

THE MON VALLEY INDEPENDENT

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STACY WOLFORD MANAGING EDITOR
LORELI BYRON ADVERTISING/CIRCULATION MANAGER

Fayette land plan sounds grand

FIGHTING BLIGHT MAY GET a little easier in Fayette County as the commissioners are expected to become the first in the state to grant land bank powers to the county's redevelopment authority.

It's a plan that looks like it will benefit county officials, the land bank and — best of all — Fayette County residents.

The move will be made in accordance with Pennsylvania Act 33, which was introduced by state Sen. Pat Stefano, R-Bullskin Township, last year and signed into law by Gov. Tom Wolf in June. Act 33 grants redevelopment authorities the same powers currently allotted to land banks through the Pennsylvania Land Bank Act.

The new legislation, which will enable redevelopment authorities to take a more active role in acquiring and rehabilitating blighted properties and neighborhoods, was passed by both the state Senate and the House of Representatives in consecutive unanimous votes. Stefano hailed the legislation as an important tool to combat a growing problem that affects many communities.

"Unfortunately, blight is like a cancer that spreads rapidly through our neighborhoods and risks the safety and economic vitality of the communities we serve," Stefano said. "In my district, several areas looked into forming a land bank, but found the start-up costs and the recurring costs to maintain it too expensive."

In many of the 16 land banks that formed following the Land Bank Act's passage five years ago, Stefano said, local redevelopment authorities have led the way for the operations.

Allowing them to now act as their own land banks eliminates redundancy and provides a huge cost savings, he added.

Fayette County Redevelopment Authority Executive Director Andrew French said the ordinance being considered by commissioners will provide them official land bank powers and give them "one more tool to help fight blight in Fayette County."

Since the Land Bank Act's passage, French said, the redevelopment authority has acquired and rehabilitated nine properties for resale to low-income home buyers; rehabilitated 33 owner-occupied residential properties; demolished more than 40 residential blighted properties and seven commercial blighted properties; and aided in the construction of more than 40 new homes for sale to first-time, low-income home buyers.

In total, French said, the authority has invested more than \$7.1 million in those efforts using a variety of local, state and federal resources.

Because the initial cost to form a land bank is often the biggest barrier for communities to create them, partnership is essential to ensure success.

Partnering with the redevelopment authority is a common-sense solution. By joining forces, both the county and the redevelopment authority can work together to speed up the process of acquiring and rehabilitating blighted and abandoned properties.

That's the kind of deal where everyone comes out a winner.

FROM OTHER EDITORS

The Blade of Toledo, Ohio, on space exploration:

Few concepts remain as intriguing and exciting as space exploration. From the Apollo 11 mission to the moon in 1969 to the Curiosity rover reaching Mars in 2012, the United States' achievements when reaching toward the cosmos is a point of national pride.

Many have hoped the next triumph could come in the form of a manned mission to Mars or the construction of a lunar base. But these projects have taken a backseat to NASA's proposed Lunar Orbital Platform-Gateway (LOP-G).

According to NASA officials, the outpost would orbit the Moon and serve as a staging area for missions deeper into space. The idea has been endorsed by the Trump administration. During a speech last month at the Johnson Space Center in Houston, Vice President Mike Pence said the administration hopes to have an American crew aboard the LOP-G by 2024.

But critics have emerged with pointed criticisms of the project. Many have noted that the proposal lacks a clearly defined scientific goal.

NASA still does exciting and helpful work — the launch of the Parker Solar Probe in August would be a good example. But the questions surrounding the Lunar Orbital Platform-Gateway are significant enough that NASA should revisit the usefulness of the project.

To publish or not to publish?

Should the New York Times have published an anonymous op-ed column that describes a White House in chaos and a "quiet resistance movement within the administration" aimed at containing President Trump's worst impulses?

The column has provoked a fierce debate in many quarters, including the classroom at George Washington University where Steve teaches a course in journalistic ethics. Margaret Sullivan, the media critic of The Washington Post, calls the fallout from the article "a quagmire of weirdness." President Trump has accused the author of "TREASON" and called for a Justice Department investigation.

The public is conflicted and confused. A Quinnipiac poll found that 55 percent believe the writer's allegations. And yet 51 percent say it was "the wrong thing" to publish those charges anonymously.

A similar debate is simmering over the new book by Bob Woodward, who depends heavily on confidential sources to draw a damaging picture of a dangerously deranged president. Even defenders of Woodward and the Times concede that using unnamed sources is never an optimal solution, and always a risk. You're asking the public to trust you while withholding key information they deserve to know and usually receive.

Here's the first test that must be met in justifying



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those risks: Is the story truly significant? Does it tell your stakeholders something they really need to know as informed citizens?

