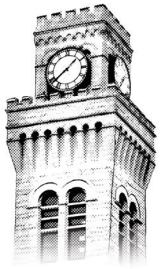


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Former superintendent sues school district

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SIoux CITY – Former Sioux City Superintendent Paul Gausman is suing the Sioux City Community School District and multiple school board members for alleged violations of open meeting laws.

The lawsuit filed in Woodbury County District Court on Wednesday claims school board members Dan Greenwell, Jan George, Taylor Goodvin and Bob Michaelson violated Iowa Open Meetings laws.

According to the lawsuit, board

members held illegal meetings citing the wrong Iowa code sections in order to avoid notifying Gausman or the public of their discussion of him and the following board decision to file a complaint against him with the Iowa Board of Educational Examiners.

Board members identified in the lawsuit declined to comment at this time. Greenwell said “the district was advised by council preceding all closed meetings.”

Gausman led the Sioux City Community School District for 14 years and left the district in June 2022 for a job as superintendent

of the Lincoln Public Schools. Gausman did not immediately respond to a voice message left by the Journal.

Gausman is seeking the removal of the four school board members from their elected positions as well as monetary damages and attorney fees. He is also asking the Iowa Board of Educational Examiners to dismiss the complaints filed by both the district and Greenwell personally against him.

Gausman claims the four

Please see **GAUSMAN**, Page A4



Dr. Paul Gausman, superintendent of Sioux City Community Schools, talks to Sioux City media on Feb. 23, 2022, about his selection as the next superintendent of the Lincoln Public Schools district.

TIM HYNDY, SIOUX CITY JOURNAL

DAWN SNYDER RETIRES AFTER 34 YEARS



TIM HYNDY, SIOUX CITY JOURNAL

Dawn Snyder, education program director at Woodbury County's Dorothy Pecaut Nature Center, is retiring Feb. 2. She was hired as the county's first full-time naturalist in 1988 to begin nature education programs.

Outdoor education

County naturalist completes career at nature center

SIoux CITY – Following in her grandmother's footsteps, Dawn Snyder went to college to be a teacher.

The only problem: the education classes were boring. “My real love is just being outside. I started finding my niche when I started taking zoology and biology classes,” Snyder said. “I wanted to teach,



NICK HYTREK

but I didn't want to be in a classroom, so I became a teacher of the outdoors.”

For more than 34 years, Snyder's led field trips and programs at Woodbury

County parks and the Dorothy Pecaut Nature Center, showing children and adults new ways to appreciate what surrounds them outside.

“That's the whole point, and the whole reason is to be a place

where people can connect with nature,” said Snyder, who will retire Feb. 2 as the nature center's education programs director. She'll be honored during an open house from 3-6 p.m. on Feb. 1 at the nature center.

Snyder has seen a couple generations of excited children pull up in school buses, excited at the possibility of seeing a deer or a turkey in the wild. They weren't always fortunate enough to spot a turkey or deer, but they were lucky to have Snyder leading them on the journey, pointing out other

animals and plants seen along the way and sharing knowledge gained through years of her own outdoor exploration in western Iowa's Loess Hills and abroad.

Snyder initially figured she'd gain no more than five years of Loess Hills knowledge.

Please see **HYTREK**, Page A4



To WATCH: Snyder talk about her career, point your smartphone camera at the QR Code and tap the link. **NEWSVU**

Signatures tipped Gill off to voter fraud

NICK HYTREK
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SIoux CITY – Prior to the 2020 general election, a Woodbury County voter attending Iowa State University visited the Iowa Secretary of State Office's website to request an absentee ballot.

After entering her voter identification information, the student was informed she'd already voted. The same thing happened to her brother, also an ISU student.

Both called Woodbury County Auditor and Election Commissioner Pat Gill to report that someone had cast ballots in their name.

Gill's office reviewed the signatures on the students' absentee requests that had been submitted before the general election, then compared them with those on absentee requests filed in the students' names before the primary. All four forms appeared to have been signed by the same person.

“Those ballots during the primary, that stepped it up for me,” Gill said at a Friday press conference.

