January 14, 2022

**Dear Judges:**

Armed with the big lie and allied with right-wing news outlets, some elected officials and their supporters were emboldened to attack journalists and columnists relentlessly. This is the time when we must stand up. Links are provided to these four columns, which are just some of the many times editor Matt Westerhold was willing to take the heat. We hope you see it as we do and award him the best columnist award. **Thank you.**

# Dead on the floor

"You're having a heart attack. We're fixing your heart," the doctor told me. "Try to calm down."

I was on the table, in the cath lab at Firelands Regional Medical Center. I did calm down after he told me that. I wonder how many times he's said that to other patients, in other or in similar situations.

I never expected to be there or saw it coming. A twisted path that morning, March 22, from home to work, everything seemed normal, at first, almost back to normal. Just two days earlier, I got the second of two COVID-19 vaccine shots.

Then, around 10 a.m., my eyes started to itch.

In just a few short minutes, they were puffed up. I washed my eyes out. It grew worse. I need some eyewash, I thought, and some eye drops. I went to my car and drove to the CVS. In the parking lot, my scalp began to itch, overwhelmingly, then my arms, my hands, my underarms and my scalp, more intense each minute after the next.

I have to take a shower. I drove west, on Monroe Street. Maybe I should go to the ER, I thought, and almost turned at Columbus Avenue to go there. "No, I just need to take a shower." At home, I whipped off the jacket, the shirt, my trousers and jumped in the shower. The soap bar was just a sliver, I remember, thinking I didn't have the energy to open a new one, and then realizing I was being overwhelmed, breaking out in a redness all over, unable to breathe normally.

I stumbled out. I had to get control of my breathing. I sat in a chair and tried to slow it, to will away the incredible itchiness that was all over my body, breath in, breath out, in, out, in, out.

I realized then, I don't have my phone. I left it in the newsroom. Everything had happened so quickly. It came on so fast. I stumbled from the chair to the den in my home, to my desk, to my email. My friend Tondra Frisby was downtown, and reporter Andy Ouriel lives downtown. I sent an email to both of them.

"I was at work and got sick bad to come home. Left my phone there; Could you please bring it to me..."

I stumbled back to the living room and sat down, thinking I could calm myself down again. I could will away whatever it was that was happening. I still could not breathe with rhythm. I was gasping for air. It was at that point I knew I needed an ambulance. I crawled back to the computer. I could not even lift myself to the chair, but I was able to send another email to Andy and Tondra.

"Send ambulance."

I was lying on the floor, then, and remember looking around from that view, thinking how the house was clean, as clean as it's been in forever after a weekend spring cleaning blitz. In my mind, I started writing my own story. "He was found dead in a computer room at his modest home, on the floor. His home was neatly kept."

I wasn't ready to die. I had to get back to the living room. Every bit of energy I had left I spent looking at the email from the floor, reaching up, and seeing that a minute after I sent it, at 11:37 a.m., Andy had written back, 'OK.' He called for an ambulance.

And, now, with what I thought was all I had left I made it back to a chair in the living room, where I could watch for the ambulance. And there it was. I opened the patio door, called out to them as best I could. "Help. Help. Here. Here." But they didn't hear me. A moment later, I heard the buzzer at my front door, inside. I stumbled there, hit the button to let them into the condo building.

I fell into the hallway as I saw the paramedics approaching with a gurney.

In the ambulance, barely conscious, they worked on me. I saw Tondra drive up and minutes later she too was talking to me, trying to calm me down. When the ambulance took off, I remember looking out the back seeing the streets whiz by, trying to determine how close were to the ER.

If I can make it to the hospital, I'll survive, I remember thinking.

I was dead on the floor, but I remember being mostly content. I started writing my own story, or editing it, in my head. Doing my job has always been the easiest thing I do in life.

## Thankful

With a deep sense of gratitude rarely experienced, I want to express my thanks to the EMS/EMT first responders and all the first responders from the Sandusky Fire Department and Erie County dispatch center who answered the call March 22. You are heroes-at-the-ready every day, on every shift and in life. I want to thank the doctors, nurses and support staff at Firelands Regional Medical Center in the ER, the cath lab and general admission. Your work matters for everyone. Your kindness and professionalism was truly amazing. I also want to thank reporter Andy Ouriel and my friend Tondra Frisby. When I need you, you're always there.

matt westerhold
• Executive editor of the Sandusky Register.

