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THE OPINION PAGE

In the Mail: letters@gfherald.com; Box 6008, Grand Forks, N.D. 58206

OUR VIEW

If schools have not had 'the talk,' it's time

Herald editorial board

A former high school football player in Proctor, Minn., has been arraigned on a charge of sexual assault. It's the latest in an incident that resulted in the cancellation of the school's football season and, in the weeks since, has focused more attention on hazing and school assaults.

Alex John Baney has been charged with third-degree sexual criminal conduct. He allegedly assaulted a teammate with the handle of a toilet plunger after the victim was chased and then held down by others.

Of course, it's just an allegation for now. But enough evidence apparently was available to prompt the school to shut down its football program shortly after learning about the incident. Now, it's in the hands of the courts and the law.

To be clear, incidents like that alleged in Proctor should not be considered "hazing." If it indeed happened as alleged in court documents, it's nothing short of sexual assault, and it's happening more than one would imagine.

In August, in suburban Chicago, high school football players were accused of sexually assaulting two freshmen in the locker room, part of what some have described as a hazing tradition at Plainfield Central High School. According to Newsweek, three adult coaches were aware of the tradition.

According to an attorney quoted by Newsweek. "Coaches were aware of these gruesome hazing traditions and looked the other way, allowing it to happen."

In September, according to ABC affiliate WCVB, a Massachusetts man said his son was attacked and sexually assaulted by Wobun Memorial High School football players in a school locker room.

"It eats me alive to see the mob of kids and football players bullied him, harassed him, sexually assaulted him, physically assaulted him," said the boy's father, according to WCVB.

And in November, at Wall High School in New Jersey, a charge was filed after six athletes allegedly pinned a younger student and threatened to sexually assault him with the handle of a broom or mop, according to a news report by New Jersey radio station 101.5.

In 2017, CBS News, citing an Associated Press review of sexual assaults and hazing, outlined numerous cases nationwide in the previous few years.

"Targeting rookies for humiliating, and even risky, rituals is not new to sports," the report said. "However, experts say the last 10 to 15 years have seen an escalation into sexual violence." Because the incidents are mislabeled as hazing, many cases don't show up in education records or crime data, the report said. One source in the CBS story said that "if this happened on the street, nobody would say this is hazing or bullying."

And B. Elliot Hopkins, a sports safety expert at the National Federation of State High School Associations who was quoted throughout the CBS report, said the issue could end almost immediately if schools stressed the dangers to players and coaches.

"But adults aren't saying the proper words to the kids and adults aren't saying the proper words to the coaches. And that's why it goes on," Hopkins told CBS.

School administrators, have you had this talk with your coaches? And coaches, have you had this talk with your players?

We hope so. But if not, it needs to happen now.

Hoeven avoids a showdown

In a column printed Feb. 16, I suggested U.S. Sen. John Hoeven "is at some risk of entrapment" in a campaign involving Rep. Rick Becker. The trap was sprung 10 days ago, at the Republican convention in District 2.

Hoeven wasn't there, but his surrogate was booted.

Becker, a state representative, who wants Hoeven's seat, was there. His remarks were greeted enthusiastically, judging from coverage of the event printed in local newspapers. Becker is the founder and chief spokesperson for a group of legislators called the Bastiat Caucus, which distrusts government pretty much wherever it occurs.

District 2 Republicans selected a delegation numbering 94 persons to attend the state party convention, which is set for the first weekend in April. The delegation is the largest in the district's history and among the largest of district delegations. It "will be a force to be reckoned with," the Tioga Tribune said.

Likely it will be. The delegation, like the convention, was clearly hostile to Hoeven, who is running for his third term in the Senate, again judging from newspaper coverage of the event.

While Becker was haranguing the crowd in Tioga, Hoeven was courting voters at a less well-attended convention in nearby Williston, according to the Fortuna Oracle. This may have been a strategic blunder for Hoeven. The District 1 convention held in Williston failed to fill its



MIKE JACOBS

delegate slate.

Or maybe not. Hoeven is touchy about criticism. He's made a career of being inoffensive, and his election victory margins attest to his success. So perhaps his absence from the District 2 convention was a thoughtful defensive move.

It's not a surprise that District 2 would elect a rightward-leaning delegation. The district vividly reflects the sharp rightward lurch in North Dakota politics.

District 2 is Oil Country. The convention was held in Tioga, where oil was first discovered in North Dakota. The district is the northwesternmost in the state, encompassing a large swatch of territory basically between the Canadian border and the Missouri River and extending about 90 miles eastward from the Montana border.

The northwest part of the state gained a district in the reapportionment plan approved in November. The new district, given the number 23, includes portions of the city of Williston and rural subdivisions nearby - territory that had been in District 2 before the explosive population growth associated with the oil boom. The number reflects the loss of population in east-central North Dakota. The old District 23 was south and west of Grand Forks, south of Devils Lake,

and included the county seat towns of Finley, Cooperstown and New Rockford.

I'm well acquainted with District 2. The place where I grew up is in the southeasternmost corner of the district, southeast of Stanley, my home town. The area elected Democrats to the Legislature into the first decade of this century. It sent moderate Republicans to Bismarck as late as 2020. They'll be there in the 2023 session, since the district's population didn't change enough to force an election this year. Even-numbered districts elect legislators in presidential and gubernatorial years. U.S. Senate elections alternate, of course, because senators serve six-year terms.

Some of the rhetoric at the District 2 convention was inflammatory, according to reporting in the local newspapers. Becker was quoted as saying "People need to start going to jail. For God's sake, they need to go to jail."

One of the attendees, identified by The Tribune as Dennis Lindahl, a Tioga broadcaster and the town's economic development director, suggested that "the penalty for treason is the death penalty."

Tioga has been the focus of quite a bit of right-wing activity. Many of the participants at a rally protesting vaccine mandates held at the state Capitol in November arrived by bus from Tioga. The bus was provided by a group called "Sons of Liberty," whose members were prominent among district convention goers. Of course conventional

wisdom suggests Hoeven will win and win easily. He's never lost an election and six years ago he was reelected with more than three-quarters of the vote.

But as the song says, "That was yesterday." And politics have changed.

Addenda

Secretary of State Al Jaeger supplied additional names of state officials who were appointed to office and subsequently elected, the subject of last week's column. Here's his list:

"Jim Poolman resigned as insurance commissioner in August 2007 and Adam Hamm was appointed and then elected in 2008 and 2012. Byron Dorgan was appointed tax commissioner in 1969, Heidi Heitkamp in 1986 and then Ryan Rauschenberger and Brian Kroshus. On the Public Service Commission, Bruce Hagen was appointed in 1961, Dale Sandstrom in 1983, Susan Wefald in 1993, Bonny Fetch in 2012 (did not run for election), Kevin Cramer appointed in August 2003, and then we have Julie Fedorchak and Kroshus."

You'll recognize most of these names as important players in North Dakota politics.

Wrong again

In last week's column I wrongly gave the Legislature the ability to amend the state constitution. This is exclusively the purview of voters. Legislators can amend initiated measures after seven years by a two thirds vote.

Mike Jacobs is a former editor and publisher of the Grand Forks Herald.

DOUBLE PLAY

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Following is telephone and regular mail contact information for North Dakota and Minnesota congressional delegates, as well as for the governors of those states. Email addresses for the delegates can be found on their websites.

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