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EDITORIAL

Cobb educators face a ...

PRESUMPTION OF GUILT

To the list of most dangerous jobs in our community (police officer, firefighter, etc.) it is time to add another: Cobb County educator. It's hard to say otherwise after a dismaying string of cases that have seen the Cobb School District chew up and spit out some of its most capable personnel on the flimsiest of pretexts.

State law requires school employees (and volunteers at schools) to report suspected abuse of children within 24 hours of hearing about it.

Those found guilty can be fined up to \$1,000 and jailed for a year, even if it turns out that the alleged assault that sparked a case never actually happened. And to its discredit, the Cobb school board has been overzealous in enforcing that law.

The latest such unintended Cobb victim is now-retired Kell High School principal Trudie Donovan. Her acclaimed career essentially ended after she quickly was charged with failure to report to higher-ups that Kell teacher James C. Brigham had slapped one student's buttocks and another in the face while in class last year.

But guess what? As reported in Monday's MDJ, the Cobb Solicitor's Office now has decided to drop the charge against her due to lack of evidence.

"After an extensive investigation, the state is unable to pursue this charge due to lack of facts or supporting evidence to prove beyond a reasonable doubt that the defendant violated the 'willfully and knowingly' portion of (the mandatory reporting law)," Assistant Solicitor General Latoria Hines wrote.

And three months before Donovan retired, Dr. Jerry Dority, a 28-year educator and principal at Tapp Middle School, and counselor Yatta Collins were charged (and later fired by the school board) for failure to report that a child allegedly had been molested and had attempted suicide. Collins had heard the allegations second hand and Dority third-hand. Hearsay evidence is inadmissible in U.S. courtrooms; but failure to report hearsay allegations is now a fireable offense in Cobb, and we suspect other parts of Georgia as well.

Meanwhile, Awtrey Middle School principal Jeff Crawford is the latest educator to get snared. He failed to report hearing of an alleged off-campus sexual assault involving two students. The Cobb School District apparently has decided to "go easy" on Crawford. It did not file criminal charges, but is trying to suspend him

for a day without pay and plans to haul him in for a disciplinary hearing next month. He contends he did nothing wrong and is fighting what would be an undeserved blot on his reputation.

And in an even more troubling case that didn't involve the 24-hour reporting law, but amply demonstrates the Cobb School District's "fire 'em first; ask questions later" approach, standout Cobb elementary teacher Gregory Leontovich was fired by a prior incarnation of the Cobb school board in

2005 for supposedly sexually assaulting a 6-year-old student — even though her teacher swore the girl had never left her classroom on the day in question and even though a hospital exam showed no signs of an assault. It was her word against his, and that was good enough for the board.

Leontovich eventually cleared his name in 2008 (with the help of a Cobb Superior Court jury, and after spending 26 days in jail), but lost his job, his profession, his reputation and his savings in order to do so.

SO TO RECAP, neither Donovan nor Dority nor Collins nor Crawford are accused of actually abusing anyone. Yet all have become high-profile victims of a well-intended but flawed law, their names and careers in tatters or tarnished.

"For this to have fallen on (Donovan) the way it did was just a tragedy, and unfortunately things are going to have to happen to prevent this from occurring (again)," retired Cobb assistant superintendent Dr. Stanley Wrinkle told the MDJ.

"This just changed a person's life," he said. "There is no telling how much money she spent (defending herself), but to treat someone like a common criminal is beyond words of horror."

That goes for the others accused as well.

POLICE OFFICERS who shoot someone in the line of duty typically are put on desk duty, with pay, until the matter is resolved.

Someone accused of sexual assault in cases like the ones cited above is presumed innocent until proven guilty.

Cobb educators, however, are presumed guilty unless they can somehow prove their innocence.

That is wrong and needs to change. The Cobb school board needs to challenge Superintendent Dr. Michael Hinojosa and the Central Office to re-evaluate how they apply the law in question in order to prevent more valued educators from becoming casualties.

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— retired Cobb assistant school Superintendent Dr. Stanley Wrinkle



1925 - 2013

COMMENTARY

Thatcher embodied ...

VIGOROUS VIRTUES

She had the eyes of Caligula and the lips of Marilyn Monroe. So said Francois Mitterrand, the last serious socialist to lead a major European nation, speaking of Margaret Thatcher, who helped bury

socialism as a doctrine of governance. She had the smooth, cold surface of a porcelain figurine, but her decisiveness made her the most formidable woman in 20th-century politics, and England's most formidable woman since its greatest sovereign, Elizabeth I. The Argentine junta learned of her decisiveness when it seized the Falklands. The British, too, learned. A Tory MP said, "She cannot see an institution without hitting it with her handbag."

She aimed to be the moral equivalent of military trauma, shaking her nation into vigor through rigor. As stable societies mature, they resemble long-simmering stews — viscous and lumpy with organizations resistant to change and hence inimical to dynamism. Her program was sound money, laissez faire, social fluidity and upward mobility through self-reliance and other "vigorous virtues." She is the only prime minister whose name came to denote a doctrine — Thatcherism. ("Churchillian" denotes not a political philosophy but a leadership style.) When she left office in 1990, the trade unions had been tamed by democratizing them, the political argument was about how to achieve economic growth rather than redistribute wealth, and individualism and nationalism were revitalized.

And the Labour Party, shellacked three times, was ready for a post-socialist leader. Tony Blair was part of Thatcher's legacy.

Time was, Labour considered itself the party of ideas and Tories preferred balancing interests to implementing political philoso-

phy. But by the 1970s, Labour was a creature of a single interest group, the unions, and the Tories, who made Thatcher their leader in 1975, were becoming, as America's Republicans were becoming, a party of ideas.