To Sullivan of the Post, the answer in the case of the Times op-ed is yes. "For me, it comes down to newsworthiness — and that the piece has, in spades," she writes. "Its revelations may not break entirely new ground, but certainly add to our understanding of an administration in dangerous turmoil."

The second test is whether the information could have been obtained in another way, and the paper insists that was not possible. Trump demands such total loyalty, goes this argument, that no internal critic could have spoken openly and survived. As James Dao, the Times editor who commissioned the piece, put it, anonymity "was necessary to protect the author from reprisal, and the concern has been borne out by the president's reaction to the essay."

The third test is making certain the anonymous source is a credible authority who knows what he or she is talking about. Dao assured Times readers that he talked

to the author directly, did "some background checking," and received a recommendation from a "trusted intermediary."

Critics were not persuaded, calling the essay old news that broke no new ground. "The fact that senior administration officials have been trying to block Mr. Trump's uninformed policy impulses, and mute his self-destructive anger and narcissism, has been reported hundreds of times," argues a Wall Street Journal editorial.

Others fear that the column will backfire, fueling even more of that anger and narcissism from Trump. As conservative columnist David Frum wrote in The Atlantic, "He'll grow more defiant, more reckless, more anti-constitutional and more dangerous ... Things will be worse after this article. They will be worse because of this article."

Trump loyalists echo the president's charge that the author is "gutless" for refusing to go public. U.N. Ambassador Nikki Haley writes in the Post that officials who disagree with the president should tell him so directly. "I do it," she says. "And he listens."

"If that doesn't work," she adds, "and you are truly bothered by the direction of the administration, then resign on principle. But do not stay in your position and secretly undermine the president and the rest of our team."

Donald Trump Jr. charged on ABC that the op-ed writer is trying to "subvert the vote of the American people who elected my father to do this job."

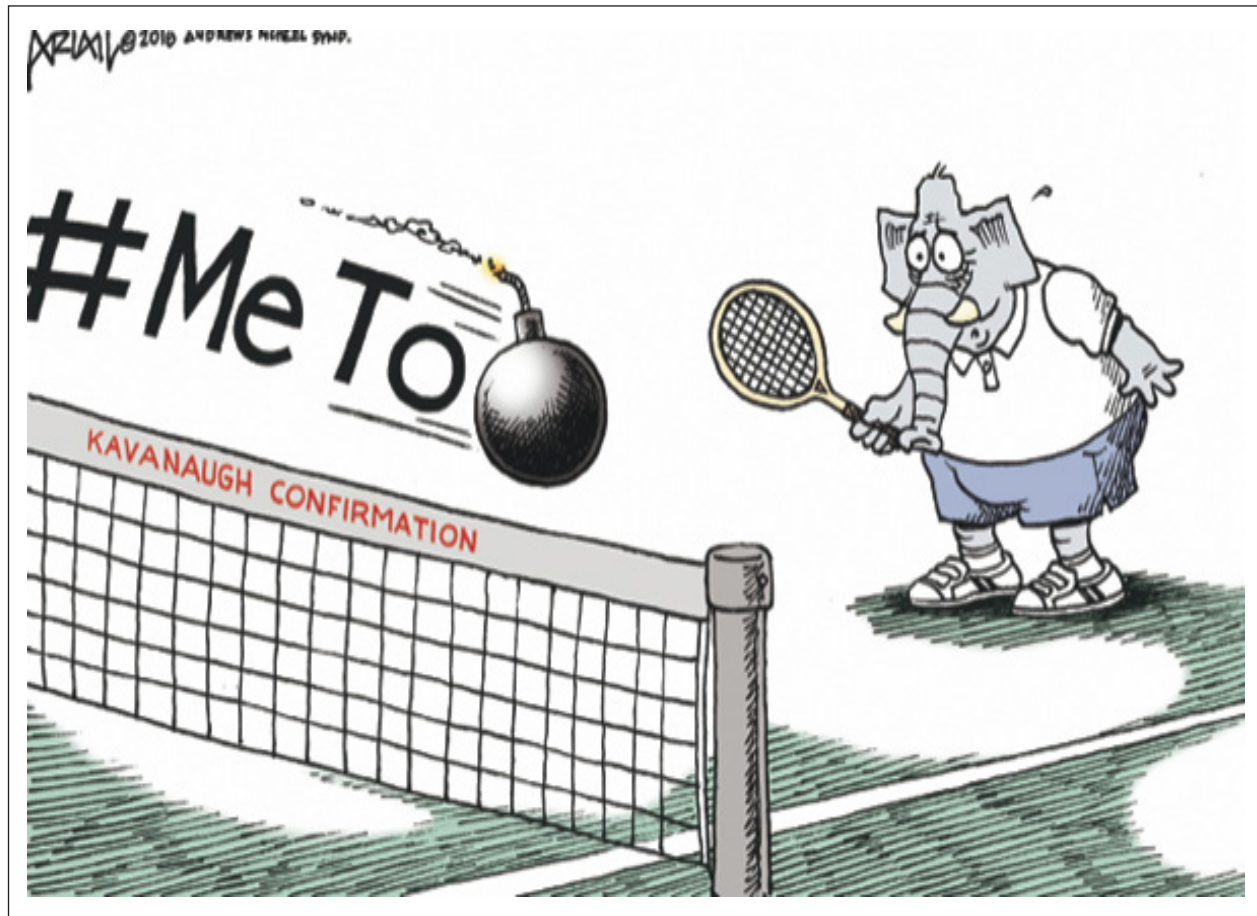
An especially damaging criticism is voiced by Woodward, who says the Times description of the author as a "senior administration official" is "too vague" and "does not meet the standards" of authority and credibility he uses in his own book.

