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EDITOR'S PICK

## Chris Rickert: Fitchburg pay-to-pay allegation questionable, but effective

CHRIS RICKERT crickert@madison.com, 608-252-6198 Nov 5, 2016

### Chris Rickert | Wisconsin State Journal

Chris Rickert is the metro columnist for the Wisconsin State Journal, where he's got his laser-like perspective trained (mostly) on all things Madison.



PHOTO BY SAIYNA BASHIR

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Michael Johnson, president and CEO of the Boys and Girls Club of Dane County, photographed with members of the Focused Interruption Coalition, speaks during a press conference on Oct. 4.

After a raucous meeting in which audience members accused the city of racism, Fitchburg City Council members on Tuesday voted to continue setting aside \$50,000 in its budget for the Boys and Girls Club of Dane County.

It's good that needy children of color will benefit from public dollars spent on things such as after-school transportation and meals, and you can only give so much credence to the hyperbolic, fact-challenged statements people sometimes make at city council meetings.

What's not so good is that the leader of BGC helped fan the hysteria by tossing out an allegation he can't prove and isn't — now that he's gotten his money — interested in pursuing.

BGC president and CEO Michael Johnson contends that Ald. Dorothy Krause tried to cut his agency's funding because he refused to contribute money to her campaign or, in 2011, in support of some of her personal community work.

"When I refused she began going after our funding," he said. "When she ran again — I think this was a year ago — she asked me for personal campaign contributions and if I did not, that she would campaign to take funding away from the BGC kids."

As proof, Johnson sent me a screenshot of a 5-year-old webpage Krause set up and shared with him and two pages of her bank statement.

Krause said she set up her "Invest in Me" page after she was first elected in 2011.

It's essentially a public plea to hire her to work on various neighborhood-improvement initiatives — specifically one to add landscaping and create gardens in the Allied Drive neighborhood.

She said it never generated any money.

Krause said she gave Johnson her bank statements to illustrate her lack of steady income. She also said she has no recollection and can't find any evidence that she ever asked him for campaign contributions.

She denied that she ever threatened to try to cut BGC's funding if Johnson didn't contribute to her community efforts: "Absolutely not," she said.

Johnson doesn't have proof of those alleged threats, which is understandable; most people don't keep records of their every interaction.

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His allegation is an attention-getter, though, if you're trying to mobilize people to speak out against a proposal that affects your agency, and it puts Krause in the position of having to prove a negative.

Krause was one of three council members to propose the amendment that would have sent BGC's \$50,000 to the city's Community and Economic Development Authority, which would then decide how to distribute it and other monies.

Nothing would have prevented BGC from applying for these funds, and if cities are going to provide taxpayer dollars for social services, maybe they should offer a formal application process open to any local do-gooder agency.

Krause told me that she would have supported awarding the \$50,000 to BGC through CEDA.

It's not clear whether Krause's behavior runs afoul of city or state conflict-of-interest rules, but Johnson is not interested in filing a formal complaint against her to find out.

I guess that's not surprising. Why worry too much about the details when it's all about the "kids"?

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. His column appears Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday and Sunday.

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