

KeyOpinion

PIC-a-PAC of Peevish Plotters

Richard L. Hershatter
Contributing Columnist

**"Sticks and stones may break one's bones,
But words can never hurt."
That's not quite true; there are a few
That people ought to skirt.**

At their regularly scheduled meeting Tuesday, several of the seven Planning and Zoning Board's members present, wearing their "PIC" hats, vented their sentiments toward the results of the Moore Restaurant rezoning referendum and the publicity received prior to the town election.

Claiming a "point of personal privilege," Board and PIC member George Symanski read a prepared statement, but refused thereafter to give a member of the press a copy.

Mr. Symanski's diatribe included accusations leveled against Alan Moore, of the restaurant bearing his name, as well as the Chamber of Commerce, the Sarasota daily newspaper, both Longboat weeklies, their respective owners, publishers and CEOs, and their columnists, including yours truly.

His charges included, collectively and individually, claims of misinformation, ignorance and calumny (although it is not certain that he knows the definition of the last word).

Sandy Gilbert, Chairman of the P & Z Board and past president of PIC, added his opinion that the public had been intentionally misled by the targets of Symanski's vituperation.

It was a classic example of logorrheic paranoia, blaming everyone else imaginable for the outcome of the voting, except the members of the Planning and Zoning Board and the leadership of PIC.

The two proclaimed themselves a "truth squad," and

charged that 75% of the statements made about the Moore problem were "gross lies" and "truly ignorant."

We have written of the good works PIC has done in the past and believe that its goals remain legitimate and the great majority of its members sincere.

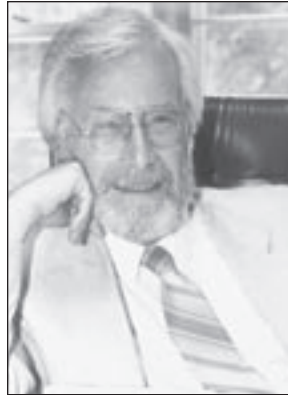
We also do not question the right of any individual to his or her opinion, with the Constitutionally protected right of free speech. What is inappropriate, however, is the utilization of a scheduled meeting of a regulatory Board as a platform for spewing forth personal frustration and spleen.

We are also saddened by the fact that the good, original purposes of the Public Interest Committee have been subverted by four of its present leaders.

The voluble quadrumvirate (for those unfamiliar with communist semantics, that's a "troika," plus one) have indulged themselves in a vitriolic spectacle rare for the Town of Longboat Key.

In addition to Gilbert and Symanski, the gentlemen in question are PIC members Walter Hackett and Jim Brown (no relation to the former mayor and columnist of the same name.)

The attitude displayed by this quartet, both publicly and privately, mandates that each of them must recuse himself from consideration when, and if, a petition for zone change of Moore's property comes before their Board. A failure so to do will mean a certain Court slap-down and reversal, with the extra legal costs involved to the taxpaying public.



In his well-reasoned analysis of the results of the town election, former mayor and Herald Tribune columnist Jim Brown (as we said, no relation to P & Z Board member and PIC leader Jim Brown), points out that notwithstanding PIC's endorsement, successful Commission candidate Bob Siekmann won by a much smaller margin than is customary in such contests.

The facts are that the town was fortunate to have two excellent candidates volunteering to serve on the same unpaid seat. It is perfectly legitimate for PIC to endorse one of them and announce such endorsement, with the reasons therefor, to the general public.

Where PIC's present leadership crossed the line, however, was to follow up with a second, last minute, electioneering pamphlet, parroting the phrases used in the candidate's campaign literature, and crying that PIC's own "volunteers" were being abused.

That made "PIC" a "PAC," or Political Action Committee, which puts the organization under a quite different set of rules, particularly with reference to in kind contributions to a candidate's campaign.

Whatever the legal implications, it is doubtful whether the dues-paying membership of PIC at large would have countenanced the antics of its leaders.

It would seem that Commissioner Siekmann won in spite of PIC. If the organization continues on its present course under its current leadership, its future endorsements will do more harm than good.

To paraphrase the words of the late U.S. Vice-president John Nance Garner, their endorsement will be as useless as a "cup of warm spit."

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Clintonism, Federalism May Save the Day

Tom Burgum
Contributing Columnist

Justice William Frankfurter once said that federalism was part of the genius of the American experience. In our system of government the authority to govern is divided between Washington and the states. Frankfurter reasoned that each of the states could become a governmental laboratory where different ideas or programs could be tried, allowing the nation as a whole to reject the failed and adopt or emulate those that succeeded. He believed a failed federal program was rarely cancelled and taught but a limited lesson.

We may need the federal system now more than ever in our history. Washington seems exhausted. It appears to even a sympathetic observer to have run out of both ideas and the energy to implement them. The huge federal deficit combined with the bitterly partisan political culture seems to have rendered Washington catatonic. George Bush has ceded the public debate to the Democrats and now seems incapable of promoting any serious agenda. Social Security reform, which many in both party parties believe is desperately needed, is dead. Even though Congress is now looking at tax reform proposals it is inconceivable the current Congress will seriously consider needed reform during this election year. The Republicans in Washington are too busy running for cover from the ports dispute to effectively govern. National Democrats seem incapable of forming a cogent agenda and seem only able to hope the rest of the country can be brought to dislike George Bush as much as they do.

Out in the states it is very different because a "Clintonian" (Bill, not Hillary) renaissance is underway. Many states are sporting a budget surplus and many also seem to have a surplus of clever ideas about what to do with the money. The Economist noted, "Prepare to travel back in time to the era of triangulation, health-care task forces and tedious third-way conferences.



The Republicans may control more governorships, but Clintonian ideas dominate governors' mansions across the country, from Little Rock to Sacramento." Finding an answer to the health insurance problem is first in line. The ideas aren't necessarily new but the great majorities are centrist ideas. Educational reform is still on most agendas, and attracting high-tech business — or almost any business that increases employment opportunities — in a state is one of the old stalwart ideas from as far back as the 70s.

The Clintonian approach take the middle ground is making it possible for various states to find answers without regard to liberal or conservative dogma. The Economist reports, "Conservative stalwarts like Oklahoma and Georgia are providing kindergarten for pre-schoolers. Everybody is trying to attract high-income workers by reinforcing 'clusters of excellence,' investing in 'meds and eds' (ie, health care and universities) and establishing initiatives in the 'life sciences.' In Massachusetts, Mr. Romney is introducing universal health care through a combination of sticks and carrots: everybody will be forced to buy health insurance, with poorer people getting subsidies."

It is instructive to realize the Clintonian approach has enabled Democratic governors to win elections in 12 states won by George Bush. It has also enabled many of these governors to succeed in achieving approval ratings in the 60-percent range despite governing in states with a majority of Republican voters. It is a bit ironic that many Democratic governors now claim to be fiscal conservatives, although a cynic might observe it's good someone is fiscally conservative because the national Republican party seems to have abandoned the idea. Still, it is not surprising to find many state-based Democrats on the conservative side of the spending issue as they seem to have no problem adopting "red-state" ideas. Bill Richardson in New Mexico has cut taxes. The new Democratic governor of Virginia has been a missionary in Latin America. Brian Schweitzer of Montana is an avid hunter and has been careful to support second amendment rights. Kathleen Sebelius of Kansas has proposed a military "bill of rights" to help families of military personnel. Other Democratic governors in both swing and red states have approval ratings in the 50 and 60

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