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LIGHTFOOT

AT ISSUE: PUBLIC DEFENDER SELECTION

GOP locked Democrats out of tight security plans for meeting

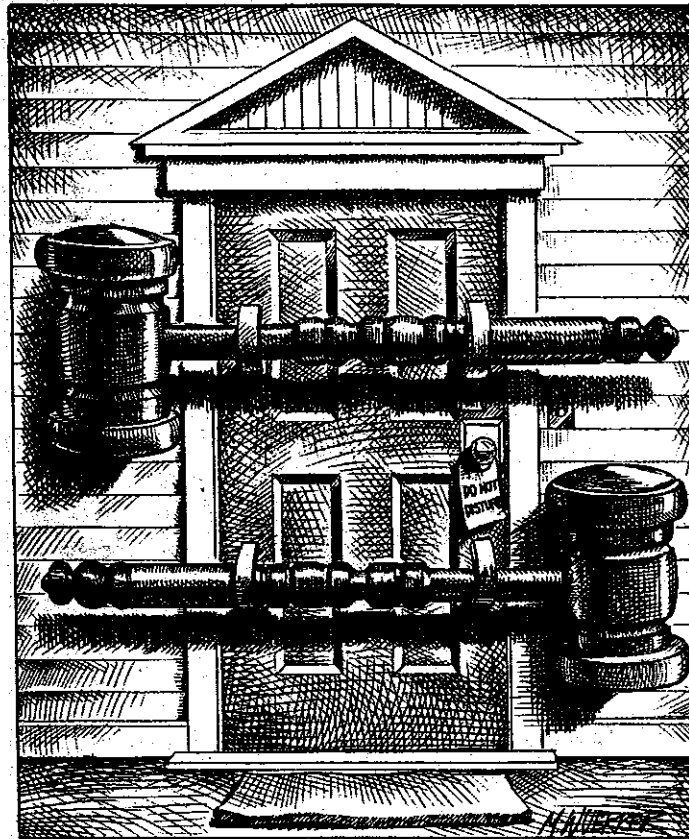


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GUEST
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America is supposed to be the land of the free and home of the brave. Having served 12 years in the U.S. Air Force and 11 years as a Rochester firefighter, I am deeply troubled by the partisanship that led Republican county leaders to plan and implement a response to "threats of violence," even though I, as the ranking Democrat on the Public Safety Committee, was never informed of those "threats."

On Feb. 14, County Executive Maggie Brooks explained that the overwhelming police presence was necessary at the Feb. 12 meeting of the Monroe County Legislature to protect legislators who needed to conduct business. It is hard for me to describe how ridiculous such a position is, especially when the very people purported to need protection, myself included, were not told of the alleged threats before that meeting.

What planning took place for the extreme security measures? Given the number of officers, the audio feed set up across the street, and many other factors, it is clear these plans were in the



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works for at least a few days. Surely there was enough time to stop by the Democratic legislators' staff office to say, "We're going to have an unprecedented level of security tonight because of threats." Why didn't that happen? Why didn't the majority leader, county executive, legisla-

ture president, legislature clerk or sheriff tell Democratic legislators about these threats? The only issue that came up beforehand was a procedure to exit if the president found it necessary to clear the chambers — to keep order to conduct business, not in response to safety concerns

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raised by threats.

As a member of the public safety community, I understand the officers were only following orders. It is really unfortunate that the GOP majority used them in this distasteful exercise to quiet people who voice dissent and to close people out of what is supposed to be open government.

Rather than spew partisan talking points, as Majority Leader Dan Quatro, R-Webster, has repeatedly done, GOP leaders must justify this show of armed force at our public meeting. This majority is so blinded by politics that they do not share even basic information, such as the plans for an emergency meeting to force the so-called F.A.I.R. plan on this community, or the security measures mentioned above, with leadership on the other side of the aisle. A true leader would have the courage to speak out against these tactics, even if a powerful party boss had ordered them. Obviously, this county lacks any such Republican leader. □

Lightfoot, D-Rochester, represents the 27th District in the Monroe County Legislature.