Gill said both the Secretary of State and then-Woodbury County Attorney Patrick Jennings advised him to report the incident to the FBI. Gill's report touched off an FBI investigation that came to light Thursday, when Kim Phuong Taylor, the

Please see **FRAUD**, Page A4



To WATCH: A clip from the press conference, point your smartphone camera at the QR Code and tap the link. **NEWSVU**

THE MINI: The new Republican controlled House promises to balance the budget. The first law they passed, to cut back on IRS enforcement, shows their true colors. It will make it easier for the rich to cheat on their taxes, and would add \$114 billion to the deficit. —**Greg Nooney, Sioux City**

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JESSE BROTHERS SIOUX CITY JOURNAL

Dr. Paul Gausman, superintendent of the Sioux City Community School District is shown in the school board room in Sioux City on June 1, 2022.

Gausman

From A1

individuals “recklessly and knowingly participated in the violations of the Open Meetings Act,” according to the lawsuit.

School board members Perla Alarcon-Flory, Monique Scarlett and Bernie Scolaro as well as former school board member Julie Albert were in attendance at certain meetings but were not named in the lawsuit.

The suit claims on Jan. 24, 2022, and Nov. 30, 2022, the board held special meetings and closed sessions to discuss Gausman and his professional qualifications.

“Both the open and closed session was designed to avoid giving Dr. Gausman, his supporters and the public, notice of the Board’s intentions to meet to discuss filing a complaint against Dr. Gausman with the [Iowa Board of Educational Examiners,]” according to the lawsuit.

On Jan. 24, 2022, Gausman states the board met in a closed session to discuss him and his professional qualifications and proposed to file a complaint against him with the Iowa Board of Educational Examiners.

To go into the closed session, the board cited the Iowa Code stating the closed session was to “evaluate the professional competency of an individual whose appointment, hiring, performance or discharge is being considered when necessary to prevent needless and irreparable injury to that individual’s reputation.”

The code section specifically states that the individual being reviewed must request the closed session, as well as meet other requirements Gausman claims did not occur.

Gausman claims he was not notified and the board did not notify the public that they intended to file a complaint against him with the Iowa Board of Educational Examiners, which the lawsuit claims was required.

On Nov. 30, 2022, the board held another special meeting and closed session to discuss Gausman, he claims.

The board cited a different code section stating the meeting was to “review or discuss records which are required or authorized by state or federal law to be kept confidential.”

This code section specifically states the board is only allowed to discuss the confidential record and Gausman claims it went beyond that.

He also alleges the board again discussed his professional competency, job performance and the possible filing of a complaint with the Iowa Board of Educational Examiners.

After the closed session ended and the board went into open session, Goodvin made a motion to direct Greenwell to file the complaint. Scarlett and Scolaro abstained from the vote, and Alarcon-Flory was not present. The motion did not state who the complaint was being filed against.

Greenwell filed the complaint on Dec. 2, 2022.

The complaint claims Gausman attempted to bribe Michaelson and George on Nov. 17, 2021, before their official swearing-in on Nov. 22, 2022. Greenwell claimed it was an attempt to solicit their support to re-elect Alarcon-Flory to board president, in the letter sent to the Iowa Board of Educational Examiners.

“Dr. Gausman directly offered to allow Mr. Michaelson (board member-elect) and Mr. George (board member-elect) to make any of their desired changes in school operations, programs, activities, and other matters in exchange for their vote for Ms. Alarcon-Flory as president of the board,” Greenwell said in the letter.

Greenwell claims the conversation took place at a public place in Des Moines with Gausman, Michaelson, George and Alarcon-Flory present. Greenwell states the pair objected to Gausman’s offer multiple times.

“Ms. Alarcon-Flory remained silent regarding the bribery offer during the discussions at the table,” he said in the letter.

Greenwell’s letter claims Gausman admitted to the bribery at a meeting on Jan. 27, 2022, with Greenwell and Goodvin present, as well as in a separate discussion with Scarlett.

The letter to the examiner’s office also claims Gausman disclosed confidential closed board meeting information to staff members. It states Gausman acquired information from the closed session from Alarcon-Flory and shared it with cabinet members.

Greenwell’s letter claims Gausman admitted to Greenwell and Goodvin that he shared the information with the cabinet members. He states cabinet members have confirmed the information was shared with them.

The complaint is pending and is “meritless and made false claims,” according to the lawsuit.

The lawsuit also states Greenwell himself filed a complaint against Gausman on Aug. 1, 2022, with the same claims in an similarly worded letter, without board support.

The Iowa Board of Educational Examiners requires complaints to be from the district, and the one filed in August was not approved by the school board. It was dismissed for lack of jurisdiction, but Greenwell had withdrawn his complaint.

