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# Ohio's House Bill 6 bribery case is the scandal that won't go away

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Some years ago, I took part in an FBI Citizens Academy, a six-week program which gives participants a close-up look at how the bureau conducts investigations.

One agent shared with the class that when it comes to public corruption, New Orleans is the heavyweight champ.

Guess whose state legislature is in the top 10?

During her unsuccessful campaign for governor in 2022, Dayton Mayor Nan Whaley pointed out the FBI has identified the Ohio Legislature as one of the country's most corrupt.

No one paid her a bit of attention.

Because gerrymandered districts and bad electoral maps have created a supermajority which answers to no one, it's small wonder that two successive Ohio House speakers came under FBI investigation for corruption, with one of them landing in the hoosegow.

Earlier this month, the feds arrested former Public Utilities Commissions of Ohio Chairman Sam Randazzo for allegedly accepting \$4.2 million in bribes from FirstEnergy in exchange for bestowing favorable treatment, including helping the utility secure House Bill 6, a law which has you on the hook for a \$1.3 billion bailout of its outdated nuclear power plants.

In a "deferred prosecution" deal with the U.S. Attorney's Office, FirstEnergy threw Randazzo under the bus by admitting it paid him the bribe.

Several FirstEnergy executives were fired, but no one from the company has gone to jail. No one.

Former Ohio House Speaker Larry Householder, former Ohio GOP Chair Matt Borges, Householder's political consultant, went to jail, but there were enough people involved to fill a cell block.

**Ambivalence run amok:** Larry Householder abused the public's trust...but do Ohioans really care?

Rather than handcuffs and a perp walk, Randazzo was allowed to surrender following his recent 11-count federal indictment on bribery and fraud charges.

You, on the other hand, would have been frog-hopped into a police van — live — on TikTok.

Despite being warned not to play footsie with Randazzo, Gov. Mike DeWine and Lt. Gov. Jon Husted blew through the guardrails, with DeWine appointing the attorney and former utilities lobbyist as PUCO chair in 2019.

Husted, whose gubernatorial aspirations are the worst-kept secret in Ohio, claims he doesn't remember much about any discussions involving Randazzo's appointment.

How did we get here? Part of the problem is culture wars. Too many single-issue voters are willing to ignore the elephant trampling through the china shop if it means their particular cause has a chance of becoming policy.

We're also here as a result of gerrymandering, which transforms the democratic process into a shadow of itself. It enables unserious people and demagogues whose qualifications for office aren't as important as their willingness to be good soldiers, and it generates an arrogance that sees no need for restraint or compromise.

Gerrymandering makes mockery of the foundational belief that "Politics is the art of the possible."

DeWine, whose Macbethian ambitions have always been camouflaged by his homespun, mayor-of-Mayberry persona, somehow always manages to avoid direct blame, even though his decision to appoint Randazzo has resulted in the biggest political scandal in state history, and FirstEnergy customers in Ohio having to pay higher utility bills.

According to Cleveland.com, DeWine was warned to steer clear of Randazzo shortly after his 2018 election by J.B. Hadden, a longtime friend who served as his campaign treasurer.

Now, in an exercise of audacity that can't be measured, FirstEnergy just asked for a \$1.4 billion rate hike through something called an Electric Security Plan. If approved, customers will start paying more next year, and every year through 2032, according to a report by the Ohio Consumers Council.

Meanwhile, a bill to repeal House Bill 6 has languished in Columbus like leftover potato salad.

It's often said that voters ultimately get the government they deserve, but the recent election and the passage of Issues 1 and 2 showed what can happen if enough Ohioans get fed up.

Yet, even as we speak, efforts are underway to undermine the will of the voters by elected officials who are choosing to ignore the very people for whom they work.

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