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Charita Goshay: Is ambition causing Frank LaRose to squander his potential?

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Ohio Secretary of State Frank LaRose probably should have given Mike Tyson a call.

After all, it was Iron Mike who coined the warning that "Everybody's got a plan until they get hit in the mouth."

By wrapping himself in the mantle of Issue 1, LaRose may have hamstrung his own bid to unseat incumbent Sen. Sherrod Brown in 2024.

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Because some in Columbus have refused to accept that "no means no," threats and promises are being made by some Republicans that Issue 1, which aimed for a 60% threshold to amend the state's constitution, will resurface on a future ballot.

Rather than pushing for another vote, they might do well to recheck the scoreboard from Aug. 8.

Surely, there are more pressing issues in Ohio that are in need of legislators' attention. Child poverty, population loss, the ongoing FirstEnergy scandal and gerrymandered election maps are some which come to mind.

Taylor Swift tickets might be going for \$10,000, and the White House and Gov. Mike DeWine may be touting low unemployment rates, but many Ohioans are scrambling and struggling just to keep themselves fed.

Grocery stores and restaurants in Stark County's suburbs can't seem to open fast enough, but the child poverty rate in its cities sits at nearly 30%.

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Even before the dust of defeat had settled down, LaRose declared that he has not yet begun to fight, and that he deserves credit for taking the lead on Issue 1.

Isn't that a little like Custer wanting a thumbs up for Little Big Horn?

Besides, giving credit would require ignoring that Issue 1 was not only a waste of time, but money. Imagine if that \$20 million spent on the election would have instead been distributed to the already-forgotten residents of East Palestine.

Somehow, somewhere, a talented young politician who made a name for himself for his bipartisanship and for being a conscientious conservative has lost the plot.

LaRose, who once was chided by some fellow Republicans for having a casual dinner with a Democrat, seems to have abandoned his reasonableness out of fear of being tagged as a RINO, or looking weak in the age of Donald Trump, whom someone recently likened to a velociraptor constantly testing the fences.

But LaRose didn't need to change who he was; he only needed to stay true to it.

In 2019, he formed a bipartisan group of legislators to modernize the state's voter registration process.

In 2020, he lent his support to bipartisan legislation aimed at cracking down on dark money contributions in response to the FirstEnergy bribery scandal. However, the bill died from neglect.

Where's *that* guy?

When our heroes fall: It's hard to admit when our trust has been misplaced

Then again, elections are not just about policy, but also calibration and math. Perhaps LaRose became spooked at the sight of anti-vaxxers screaming for DeWine's head while pounding on the doors of the Statehouse; or maybe he recalled how former Gov. John Kasich became persona non grata in the party after he refused to kiss Trump's, well, ring.

He can't help but note how well Sen. J.D. Vance has done. Vance, who once called Trump "America's Hitler" and a xenophobe has flipped like Simone Biles and is now all-MAGA. During Vance's 2022 campaign, Trump, not even pretending to remember Vance's name, did his best Montgomery Burns while publicly disparaging Vance as a kiss-up.

Now comes word that LaRose has fired his office press secretary, Rob Nichols, for past anti-Trump tweets. We must suppose in hopes that he will garner Trump's endorsement. But LaRose recently complimented former Vice President Mike Pence for his actions during the 2020 election-certification process, so he probably shouldn't count on it.

After years of being mistaken for "The Walking Dead," Ohio Democrats are feeling their Wheaties, circulating petitions to get abortion protections placed on the ballot in November — the real impetus behind Issue 1 — as well as a referendum to prohibit elected officials from participating in the creation of election maps, something that even DeWine favors.

According to a poll conducted by the Pew Research Center: "62% of Americans support legal abortion in all or most cases, as compared with 36% who think it should be illegal in all or most cases."

Legislators who supported Issue 1 ignored these numbers, and it resulted in getting spanked by voters of all political stripes. They underestimated how much Ohioans are not yet ready to cede the power inherent in one person, one vote.

The unintended consequences of this overreach are that a promising young politician may be squandering his future, and Ohio could be in the process of reverting to what we used to be: A more purple union.

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