

The AstroTurf campaign comes to my local school board

I live in a smallish suburb north of Milwaukee, with one of the highest performing school districts in the state of Wisconsin.

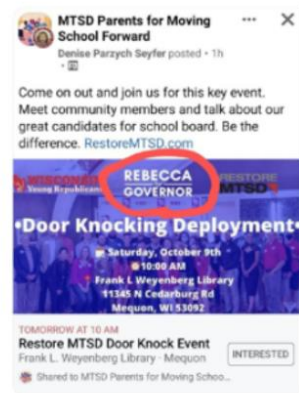
And yet, [according to The New York Times](#), we have become the latest ground-zero in the rolling battle over critical race theory, masking, and school boards. A recall campaign targeting four incumbent members of the Mequon-Thiensville school board will be on the ballot on November 2.

[Today's Times profiles](#) one of the challengers, Scarlett Johnson, and notes the role that state Republicans are playing in our local election.

Republicans in Wisconsin have embraced her. She's appeared on panels and podcasts, and attracted help from representatives of two well-funded conservative groups. When Rebecca Kleefisch, the former Republican lieutenant governor, announced her campaign for governor, Ms. Johnson joined her on stage.

Ms. Kleefisch's campaign has since helped organize door-to-door outreach for Ms. Johnson and three other school board candidates.

Indeed, the GOP and Kleefisch's campaign are playing a major role in what would normally be a strictly local issue.



Notes the Times:

Traditionally, school board elections in Wisconsin have been nonpartisan, but a political action committee associated with Ms. Kleefisch — Rebecca Kleefisch PAC — recently contributed to about 30 school board candidates around the state, including one elected last spring in Mequon.

“The fact that this is being politically driven is heartbreaking,” said Chris Schultz, a retired teacher in Mequon and one of the four board members facing recall.

The recall campaign reflects a larger campaign to weaponize concerns over CRT to mobilize GOP voters in a key swing area.

Ms. Johnson’s rapid transformation into a sought-after activist illustrates how Republicans are using fears of critical race theory to drive school board recalls and energize conservatives, hoping to lay groundwork for the 2022 midterm elections....

Recently, though, Democrats have made inroads in Ozaukee County, and particularly its largest city, Mequon, a mostly white enclave north of Milwaukee. President Trump won the city with only 50.2 percent of the vote — a poor showing that contributed to his Wisconsin defeat in 2020.

Now, with midterms on the horizon, prospective statewide candidates — including Ms. Kleefisch, Senator Johnson and the relative political newcomer Kevin Nicholson — have emphasized their opposition to critical race theory.

But here’s an odd twist in my hometown. I get lots of literature from GOP-backed challengers in the recall, **but so far none have mentioned critical race theory, or masking policies.** (And there seems to be no evidence that CRT is actually taught anywhere in the Mequon-Thiensville schools.)

The candidates are running a dual track campaign. In public, they portray themselves merely as advocates for higher academic standards, while their social media accounts teem with culture war references.

[As the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel reported](#), Johnson has deleted old tweets that question whether white supremacy was problem at all.

In tweets from 2020, Johnson said "yeah, the threat of white supremacy keeps me up at night..." next to a picture of a yawning sloth. She also tweeted "there exists no white supremacist group in the history of America that has taken more Black lives than Planned Parenthood."

And then there is this guy. Kris Kittel, another one of the Kleefisch-backed recall candidates, [shared this post on his Facebook account](#):

"It didn't start with gas chambers. It started with one party controlling the media. One party controlling the message. One party deciding what is truth. One party silencing speech and silencing opposition. One party dividing citizens into 'us' and 'them' and calling on their supporters to harass 'them.' It started when good people turned a blind eye and let it happen."

The post also included the letters "WWG1WGA," an abbreviation often used by QAnon that stands for "Where we go one, we go all."

Kittel also shared a post with images from the Holocaust and the words: "Any government with enough power to demand that you carry around papers in order to move around freely is more dangerous than COVID-19."

Other posts Kittell shared included one with a man with a mask and face shield on reading a book with references to Nazi Germany that said "How could people allow it to get to that point?" and one with a picture of a sign reading "If you've ever wondered whether you would have complied during 1930's Germany, now you know."

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Bonus take: Even though TFG is encouraging former congressman Sean Duffy to run for governor, Kleefisch is almost certain to be the GOP nominee next year — and the odds-on favorite to be Wisconsin's next governor.

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