phone at: 408-418-9388 (access code: 792 476 402)