



Horton's

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Defending due process at Michigan State University

*Hyper-Ventilator Media & Political
Opportunists inciting passions in
the aftermath of the Nassar Atrocity*

I do not have the personal stature nor a large media platform to be the sheriff who stares down the lynch mob—to evoke that familiar western movie scene—but if there is someone willing to take on that role, then count me in as a deputy protecting the flank and adding support.

The lynch mob I'm talking about are the hyper-ventilating media and the political opportunists who are taking the Nassar atrocity at Michigan State University and seeking additional culprits besides the guilty party (Larry Nassar) who has been sentenced to spent the rest of his life in prison. And justly so.

After much outcry, including editorial demands by the major daily newspapers and demands by leaders in the state legislature, MSU President Lou Anna Simon resigned.

Then Mark Hollis, the athletic director, followed suit, announcing his retirement.

They may not have not any inkling and thus are not guilty of any wrongdoing, but given their roles as the full-time administrators at the university and the allegations that there were staff at MSU who may have known of Nassar's behavior towards the young girls under his medical care and looked the other way, or didn't look hard enough when complaints were brought forth by a few of the young ladies and their families, or (worst yet) badgered them into dropping the complaints, or that there was a culture of sweeping such matters under the rug—not just with these young gymnasts, but football and basketball players accused of sexual assaults as well, then their leaving was necessary.

But ever so quickly, not content with that, there were calls for the elected Board of Trustees to resign. And if they didn't do that, then the media and legislative leaders want to take the extraordinary (and questionable Constitutional) step of having the Governor remove them from office.

Not for any so-far provable criminal conduct, but because (and I'll agree that their guilty of this) for being "tone deaf" and seemingly more interested in protecting the MSU brand than embracing the emotional devastation that these young women were testifying to in front of the court, and (in

hindsight) not taking a more pro-active and watchdog role in handling this situation.

Certainly, a case could be made to not re-elect any of them who choose to seek another term for such conduct, but (thus far) I don't regard that their alleged "tone deafness" and "inappropriate response" as rising to the level that justifies being removed from office. Given such power, the governor might be tempted to add a few troublesome legislators to the list.

And if the board of trustees are pressured into resigning or removed from office, then who is next on the list?

PERHAPS THE MOST TROUBLING OF WHAT'S BEEN PROPOSED by a few of the media pundits and legislators is that Michigan should scrap its current statewide election of boards for the three major universities—MSU, the University of Michigan, and Wayne State University—and instead have the governor appoint them, with the consent of the Legislature.

The argument that's been advanced is that these boards are comprised of members, nominated by each of the political parties and elected, in large part, due to their either being famous sports figures or having name recognition due to previous elective positions, and that they are more interested in the perks of going to a Saturday football game than in overseeing the university.

If true, then MSU and the U of M have managed to be world-class universities in a variety of realms, besides athletics, in spite of such ineptness. But I don't think so. The last thing we need in Michigan is to turn these boards into political patronage by a future governor, or a political football between a governor and legislature of opposing parties, or create constant turnover at the expense of institutional experience. These elected boards, including the State Board of Education, broaden government and add other, diverse

voices to the dialogue (which I regard as a plus) rather than further centralize the chain of command.

A legal process exists. Including a presumption of innocence until guilt is proven. What quaint notions. We now have assorted investigations that have been or will likely be launched, including that by the Attorney General's office that could result in criminal charges if evidence of wrong-doing or negligence is discovered. Admittedly, it's a slow and laborious process, and does not provide instant gratification. And even when the investigations are completed—if they're done with integrity and not pre-determined outcomes—the list of the guilty might not seem adequate befitting the crime. Or, on the other hand, a lot heads might roll.

The young ladies got the justice due to them with the conviction of Nassar. It was part of the due process. If others at MSU (past or present employees) are guilty in some fashion or other, then further justice is also warranted. But we need to put away the rope and wait and see.

As for all of the hyper-ventilators and opportunists who are busily and eagerly inciting the passions, the former with their usual penchant for fostering sensationalism and the latter with an apparent ulterior motive of altering the current State Constitution and getting rid of independent university boards (and the state board of education while they're at it), well I don't have much stature in the public arena, but—as I said—I think I'll go find a spot next to the sheriff.