

OUR VIEW | LA MARQUE POLITICS

Much about La Marque politics indeed a matter of trust

Prolific petitioner Joseph Lowry is right about one thing — much about the political warfare underway in La Marque boils down to a matter of trust.

Lowry opened the door to a discussion about trust when he argued neither he nor the political action committee behind the drives need disclose their funding sources.

“Nobody cares how they’re funded as long as we win,” Lowry told a Daily News reporter. “My supporters trust me because of who I am.”

At issue was the fact Galveston County Connects, the PAC behind petition drives to roll back the city’s tax rate and recall the mayor and a city councilwoman, had failed to file a campaign finance report July 15, as required by state law.

The PAC clearly is an extension of Lowry. His partner, Sarah Dougherty, is listed as treasurer and Lowry is the sole donor on the one report the PAC has filed during its existence.

Lowry on Thursday gave The Daily News a copy of an invoice showing the PAC paid Texas Hometown Strategies, a Leander-based company that runs political campaigns, \$45,000 for canvassers, mass text messaging and other services less clearly defined performed in service of at least two of the drives.

He declined to divulge the sources of all that money, however.

The considerable amount of money involved makes the PAC’s failure to abide by the campaign finance disclosure laws all the more serious. It makes the drives appear less like hip-pocket campaigns run by disgruntled Joe Citizens, and more like well-funded machine politics.

Either way, the state of Texas has campaign finance disclosure laws so the public can see the money behind political actions underway and political operators at large in their communities. Political people such as Lowry and political organizations such as the PAC have both legal obligation and ethical responsibility to disclose the sources of their money.

That’s a public, not a private, matter, so it was reasonable to ask about it and expect a person interested in abiding by the letter and spirit of the law to disclose what the law demands be disclosed.

Instead, Lowry said what he said.

That’s richly ironic because Lowry has presented himself as the guardian of all things legal and ethical in La Marque; as the common citizen holding the powers that be to the highest possible standards, worthy of trust because of “who I am.”

So, who is Joseph Lowry? We know from past reporting he is, by practical definition, or was, by legal technicality, a felon.

He was convicted in the state of Washington for possession of materials used in the cooking of methamphetamine, along with having the intent to do so.

Methamphetamine, of course, is a dangerous illegal drug causing an epidemic scourge in rural parts of the United States. It has killed people, shattered lives and families. It’s every bit as bad as crack cocaine, fentanyl and Oxycontin. People in the methamphetamine trade are every bit as bad

as people in the crack, fentanyl or Oxycontin trade.

Lowry was beneficiary of a diversion program that allowed him to have the record of his conviction expunged. That happened last year but not before The Daily News obtained the records.

Society might reasonably expect a person who benefited as much as Lowry did from society’s trust and largesse to go forth along the straight and narrow for evermore. Lowry didn’t and seems not even contrite about having violated a state law that’s ridiculously easy to abide by.

And the violation smells more like a premeditated strategic move than an honest oversight. That’s because the PAC’s next campaign finance report is due Jan. 1, just less than two months after Nov. 8, when Mayor Keith Bell, and, likely, Councilwoman Kimberley Yancy, will face recall.

Expedient, is it not, to withhold the names of the money people behind the drives, at the risk of a two-bit ethics commission fine, until after the election? Honest and ethical? No.

On the other end of all this are Bell and Yancy, two volunteer public servants who, as far as we know, have never been convicted of anything serious, much less felonious meth cookery.

That Lowry has any supporters or credibility in La Marque is baffling and might have been abetted by the improper actions of two elected officials — state Rep. Mayes Middleton and county Tax Assessor/Collector Cheryl Johnson, who allowed the PAC to use their names, faces and offices on a mailer advocating for the rollback vote.

Johnson claims she was merely supporting the public’s right to vote one way or another during the rollback referendum and that Galveston County voters would get that nuance.

That’s hogwash, of course, and to prove it we propose a test — we challenge Johnson and Middleton to put their names, faces and offices to a Beto O’Rourke campaign mailer along with a disclaimer such as “we staunchly support your right to vote for somebody to be governor of Texas.”

So, two elected officials who should have known and done better attached themselves and offices to a PAC that can’t follow the law run by a person who once was convicted of a serious drug felony.

The obvious problem in that is exponentially worse in Johnson’s case.

- Johnson’s office was at least involved in a calculation error that falsely set the legal conditions for the recall petition to happen in the first place.

- Johnson’s office vetted signatures on the petitions and determined they were valid. A few of them have been called out as forgeries or otherwise bogus. City officials have said the district attorney’s office is investigating, although we haven’t been able to confirm that assertion.

- And Johnson gave back-handed support to a political campaign in which she also was supposed to be an impartial arbitrator.

Is it any wonder La Marque leaders believe they’re targets of some sort of conspiracy? They need not be especially paranoid to get there, and they might very well be right.

— **Michael A. Smith**

IN PLAIN VIEW | LEONARD WOOLSEY

After everything, COVID finally found me

After more than two years, the COVID virus finally caught up with me.

What a difference a couple of years makes. After masking, keeping bottles of hand



LEONARD WOOLSEY

sanitizer in cupholders and being cautious around large groups, the virus bit me as suddenly and angrily as a pissed-off wasp.

But today, I’m better — and I am thankful.

