



The Public Square

by J C Bowman

I have been travelling and unavailable to write this month, so the article this month is written by my friend Danace Martin-Dillon. I hope you read her words carefully. I want to send out congratulations to my daughter Jennifer Bowman and her husband to be Daniel Martin. they are no relation to the guest columnist. In addition, I want to express sympathy to Helen Miller, one of the greatest teachers the Cleveland City System has ever had, on the loss of her husband John Henry Miller. Also please keep my mother-in-law Nancy O'Bannon in prayer as she battles pneumonia and other life threatening illnesses.

When people discuss the Bradley County School Board, a big topic these days, they think of controversy, tax increases and politicians with loftier aspirations. The county system and the students it serves will never thrive under a school board that makes decisions to appease a few. Instead of basing their decisions on facts and data, many members of the school board -- both past and present -- have been swayed by a few individuals on just about every critical issue. We need drastic changes to the way our public schools are managed, starting with the structure of the school board. If we elect the school board, we should also elect the Superintendent/Director. If we appoint the Director the same logic suggests we should also appoint the school board. Our children's education and well being should be the real issue here. The school board in unison makes reference to under funding of education, yet seems willing to focus time, money and energy on a helpless teacher using the power of politics.

In just a few days, local schools will open for another year. For the first time

in nearly four decades Greg Cain will not be there to welcome back students. He has been suspended without pay. He is guilty without a trial. The five school board members who regularly vote together endorsed the last act of the former director of schools. The "agenda item" was a joke. Even board members were told they could not speak, the Chairman angrily banged his gavel and the audience had no opportunity to exercise their free speech. What is the real reason for this whole mess? Somebody, in this case a teacher, spoke out about the sleaze factor that seemingly engulfs this elected body and that person is being made an example to keep others from also speaking out. We should put a medal to his chest and promote him.

The taxpayers of Bradley County need to know the real issues and the general public should do some investigating of their own concerning the qualifications each member holds on the board. Do these people have any degree or previous experience in the public education system? Do they have children in the system? These are questions that need to be taken into consideration when examining our board members. What is their political agenda? Do they profit directly or indirectly by their position? Do their family members? It is time we focus on the children rather than personal vendettas. Public School teachers need to take notice of recent events, for they may very well be next. Make no mistake the Bradley County Board of Education has targeted Greg Cain, a tenured teacher with 35 years of experience. *Who is next?* The school board is dysfunctional and only voters can change the direction. Please do not surrender your voice to this out of control government entity. Our

founding fathers would not do it, why should we?

It is time the BOE addresses real issues and is made to be accountable for this and other erroneous decisions and wasting taxpayer money. Tennessee is behind the education levels of other states and Bradley County behind other counties in the state, probably because of small town politics and backroom dealings. These small town politics or white chalk politics are complete with personal agendas, overpaid administrators and self-serving school boards. Teachers are not overpaid and if they speak out they are targeted. They should all ask: will I be next?

Greg Cain is a tenured teacher with absolute legal rights. The action taken against him is blatant teacher abuse. The policies and procedures, available online and put in place by The Bradley Board of Education (BOE) were NOT followed. The issues that the BOE is trying to force about an internet policy were unknown to all teachers, and such use will be difficult to verify. The current policy is poorly written and antiquated. But the issue is not about a policy violation, it is really about squashing freedom of speech. There were no notices or warnings verbally, in writing or otherwise. There is nothing regarding this issue or any other issue found or mentioned in his teacher file. Greg Cain absolutely did not neglect his class; there was an intern in his class during the 2007-2008 school year. An Intern is a degreed teacher. Other teachers also had interns. All tenured teachers need to be concerned about who could be next. Teachers need to consider joining their local union. As Benjamin Franklin stated during the signing of the Declaration of Independence "We must all hang together, else we shall all hang separately"

Yes, Greg Cain was outspoken in some of his political beliefs, as were many of our forefathers, which

"some" in Bradley County did not like—namely the power brokers on the Bradley County School Board. However, that is not a reason to terminate someone for exercising their rights to free speech. This is an American right. All someone needs to do is look at comments directed about our President, Congress, other candidates and political figures or public policies. Free speech is the cornerstone of our democracy. The web site Greg posted his opinion on www.bradleyweekly.com was an approved web site or surely the technical personnel at the Bradley County Schools would have blocked it, like they blocked other sites and users. Many citizens enjoy the opportunity to comment privately on the issues of the day.

Some of the individuals on the BOE have a personal agenda, and have had a personal agenda for a long time. The timing of the event against Mr. Cain is very suspect. The former director, Bob Taylor, waited until the very end of his term to initiate this action. Thus impacting Mr. Cain's chances to properly defend himself or secure other employment opportunities. The question is, did Mr. Taylor threaten Mr. Cain if he did not resign he would go after his teacher license or if he resigned he would make this go away? Why are Taylor supporters continuing these efforts? Why the need to destroy a simple classroom teacher?

Strangely, the new Director of Schools continues to uphold the prior vendetta against Mr. Cain. As Principal of Bradley High School, Mr. McDaniel apparently had no knowledge of the events which were supposedly happening in his own school. He appears to not have been even aware of any problems or privy to the information that there was an impending and now reported investigation. Mr. Cain received a letter stating he had been rehired like every other tenured teacher at the end of May 2008. Then

a mere month later while school is not in session Mr. Cain is targeted for termination. The new Director barely in our community for a year has demonstrated he neither understands the citizens nor the community and is continuing the pursuit of personal vendettas and agendas. He did understand that as Director of Schools he could help his son get a job at Bradley High School, and that is just what he did. Even if Bob Taylor signed off on it and Todd Shoemaker made the decision, it was suspect to say the least. When the School Board wants to talk about the "Good Old Boy Network," it obviously has firsthand knowledge and experience. Dr. Baker states he wants to end the "Good Old Boy Network," then why has he never addressed these types of issues? He turned a blind eye to the previous director hiring his spouse, and he turned a deaf ear to a school board member whose then wife gained employment at a school. He will more than likely have a closed mind and mouth in protecting Mr. Cain. If you wanted to chastise Mr. Cain, the message was sent. He will not be a member of a private internet community and share concerns again. You have effectively silenced him and won. But this entire issue is an unnecessary. The entire effort is a total waste of taxpayers' time, money and energy. Who wins here? It certainly is not the children. It is time to let this issue go,

issue a reprimand if you must, and move on.

As the school year begins we all are aware that many teachers have to buy their own supplies to provide for children. Children themselves have to conduct fundraisers to have money for school needs. Why does a bruised school board member or director of schools ego warrant this much attention? What a disgrace, not enough money to fund our children's basic needs but willing to spend money to target a teacher for expressing an opinion. We are constantly reminded that the Director of Schools and other high salaried administrators and self-serving board members supposedly have our children's best interest in mind. We know this is clearly not happening. Let's spend this time, money and energy on the real issues the Board is charged with, our children and their education.

The school board is dysfunctional and only voters can change the direction. Please do not surrender your voice to this out of control government entity. Our founding fathers would not do it, why should we?

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Kind words can be short and easy to speak but their echoes are truly endless.

-Mother Teresa

Politics In Our Schools.... by Donace Martin

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