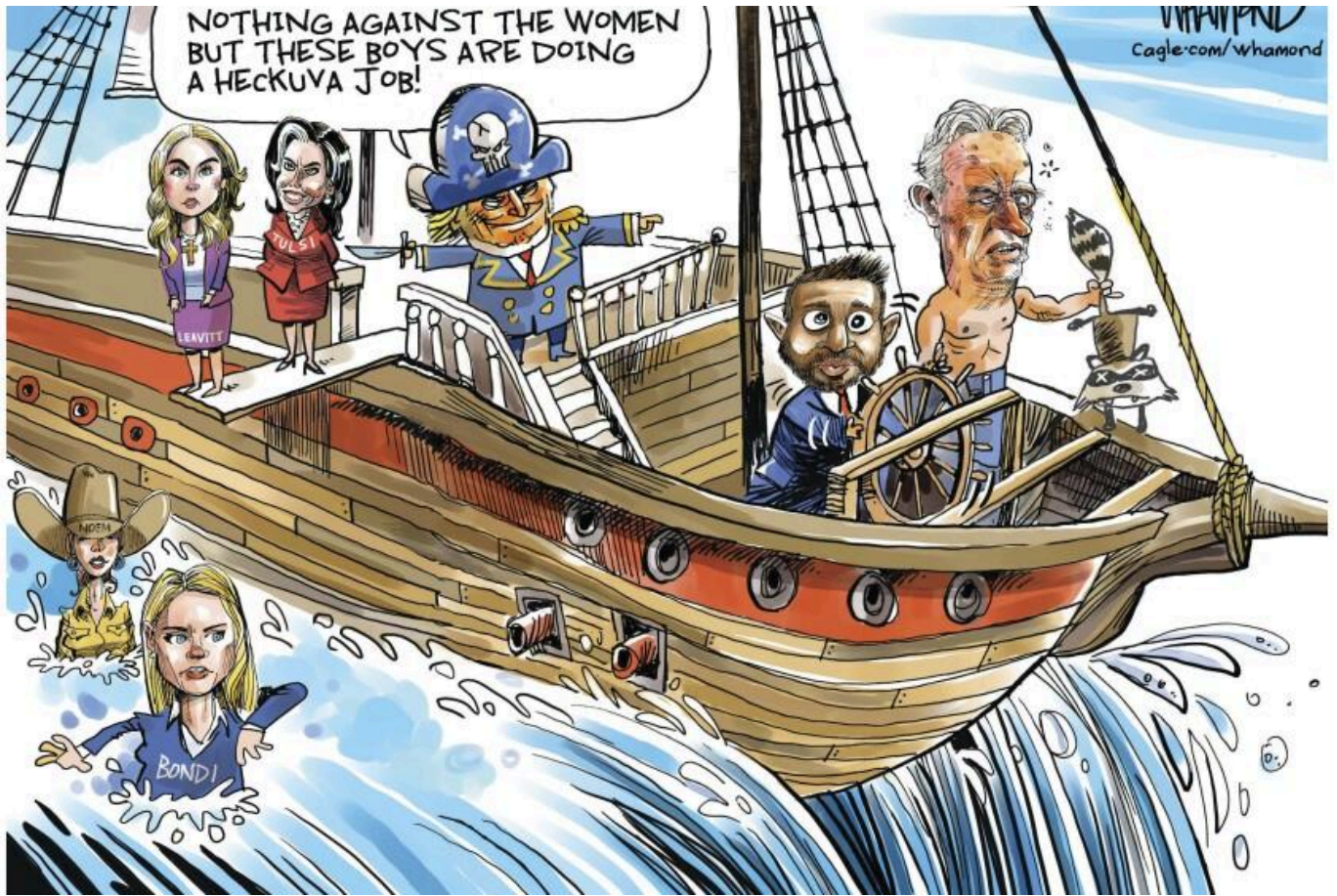


OPINION COLUMNS

Local View: Loyalty to Trump like a Northwoods punch to the ... ahem

From the column: "Why do certain people not only consent but campaign to become members of such an inner circle?"