Gausman is requesting the recording and minutes of the Nov. 30, 2022 meeting. The lawsuit claims he previously filed a Freedom of Information request to acquire the Nov. 30 recording but was denied by Greenwell in a Jan. 5 email.

Gausman claims the board must be in agreement to deny those records and no meeting was held.

Greenwell, before being elected to the school board in 2019, had been vocal in his pushback on educational strands pushed by Gausman. After being elected he continued to be a critic of Gausman.

Hytrek

From A1

The day she graduated from Iowa State University with her fisheries and wildlife biology degree in 1988, Snyder received a job offer from then-Woodbury County Conservation Board director Rick Schneider to be the county’s first full-time naturalist. After thinking it over during a 10-day hiking trip in the Great Smoky Mountains, Snyder, a Tripoli native who grew up exploring the river and woods near her northeast Iowa home, decided to pass up a possible chance at a similar job expected to open in her home county and move to the western side of the state.

Her job was to develop an environmental education program to introduce children to nature.

“I really had a clean slate, and there was no road map to follow,” she said.

At the time, she, Schneider and a secretary were the only members of the Conservation Board’s administrative office, the three of them sharing one computer on the eighth floor of the Woodbury County Courthouse. Snyder would haul materials a couple blocks away to her car and head out to schools or county parks to put on her programs.

It wasn’t an ideal setup, and in 1989, Snyder men-

tioned the idea of creating a nature center where visitors could come view exhibits and she’d have more room to store educational materials and conduct programs for children and adults. Long story short, the idea caught on and, through the hard work of a number of people, the Loess Ridge Nature Center opened in 1995. It was renamed the Dorothy Pecaut Nature Center two years later.

“It’s been a dream come true,” Snyder said of the nature center’s creation. “It was such a team effort and neat to see people from so many facets come together. Oftentimes I refer to it as my first child.”

As is often the case with real-life children, it became an anchor, giving Snyder reason to put down roots in Woodbury County. She couldn’t move away when there were so many things to accomplish as she and others kept dreaming up project after project to enhance the nature center.

“I didn’t really expect to stay in Sioux City and Woodbury County for more than five years,” Snyder said. “We had so many great opportunities here, and things kept evolving. My best memories are how it’s shaped friendships and my family.”

Over the years, she’s gained many close friends through her work and has never tired of seeing the ex-

citement of children making a connection with nature. Through their observations and curiosity, she’s frequently learning along with them.

“The neat thing about being a biological educator is you learn by asking questions,” she said.

The Conservation Board’s administrative staff has grown to 11 people since Snyder came to Sioux City, and the nature center continues to add programs and other features to attract visitors. It’s a job that’s never really done, Snyder said, but she had reached a point at which she’d accomplished many of her goals and felt it was time to step down.

You’ll still find Snyder outdoors during her retirement. She’ll have more time to spend with her own gardens and other organizations to which she belongs, and it’s a safe bet she’ll be spending a number of hours out at the nature center, now as a volunteer, helping with various projects.

“It’s been a huge honor, and I’m humbled by all the comments and support and hard work people have done at the nature center and the county parks,” she said.

Like a tree in the woods, Snyder’s career began with a small shoot and branched out over time. Now it’s time to enjoy the full growth of a career spent sparking an interest in nature in others.

Fraud

From A1

wife of Republican Woodbury County Supervisor Jeremy Taylor, was arrested on 52 counts of election fraud. She has pleaded not guilty and is scheduled to stand trial in federal court in Sioux City in March.

The indictment alleges Kim Taylor fraudulently filled out absentee ballot requests and voter registration forms and cast absentee ballots on behalf of others during Taylor’s unsuccessful run for Congress in the 2020 primary election and his election to the county board in that fall’s general election.

Kim Taylor’s name had been linked to suspicious election activity before.

Gill said he had received complaints about her during previous elections. Her husband successfully ran for the Iowa House in 2010 and lost his re-election bid in 2012. He was elected to the county board in 2014 and was re-elected in 2018. Gill didn’t say what years he received complaints about Taylor, but said he dismissed them because many candidates and their spouses go door to door during campaigns seeking support.

Taylor did not respond to requests for comment on Thursday and Friday. His wife’s attorney also has declined to comment on the charges.

The night of the 2020 primary election, Gill saw compelling evidence someone was casting fraudulent ballots.

Election workers who were processing absentee ballots and tallying write-in votes found several ballots in which the handwriting appeared similar. Jeremy Taylor received numerous write-in votes for county board and county auditor in the election.