No fun was the best way to describe my experience. The virus slammed me with the wallop of my head shoved in

a trash can and someone keeping time with an AC/DC tune. And my body demanded sleep like a lost caravan searching for water in the desert.

Full disclosure — I am fully vaxxed and boosted. And according to medical advice, I do not have any known underlying risk factors. I was advised to expect a bumpy ride, but over-the-counter remedies should offer relief.

COVID continues to be a part of our lives, with hundreds of people dying each day because of the virus. And I’m sure we all agree that to the family impacted, one is too many.

We’ve come a long way in the past couple of years. Rewind to March 2020, when we knew more about Batman’s backstory than how the new virus would impact us. Then, deaths were rampant, especially among the elderly and those with pre-existing conditions. And the reality of an effective vaccine remained an elusive wish.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention links more than 1 million deaths to COVID-19 and its variants. Current rates points to 357 deaths a day and 59,000 new cases a day. Fortunately, because of vaccinations and behavioral safety measures and recent versions of the virus being less lethal, hospitalizations are below 4,400 a day.

Simply put, we are getting better at managing the risk and understanding the best course of action.

But considering I am fully armed, at least as the CDC would recommend, this is one nasty and unpredictable virus. Some get a fever, and others do not. Many get head colds, others long-term exhaustion.

For me, a day or so of fun-house dreams and 18 hours of sleep in a 24-hour window seemed the worst. But my body knows it’s been in a train wreck of a battle. A short walk around the neighborhood on the third day sent me scrambling in retreat for a nap.

A friend told me he knows of more friends getting COVID now than ever before, but they are — fortunately — getting through it.

There is the challenge: The virus is still with us and will most likely be around for the long term. Those with the highest risk factors will likely remain at more risk of the more dangerous outcomes from the virus. But our medicine, knowledge of treatment and self-awareness of managing risk are at an all-time high.

So yes, I admit I am fortunate. I thank those who worked tirelessly to understand the best medical and behavioral way forward.

And I will continue to pray for those who least need this in their lives.

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COMMENTARY | REMEMBERING KIMBERLY BROWN

There’s love in this world for you

One of my dearest friends died more than a month ago. Sept. 17 would’ve been her 49th birthday.

Kimberly Brown took her life.

No one knows why.

She wanted to do it.

She drove from the middle of Jefferson County to the middle of Crystal Beach — past The Big Store.

That’s a long drive when you know at the end you’re going to take your life.

We met at Lamar University-Beaumont in the University Press offices.

I might have known her two days when she asked me to go see a ballet of “Romeo and Juliet” at Julie Rogers Theatre.

I might’ve been the first or 31st person she asked, but I accepted.

Five or 10 minutes into the ballet, Kimberly leaned over to me and asked, “When do they start doing the dialogue?”

“I don’t think they recite dialogue in ballets.”

Another 10 minutes go by and the dancers are flat-out not speaking Shakespeare.

“Yeah. They don’t talk in ballets.”

After, we ended up at a coffee place in Old Town. There were no other customers, just the two guys running the place.

It was ridiculously quiet and other than our drink order, Kimberly and I almost didn’t speak.

I was intimidated by the silence.

I took her home and instead of going straight in, Kimberly asked whether we could sit outside and talk.

We sat on this small concrete front



SEAMES O'GRADY

porch and had the conversation we could’ve had at the coffee place.

Kimberly admitted she was also intimidated by the silence.

Our conversation was wonderful and amazing and I remember none of it.

But Kimberly did one thing I will never forget. She sang to me. Why? I can’t remember. I do remember the song — “John Deere Green” by Joe Diffie.

From that moment I was hooked.

Here’s another — Kimberly and I went to New Orleans to see Britney Spears.

Britney is the best. Shut up. Let it go.

We were in the main concourse of the New Orleans Arena — now the Smoothie King Center.

I see an older man — shock of white hair — in a gray suit. He’s standing with presumably his wife and two teenage daughters. All three women are platinum blondes. The entire family is dressed — crisp.

Their attire is better fit for church or Sunday brunch than a Britney Spears concert.

The man turns and I recognize him.

I lean to Kimberly and said: “Kimberly. That man, over there, that’s Edwin Edwards.”

“Who’s Edwin Edwards?”

“The former governor of Louisiana. He resigned because his administration was so corrupt.”

“How do you recognize these people?”

We approached Edwin Edwards — no one else was. Britney’s fans, strangely, don’t follow corrupt Louisiana politics.

“Gov. Edwards?”

He turned like he was floating.

“Hello, Governor. I just wanted to say ‘hello’ and shake your hand.”

“Well, thank you.”

“And this is my friend Kimberly.”

Then he turns to Kimberly, puts out his hand and in a way only a corrupt Southern politician could pull off, he said to her: “And what a lovely friend you are.”

Kimberly is like no one else.

That’s an easy thing to say. We all have special people in our lives who break and hold our hearts.

Most of them never know what they do to us.

She’s not perfect.

As a daughter, sister and mom, Kimberly could be challenging, but you love Kimberly anyway.

People cannot be explained or understood.

As you read this, the one next to you could never explain to you who they truly are. If they could, you could truly never understand.

We, at times, all can feel lost. We all can feel alone. It’s not unusual to any of us.

Know this, there is love in this world for you and some of that love exists around you every day from everybody who populates your world.

Please know you are loved.

Be kind — to others and yourself.

Seames O’Grady is the Design Editor for The Daily News.

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