

Opinion

On the law

Astonishing error in Wagner professors' anti-Trump 'open letter'



Daniel D. Leddy *Guest Columnist*

Last Wednesday, the Advance published a half-page advertisement paid for by 33 professors at Wagner College. Denominated “An Open Letter to Representative Dan Donovan,” the statement strongly condemns several “actions and executive orders of President Trump and the Trump Administration.” While their status as educators may lead some to accord them greater credibility, they merit no such deference where, as here, they’ve ventured beyond their respective fields of expertise to become rabid political partisans.

Still, it’s difficult to fathom how any truly learned person, in any avenue of life, could have made the astonishing factual error that appears in their advertisement. It’s set forth twice, in fact, the first in this opening sentence of paragraph two: “On the first day of office, the Trump White House removed from its website any reference to or information about climate change.” Similarly, the third paragraph begins this way: “The Trump Administration has also removed from the White House website any reference to LGBTQ rights.”

Both assertions are flat-out false, a fact these professors could have easily ascertained had they bothered to do even cursory research on the matter. (The error is even more inexplicable insofar as it’s subscribed to by three faculty members with the title “Professor of History.”) So, for the Wagner college students who are paying tuition to be taught by these people, and for everybody else swayed by their titles, here’s the truth.

OBAMA’S ERASER

In the waning days of his administration, and consistent with procedures used by his predecessors, Barack Obama

decided that the material posted on whitehouse.gov during his tenure would be preserved by the National Archives and Records Administration. His purpose, which is as logical as it is self-evident, was to give the incoming Trump administration a pristine website on which to enunciate its own priorities. Obama explained precisely that with a Jan. 17 entry posted on whitehouse.gov titled: “The Obama Administration Digital Transition: Moving Forward.” On the day of Trump’s inauguration, the Obama administration’s postings about climate change and LGBTQ rights were, indeed, gone from whitehouse.gov because Obama — not Trump — had removed them. In fact, there was very little at all on whitehouse.gov that day besides Trump’s inaugural address.

GAY RIGHTS

The most significant victory by far for the gay-rights movement occurred on June 26, 2015, the day the U.S. Supreme Court held in *Obergefell v. Hodges* that the 14th Amendment guarantees same-sex couples the right to marry. Decided by the narrowest of margins, the 5-4 decision is destined to remain controversial for two reasons. First, it’s legal soundness is highly suspect. Second, and more to the point here, the court’s liberal wing, joined by Justice Anthony Kennedy, took the issue out of the hands of the people and their elected representatives, and decided it by judicial fiat. While same-sex couples were the clear win-

ners, the democratic process was the clear loser. That, however, doesn’t bother the Wagner professors, despite their professed concern about “basic principles of American democracy.” Why? For the most simplistic of reasons: They personally like the result.

Since same-sex marriage is now a constitutional right, Trump can’t “restrict or reverse” it, or its legal consequences, any more than he could with traditional marriage. Which is why virtually every lawsuit advancing a gay-rights argument is constructed around the *Obergefell* ruling. Tellingly, in a post-election interview with Lesley Stahl on “60 Minutes,” Trump called same-sex marriage “settled,” adding, “And I’m fine with that.”

THOSE WHO DISAGREE

Space constraints make it impossible to address the Wagner educators’ multiple other attacks on Trump, including his pro-life stance. Still, a general observation is in order. It is crystal clear that these individuals, like the overwhelming majority of others in academia, are fierce liberal partisans. In preparing the Advance advertisement, their ideological myopia so blinded them that they twice built arguments on an evident falsehood. Despite repeated claims of concern for their students, that same partisanship, openly and dogmatically expressed, is an assault on the intellectual integrity of those students who disagree with them. Do those young people endorse, either overtly or by calculated silence, positions they find abhorrent? Or do they dare challenge teachers who control their grades and, derivatively, their future?

Caring adults don’t put kids in that position; bullies do. And the smart bullies make sure they know what they’re talking about.

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