"It is very important who it is," he explained on CBS' "Sunday Morning." "It's very important whether this is somebody who witnessed and participated." Pressed on whether he would have published the article, Woodward replied, "I wouldn't have used it."

This is a close call with no clear answer. Cokie shares Woodward's reservation that the Times did not sufficiently identify or authenticate the author. Steve agrees with Sullivan that the "newsworthiness" of the column outweighs its drawbacks.

The public will have to make its own judgment — about the validity of the Times column and the behavior of a president the writer finds so fundamentally flawed.

Steve and Cokie Roberts can be contacted by email at stevecokie@gmail.com.



Leading the church by example

I've been thinking a lot about priests lately. In truth, I often do, as some of my best friends do happen to wear Roman collars. Of course, you know why I'd be thinking about them even more lately. For priests who seek holiness in loving service to God's people — striving to see God in every person they encounter, these are grueling times.

One of the priests I've been thinking a lot about lately is the late Father Arne Panula, the former director of the Catholic Information Center in Washington, D.C., a hub for many things truly Catholic. I still have a vivid memory of seeing him after he had a very close call in his battle with cancer. Back from the brink, he had taken a train from D.C. to New York in order to attend a dinner. He was radiating a joy of life that could have only come from God. It was clear that the end was still coming for Father Panula soon, and that the rest of us at the dinner needed to see him as a message from God to be careful about falling into internet rabbit holes, getting caught up in the things of the world and being ruled by our emotions. The added time that Father Panula got was also



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enough time for my friend Mary Eberstadt to sit down with him and ask him every question she ever wanted to for his final record.

At the Catholic Information Center, Panula was a revered spiritual director, helping people discern God's will for them. Eberstadt's transcripts her conversations with Panula will be published next month under the title "The Last Homily." Parts of it read like Panula's directing us through this current moment in the Church. It's a reminder that the Christian call is the same, whatever the season — a call to truly live God's will — and our role in being the solution to the woes of the world has everything to do with living well, as Father Panula did.

Eberstadt asked him about what he tells young people about charity. His answer wasn't initially about putting money in a collection basket or giving to the person on the corner.

Instead he addressed "the most corrosive impediments to charity: anger, vindictiveness, suspicion. "Understand that you are a tempting target for the devil," he says.

Given the darkness in our midst, this grabbed my attention.

"Diablos," Panula said, "means literally 'scatterer,' and that is how evil operates: by putting obstacles between individuals and true community. His first weapon is lust. The sexual appetite is all-powerful, because it engenders a powerful good: the propagation of humanity itself."

"When the sexual appetite is turned to selfish self-indulgence, it destroys not only individuals, but a whole culture." He continued: "When lust doesn't work for the devil, or even if it does, he goes after charity. ... In all cases, I encourage spiritual jujitsu. When you begin to feel any of these divisive emotions, be self-aware, and immediately say a prayer for whoever is the object of your anger or resentment. This sets your spiritual house in order, and keeps you closer to community and less scattered."

He explained: "The first line of thought I'd advance

about charity is the necessity of getting one's spiritual, interior life framed correctly, the better to give the right sort of material help."

Perhaps now more than ever, for priests and Catholics of all states in life, this is a moment to choose to not get caught up in confusion, which is legion at the moment in the Church and many other places. Stick with/adapt/grow in practices of virtue. See them as the part of the solution they are.

Father Panula had such a serene yet commanding nature about him. And it would draw you not to him, but to the God he served. When you think of priests, especially in the wake of the abuse scandals, consider saying a prayer that they might have what Father Panula had: a gift of showing Christ to others by the way he prayed, smiled, talked and lived. You'll see Him by his love.

Kathryn Jean Lopez is senior fellow at the National Review Institute, editor-at-large of National Review Online and founding director of Catholic Voices USA. She can be contacted at klopez@nationalreview.com.