Britain has periodically been a laboratory for economic ideas — those of Adam Smith, John Maynard Keynes, the socialism of postwar Labour. Before the ascendancy of Thatcher — a disciple of Milton Friedman and Friedrich Hayek — Tories tried to immunize Britain against socialism by administering prophylactic doses of the disease.

But by 1979, Britain's fundamental political arrangements were at issue: Such was the extortionate power of the unions to paralyze the nation, the writ of Parliament often seemed not to run beyond a few acres along the Thames.

In 1979, she won the most lopsided election since 1945, when there had not been an election for 10 years. In 1983, she became the first Tory since 1924 to win two consecutive elections. In 1987, she won a third. Her 12 consecutive years were an achievement without precedent since the 1832 Reform Act moved Britain, gingerly, toward mass democracy. The most consequential peacetime prime minister since Disraeli, by 1990 she had become the first prime minister to govern through an entire decade since the Earl of Liverpool from 1812 to 1827.

In Britain and America in the 1960s and 1970s, government's hubris expanded as its competence shrank. Like her soul mate, Ronald Reagan, Thatcher practiced the politics of psychotherapy, giving her nation a pride transplant. Reagan was responding to 17 lacerating

years — Dallas, Vietnam, Watergate, stagflation, the Iranian hostage crisis. She was sick and tired of three decades of Britain being described as the Ottoman Empire once was, as "the sick man of Europe." She set about disrupting settled attitudes and arrangements by enlarging and energizing the middle class, the great engine of social change in every modern society.

Before Thatcher, Britain's economic problems often were ascribed to national character, and hence were thought immune to remediation. Thatcher thought national character was part of the problem, but that national character is malleable, given bracing economic medicine. Marx's

ghost, hovering over his grave in London's Highgate Cemetery, must have marveled at this Tory variant of economic determinism.

When Nature was serving up charm and convictions, Thatcher took a double serving of the latter, leaving little room on her plate for the former. But by what has been called her "matriarchal machismo" she usefully demonstrated that a soothing personality is not always necessary in democracy.

Like de Gaulle, she was a charismatic conservative nationalist who was properly resistant to what she called the European federalists' attempts to "suppress nationhood and concentrate power at the center of a European conglomerate." She left the British this ongoing challenge: "We have not successfully rolled back the frontiers of the state in Britain, only to see them reimposed at a European level." As long as her brave heart beat, she knew there are no final victories.

George Will is a columnist with the Washington Post group.

She aimed to be the moral equivalent of military trauma, shaking her nation into vigor through rigor.

The lady was a champ

MANCHESTER, England — There is a story about Margaret Thatcher, which is probably apocryphal, but speaks volumes about the strength of Britain's first female prime minister, who died Monday at age 87.

Following her election in 1979, the story goes that Thatcher took her all-male cabinet out to dinner. The waiter asked what she would like. "I'll have the beef," she said. The waiter asked, "What about the vegetables?" "They'll have the same," Thatcher replied. "Thatcher Saved Britain," read a headline in the Daily Telegraph. No, Thatcher inspired citizens of Great Britain to have less faith in government and more self-reliance, so that they could save themselves. Ronald Reagan tried to do the same for America.

In 1979, Britain and the United States were in a funk. President Jimmy Carter blamed Americans for what he called their "malaise."

Thatcher reminded Britain of its glorious past and the inherent strength of the British people. She didn't believe Britons had to accept their lot.

Thatcher began dismantling the welfare state, breaking up state monopolies and confronting powerful unions. Reagan shared her views and the two of them sought to restore their people's faith in individualism, turning them away from the false and failed doctrine of government as savior.

I met Thatcher on several occasions and saw her "live" many times, including during a debate in the House of Commons in the early '80s with Labour's Michael Foot. Thatcher annihilated him on every point to the delight of her Conservative Party colleagues and many in the galleries.

Her longtime director of press and communications, Harvey Thomas, emailed from London.

He said he once suggested she might soften her tough image by allowing him to "(make) her a little more 'domestic,' (emphasizing) family and (her) gentler side. She turned to me and said, 'Oh, we can't do that, dear. If the Russians start to think I am too feminine, it could lead to World War III.'"

After Thatcher left office, we shared the stage at an event in Phoenix, which was organized by former presidential candidate Steve Forbes, the publisher of Forbes magazine. After her address she walked into a reception area and sat down at a table by herself. Everyone seemed afraid to approach her. I sat down next to her and we had a nice chat about world events while the

hesitant crowd gathered around to listen.

She transcended identity politics. Her ideas, not her gender, were supreme.

British Prime Minister David Cameron called her "a lion-hearted" leader who served the British people "with all she had." And she had a lot.

She also shared Reagan's gift for turning a phrase. Among many reprinted in the British press: "For me, pragmatism is not enough. Nor is that fashionable word 'consensus.' . . . To me consensus seems to be the process of abandoning all beliefs, principles, values and policies in search of something in which no one believes, but to which no one objects..."

In a 1981 speech she said, "My policies are based not on some economics theory, but on things I and millions like me were brought up with: an honest

day's work for an honest day's pay; live within your means; put by a nest egg for a rainy day; pay your bills on time; support the police."

True to her principles to the end, she requested that she not be given a state funeral with military flyovers. "It would be a waste of money," she reportedly said. Instead, Thatcher's ceremonial funeral will be conducted at St. Paul's Cathedral with Queen Elizabeth breaking protocol by attending her first funeral for a prime minister since Winston Churchill's nearly 50 years ago.

UK Telegraph columnist Allison Pearson wrote: "Lady Thatcher wasn't normal, but then neither was her achievement. She sacrificed family life and got the job done."

Not a bad epitaph.

Cal Thomas is the country's most widely syndicated columnist.

Cal Thomas
COLUMNIST