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Searching for the ‘family values’ of Sean Duffy, the Trump acolyte eyeing a run for Wisconsin governor

How does Duffy reconcile his cherished family values with Trump’s border policy that was so cruel to children?

By [David McGrath](#) Nov 4, 2021, 4:00pm CDT



People demonstrate in Washington, DC, on June 28, 2018, demanding an end to the separation of migrant children from their parents under President Trump. Nicholas Kamm/AFP via Getty Images

I do not personally know Sean Duffy, the former U.S. Representative for northern Wisconsin, who, according to WisPolitics.com, is considering running for Wisconsin governor after being urged to do so by Donald Trump.

But I do know his brother, attorney Thomas Duffy, who is familiar to many people in Sawyer County whom he has represented.

Like a lot of Chicagoans, we had a fishing cottage in Wisconsin, and eight years ago, when a dispute about an old property line was preventing us from selling it, we asked Tom Duffy to take our case.

After we gave him all our information, including an acrimonious letter from the neighbor's lawyer, he listened and then asked us to visit the county records office and do some research on the property and its original owners. A surprising request, I thought, but Marianne and I leaned into it, digging up interesting things from the days that lake lots were not so precisely surveyed.

Opinion

Duffy looked over what we researched and issued another suggestion which I thought odd: invite the neighbors over for cake and coffee. Maybe meet their grandchildren. Sit around the kitchen table and talk about how fishing has been on Moose. Get to know one another.

Then, when the time seemed right, explain what we were in need of in order to sell the place and ask what would be fair to them.

His advice sounded like nothing I expected from a lawyer. But we followed it and everything worked out beautifully.

It worked because Tom Duffy knew the area, its people, and its culture. He trusted that we could resolve the situation without his even being present, in accordance with the family values and neighborliness that he grew up with in a childhood home with his parents and 10 siblings.

So, when Sean Duffy left the House of Representatives in 2019 because his ninth child was having health issues, I thought I had insight, through his brother, into the principles governing such an apparently admirable decision.

Which is why I am puzzled now by Sean Duffy's flirtation with Trump's suggestion and endorsement, and his past and continuing obeisance to the former president.

How does a person raised with such powerful family values pay homage to a president who authored the "zero tolerance" policy and used children as pawns by separating them from their parents, as a means of deterring immigrants from coming to America?

Though Trump's atrocious action took place three years ago, close to 1,000 of the over 5,000 children he split up from their parents have yet to be reunited with their families.

I shudder to think of my five-year-old granddaughter and how lost and devastated she would be if separated from her mother and father for just a week or two.

Some of those children, who were ripped from their mother's arms when they were infants or toddlers, will not know their parents if and when they are found.

Trump and his loyalists falsely blamed his cynical measure on the Democrats, or on the decades of inaction on the immigration problem — anyone and anything but themselves.

But the politics involved, or who and what is to blame, are no longer even the point. Rather, it's the supreme importance of family — which would drive Sean Duffy, I am convinced, to never stop searching, going to the ends of the earth on trains, planes, and automobiles, if a single one of his own children were crying somewhere far from home.

All of which demands that Duffy be asked how he harmonizes cherished family values with Trump's cruelty to children.

Of course, Trump is infamous for other acts antithetical to family values, including covering up COVID-19 information that could have prevented loss of some of the 700,000 American lives to the disease (we heard it in his own words in the Bob Woodward interview). Or attempting to extort the president of Ukraine into smearing President Biden's son, in order to help Trump's re-election chances (again from his words, which we all heard in a recorded phone call).

But those are matters politicians can argue over from now until doomsday, or, at least, until 2024. What Duffy needs to address immediately are those nearly 1,000 young immigrants growing up without their mothers and fathers, and the hypocrisy inherent in sticking with a character who has shown such inhuman disregard for babies and children when they're not his own.

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