Dave Whamond/Cagle Cartoons

By David McGrath

Today at 8:26 AM

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Opinion

My friend from work had driven up from Chicago for a three-day visit to my summer cottage in northern Wisconsin. We were younger and still enjoyed the occasional pub crawl to celebrate a birthday or promotion. We also were, and still are, fond of lagers, some of the finest of which have been brewed in Michigan (Bell's), Minnesota (Fitgers), and Wisconsin (New Glarus).

On the drive back home on a sunny afternoon along Highway 63 near Trego (population 187) — where the roadside is lined by stands of fir, spruce, red pine, and the Namakogan River shining through the foliage — we spied a beer sign tacked to the outer wall of prefab, corrugated building with a flat roof.

Voila! An oasis in the middle of the Northwoods.

And a timely opportunity for a pair of connoisseurs to sample local craft beer, not to mention the region's local color, before resuming our trip with, perhaps, a story to tell.

Inside, it was dark and cavernous. Three dozen men sat at tables and on stools around the bar, and a trio of women dressed like pop star Madonna were huddled in conversation on a small stage. Very quickly we realized it was a gentlemen's club.

Savvy readers know that the "gentlemen's club" was a British invention that evolved into a euphemism for a "sophisticated" strip joint , meaning less stripping and more lingerie. It was not the kind of venue my friend and I frequented. But when most every patron's head turned to see the shaft of light the two tourists let into the room, my friend and I exchanged glances, shrugged, and silently agreed the polite thing would be to stay for one beer.

That in itself was disappointing, as there were no taps behind the bar, just coolers stuffed with cans of factory brews. The bartender set cans of Leinenkugel's before us, though he failed to offer a glass — on purpose, I later learned, a policy necessitated by bar fights.

While he didn't apologize for the omission, he did tell us it was too bad we missed the raffle. The women had earlier sold raffle tickets to customers, with one lucky winner chosen for an intimate interaction. If we stayed long enough, he said, there'd be another raffle when the next shift of "hostesses" checked in.

"That's all right," said my friend. "Our lap dance days expired when we joined AARP."

The lucky winner, however, was in for something far different than what we imagined. It began predictably enough when he ascended the stage, sat in a chair, and beamed ear to ear at the three women, But then they tied his hands behind his back and, to our horror and everyone else's apparent appreciation, they each stood in front of him, counted to three, and punched him in his privates.

His face, as one can imagine, screwed up into an agonized smile, while the rest of the patrons clapped and jeered.

When I asked the bartender if the poor guy knew what was going to happen, he said it was the second time that summer the guy had “won.”

We were still shaking our heads on the drive home. Neither of us understood the allure, concluding only that more people than we could imagine don't mind debasing themselves for 15 minutes onstage.

Which also could be said about President Donald Trump's current cabinet and why any of them agreed to serve the same man who had turned against a throng of his picks in his first term, including Jeff Sessions, Rex Tillerson, Anthony Scaramucci, John Kelly, and Reince Priebus. Nearly 40% of his entire staff! Trump demonstrated he won't abide any distraction from the 24/7 party celebrating him. Not for very long, anyway.

So why do certain people not only consent but campaign to become members of such an inner circle?

Kristy Noem, governor of South Dakota; Pam Bondi, attorney general of Florida; and Elon Musk, a Mensa-certified genius and the richest man in the

world are not stupid people. Yet they went ahead anyway, getting in line with other sycophants to get figuratively punched in the groin by Trump.

Could it be their judgment was disabled by too much ambition and too much arrogance, believing they would be the exceptions to the rule? That they might grab a share of Trump's power and bright light without him turning on them?

Or is it, instead, conceivable that they knew it would happen but embraced the inevitable pain, deeming it a small price to pay for basking in a narcissist's sun? Since I cannot get inside their brains, I can only speculate as to their motivation.

But anyone viewing a single segment of the president's cabinet meetings, featuring the monthly litany of hyperbolic praise and groveling adoration of their idol, perceives there is no limit to the humiliation they invite.

Or welcome? Tolerate? Enjoy? Mystifyingly crave?

Let me know which one you think it is.

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