# Witness for the prosecution

Much like the insurrection itself, the evolution of the Jan. 6 commission transpired right in front of our eyes.

The decisions last week by House Speaker Nancy Pelosi to bar U.S. Rep. Jim Jordan from serving on the panel is the correct one. Pelosi barring U.S. Rep. Jim West, too, is correct, same as her decision to appoint U.S. Reps. Liz Cheney and Adam Kinzinger, both Republicans, to the committee.

If you're keeping score: Pelosi 4, House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy 0 ... a big, far zero.

Maybe Republicans can't handle the truth," Pelosi said.

You think?

The best thing right now is the short, overwhelming imbalance of power that exists between Pelosi and Jordan. He's so small in her presence, in the shadow of her power, tipping and tipping his talking points like he's on Fox News having a happy chat with Maria Bartiromo.

Telling big lies, little lies, all lies, void of an authentic moment.

We all watched it unfold. At Trump's "Stop the Steal" rally on Jan. 6 his supporters turned into an angry, homicidal mob. He told them to go to the U.S. Capitol and "fight like hell" or they would not have a country anymore. He told them to go to the Capitol and stop the 2020 election from being certified.

"Hang Pence, hang Pence," they chanted as they breached security and drove to the chambers and offices of representatives and senators. "We're coming for you, Nancy."

They weren't "a loving crowd." It wasn't a "normal tourist day." Violent men beat police officers with flagpoles, with fire extinguishers, sprayed them with bear spray and tear gas; they were not hugging anyone. The hand-to-hand combat with police went on for hours. It was all Donald Trump.

We all watched, with our own eyes.

Two months later Trump said this: "It was a loving crowd, too, by the way. There was a lot of love."

It wasn't a loving crowd. It was a violent, white racist mob that attacked our government. A mob Trump incited.

The calculi lose for his bloodthirsty ways that people like Jordan and McCarthy continue to show Trump is reasserting and infuriating. These men are not leaders.

The continued grovelling for the disgraced ex-president's endorsement we see from Senate Republican candidates Jane Timken, Mike Gibbons, Bernie Moreno and Josh Mandel and others causes the same reaction. This should be all the information voters need to reject their candidacies; none of them reach a minimal standard.

Please, grow some backbone. Stand up straight, your mother would say. Show some common sense. Stop groveling.

Jordan and Vitek should be called as witnesses to testify before the Jan. 6 committee. What did Jordan know and when he know it, about the insurrection, the attack on our government, are questions committee members must ask him. Did he or did any staff members participate in the insurrection, in any way, before, during or after Jan. 6?

Under subpoena, under oath. Jim Jordan should testify before this committee. For as long as it takes to get at the truth.

Jordan should answer, as a witness.

*The Jan. 6 commission's investigation of the insurrection gets underway Tuesday in Washington. As of late Monday, Jordan had not been subpoenaed to testify.*

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Register file photo/ERIN CALDWELL
U.S. Representative Jim Jordan speaks during a segment of "Between the Lines" at the Sandusky Register on Oct. 5, 2020.

# Gavarone goes out of bounds

A state senator went all creepy at social media in recent weeks, posting attacks on the president-elect — and others — and making false statements about what the potential impact of a controversial gun law she championed will be.

After one offensive post on Jan. 13 stirred backlash Theresa Gavarone blamed the person managing her social media accounts for the mistake. But her try at correcting the first Tweet led to even more followers questioning her integrity. I agree entirely with what one Twitter user said in response to Gavarone's feed.

"When you're accustomed to privilege, equality feels like oppression."

Gavarone claims she's not the one posting at her page. I hope that is true. I believed the Sen. Gavarone I met, interviewed, the one we reported about in news stories and in lead-up to the November election was intelligent and thoughtful. The person tapping the keyboard behind her Twitter feed seems a little bit hateful, a little bit racist and downright super-spreader arrogant.