“You could tell by looking at them they were all filled out by the same person,” Gill said.

Because the ballots had already been fed through the scanner, they had been separated from the voter’s affidavit, so it was impossible to tell who had submitted the ballots, so Gill was unable to take action.

When processing absentee ballots during the fall general election, workers noticed similar-looking signatures on affidavits as they opened the envelopes containing the ballots.

“The staff told me there were a lot of signatures coming in on affidavits that looked like they were signed by the same person,” Gill said. “There were quite a few,” but he didn’t count how many.

Gill said his office provided FBI investigators with all the

suspicious ballots, absentee request affidavits and voter registration forms. The FBI didn’t seek records from previous elections, he said.

The FBI investigation continues, and a Justice Department official on Friday declined to comment on it.

Gill said he couldn’t give an opinion if the actions affected the outcome of any races.

In Jeremy Taylor’s primary challenge of Iowa 4th District Rep. Steve King, Taylor received 18.5% of the votes cast in Woodbury County, far behind Randy Feenstra and King. District-wide, Feenstra won the primary with 37,329 votes, King received 29,366 and Taylor was a distant third with 6,418.

County Republicans that summer nominated Taylor to run for county board against incumbent Democrat Marty Pottebaum in November, and Taylor won election by nearly 2,000 votes.

Taylor had resigned from the board earlier in the year after Gill determined he could no longer hold office because he was not living at the address listed on his voter registration and was living outside his district, violating a state law requiring county supervisors to live in the district in which they are registered to vote.

According to the indictment, Kim Taylor, whom Jeremy Taylor met while teaching in Vietnam, approached Sioux City residents with Vietnamese backgrounds who had limited ability to read and understand English and offered to help them vote.

She is accused of signing absentee ballot request forms for residents who were not present or told residents they could sign the forms for other family members, a violation of the registration affidavit in which applicants swear they are the person named on the form. In some cases, the indictment said, Taylor filled out the ballot and signed the accompanying affidavits for people who were not present or telling family members they could sign on their behalf. She then delivered the ballots to the auditor’s office.

Gill on Friday recalled a few occasions when he observed Kim Taylor dropping ballots in a drop box outside the courthouse and saw Jeremy Taylor sitting in their car waiting for her. Kim Taylor voted her own ballots in both elections.

Though Jeremy Taylor has not been charged, speculation swirls about his future on the county board.

Board chairman Matthew Ung, a Republican, said he received a call Friday morning from a county resident asking him to fire Taylor. Ung said board members can’t remove fellow supervisors.

Ung said he’s spoken with

Taylor about the allegations, and it’s up to Taylor to address them.

“He has every right to speak for himself,” Ung said. “It will no doubt impact the work of the board as we navigate one of the most challenging budgets in years.”

Ung said the board agenda at each weekly meeting provides time for supervisors to raise concerns. Time also is allotted for members of the public to address the board or individual supervisors about any issue. The next board meeting is 4:30 p.m. Tuesday in the courthouse basement. According to Iowa Code section 66, an elected county official may be removed from office by a district court judge after hearing evidence after receiving a petition for removal. The code says the county attorney must file the petition when it involves a county official.

Woodbury County Attorney James Loomis said he hadn’t received any communications from the board or the public about Taylor’s status on the board. Loomis, who was elected this past November, said he’s not familiar with the process to remove a board member, but noted Taylor currently faces no charges.

“That bridge will get crossed when it needs to be crossed,” Loomis said. “I can’t comment on what-ifs.”

After redistricting in the wake of the 2020 census, Taylor now represents District 5 and currently serves as the board’s vice chairman. He’s up for re-election in 2024.

As for the election process, Gill said the system of checks and balances in place caught the fraudulent activity that led to the investigation.

“I want to make sure people understand the system works,” he said.

Voter fraud also is rare, Gill said, noting he’d seen few cases during his 26 years overseeing the county’s elections.

His assessment matches what experts have observed nationwide.

“Voter fraud and election fraud are both incredibly rare,” said Sean Morales-Doyle, director of the voting rights program at the Brennan Center for Justice, a New York-based nonpartisan law and policy think-tank.

It’s typical, Morales-Doyle said, for a defendant to be charged with one count for every vote impacted, so it’s not uncommon to see an individual charged with multiple counts, as Kim Taylor has been, though her total is uncommonly high.

“Someone being charged with 52 counts is rare,” Morales-Doyle said. “It rarely happens because it’s hard to run a scheme that will impact a large number of votes.”

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