The keyboard tapper is dealing out posts in a fascist manner, identifying false victimhood and blaming false enemies for causing fake misery. In one post, white males were the victim because they might not get their fair share of pandemic relief money if "minority-owned businesses and female-owned businesses" got an equal and fair share.

I agree entirely with what another Twitter user said in response to Gavarone's feed.

"Sounds like you need new staff that respects the diversity of our country. At the end of the day, you're responsible for your social media. You should be ashamed."

It's a surprise, even, that a junior state senator would have funding available — in the midst of a pandemic and the worst economic downturn since the Great Depression — to hire a social media accounts manager. Even in better times, that would seem disingenuous. But if she does have a taxpayer budget to hire someone to be her on social media, I suggest she re-evaluate the person she's got and perhaps have someone in that job with empathy who will have integrity and be a force for good.

And for her next post, Gavarone or whomever she hires to be her on social media, should write about what white privilege means to her.

matt westerhold
• The Managing Editor of the Sandusky Register.



Provided/Theresa Gavarone Twitter account
Gavarone at a mask-less pre-election campaign rally with Vice President Mike Pence in the background. She has not condemned President Donald Trump's role in inciting the Jan. 6 terrorist attack on the U.S. Capitol, in which five people were killed as the mob tried to stop the presidential election results from being certified. Some in the mob chanted "hang Pence. Hang Pence" after he refused to go along with Trump's false claim that he won the election.

# Still I worry

***Editor's note:*** *This was written on Election Day, prior to any results being available.*

There's reason to be concerned. The polls are open this Tuesday (right now), and it could be an Election Day like no other we've known.

There's reason to be concerned.

Look no further than the Huron school board race — and other school board races across the region, the state and the country — pitting more traditional candidates against non-traditional ones.

There are five candidates in the Huron race who fit in the traditional category, and three who fit the other category.

Non-traditional candidates running for offices in elections that they say are rigged — or could be rigged or might be rigged — threaten the foundation of our democracy. Candidate Ryan Hathaway, one of the three running in Huron in the latter group, attended the "Stop the Steal" protest in Washington on Jan. 6.

Hathaway believes the 2020 presidential election was stolen from ex-President Donald Trump.

The rally directly preceded the insurrection and siege of our nation's Capitol, but Hathaway said he didn't go there after the rally, wasn't inside the Capitol Building, carrying a Confederate flag or chasing after the vice president with a noose in his hands chanting "hang Mike Pence. Hang Mike Pence."

Trump said, go, fight, "or you won't have a country." But Hathaway didn't go, he said, and when a resident asked him a few weeks ago if he would protest the results of this election if he lost, Hathaway said, "No," he wouldn't.

But don't count on that.

Hathaway, Dr. Elizabeth Laffay, a "protestor" who rushed the door at the Sandusky Kroger store last year with about 20 other mask-less shoppers, and the Rev. John Adams all have activists' agendas inspired by Trump and all the lies, big and little, that keep getting repeated. They will have a huge impact if they're elected. It won't be good.

In Sandusky, voters have the opportunity to return two veteran incumbents to office, for one last term, each. Commissioners Dick Brady and Dennis Murray have worked hard for the city, and they have succeeded in guiding it to a new, more prosperous future. City commission has succeeded in recent years, surpassing prior achievements and becoming a functional city government.

I'm feeling better about this race, and about Issue 2, the ward system for the city, being defeated. Voters in Sandusky are too smart to toss out a successful team. Too smart to sabotage the city government, especially now, when it's working better than ever.

But, still I worry.

If non-traditional candidates — the ones practicing the politics of outrage — win in other school board races public schools could be set back years. What's gets sowed by outrage politics is division, deep divisions that could take a long while to recover from, to overcome.

If candidates who promote big lies and little lies win local government seats, functioning governments will become less functional and failing governments will fail more profoundly. That too, won't be good.

I'm keeping my fingers crossed, hoping that by the time you read this the electorate here at home and across the nation will begin returning to its senses by rejecting insurrectionists, and candidates who sympathize with them.

matt westerhold
• the Sandusky Register's executive editor