

# Representative Kaufmann Says His Family, Office Have Been Threatened; FBI Investigating Incidents

by Gregory R. Norfleet  
gregory.norfleet@west-branchtimes.com

Asked to apologize for obscene gestures, state Rep. Robert “Bobby” Kaufmann refused on Saturday, now saying that certain people in a Jan. 25 crowd threatened to blow up his family and his office.

After giving his reasoning, Kaufmann, R-Wilton, drew applause from many of the 30 in attendance at a Listening Post at the West Branch Fire Department.

Interviewed by various news organizations following the Convention of States Project speech, Kaufmann at the time only mentioned his — and constituent — displeasure with the federal government inadequately addressing “rampant crime, out-of-control inflation, and a wide-open border” as justification for raising two middle fingers.

However, in a column, which ran in the Feb. 3 *West Branch Times*, the District 73 state legislator stated that he, while spending time with a toddler, had been accosted by a man while stopped at a Cedar County business; and that the FBI was investigating threats against his family.

His column went on to state that he could not elaborate as the FBI investigation was ongoing.

West Branch resident Clara Oleson on Saturday prompted Kaufmann’s more-detailed response.

She referred to Kaufmann’s column and said that the legislator has “our prayers and thoughts” regarding the threats, but called his Jan. 25 speech a “rant” and said the gestures “felt directed toward me” and others who opposed his political position on those topics. (For more details, see the accompanying story.)

## Apology?

She then asked him to apologize because the gestures, while possibly appropriate in the bar she worked at years before, are not a way to find “common ground” in civil discourse.

Kaufmann’s response was terse.

“Absolutely not,” he said. “You don’t get to tell me what the gesture meant. I understand how you feel and for that I’m sorry you feel that way. I do not, unequivocally, apologize for what I did and I would do it again.”

He then turned to the crowd to give more details, though he still withheld key specifics:

“I would surmise that if any of you were put in the situation that I was put in, the double finger would be the best that most people would do. So I’ve thought about it. And the only thing that I apologize for is not doing it earlier.

“Because what I’ve had happen to me, is I’ve had far-left activists ... (We) have two open FBI investigations. See, this is the problem: Somebody takes what they heard on the news and pretends like they think they know what’s going on because that’s not even close to being accurate. So here’s what actually happened.

## Nephew threatened

“Far-left activists are currently — one’s awaiting trial, and the other is being hunted down by the FBI because they threatened to blow up my office with a bomb.

“They then decided to send communications that they know where my family lives, including my 1 1/2-year old nephew. And then they declare that they were going go be excited to blow him up as well.

“On top of that, at Kum & Go (at the I-80 Tipton interchange) three weeks ago, I had a man who was clearly deranged who

I politely asked to stop accosting me in front of a 4-year-old toddler. I’m fair game, but you don’t get to do this in front of him.

“He continued to verbally shout obscenities that are far worse than a double finger, in front of a 4-year-old, and then followed me into the bathroom. And I finally had to tell him to get the hell away from me or I was going to call the police.

“If he had gone a step further, I would have knocked him out with my fist. Because you don’t do that to another individual.

“As I was giving a speech, those same people showed up at that speech, Clara. They were the recipient of that double-finger and they’re lucky that’s all they got. Because when you threaten to blow up my 1 1/2-year-old nephew, you’re lucky I don’t knock you out on the spot, as I’m sure any of you would do.

“So, I don’t react that way lightly. It takes a lot to get me there. And to believe that you know what was in my heart based off of some really haphazard, false media coverage is false. And in the middle of a speech when the people who were doing the things that I just described showed up, they’re darn lucky that’s all I did to them.

“I do not apologize. I would do it again. And I would venture that anybody else in the same circumstances would do the same thing and that is the end of this discussion,” Kaufmann concluded.

This prompted applause from several in attendance, but the topic did come up again.

## ‘Propaganda’

Oleson had prefaced her comments by stating that she is an 80-year-old liberal Democrat, and Lowden resident Randy Millam blamed her and other liberals — he also called



**State Rep. Robert “Bobby” Kaufmann holds up his hands to quell a heated verbal exchange Saturday at the West Branch Fire Department. An argument broke out over Kaufmann’s Jan. 25 middle-finger gesture to punctuate a speech on federal overreach. Kaufmann that day also revealed details of bomb threats against his family and office as another motivating factor behind the gesture. Photo by Gregory R. Norfleet/West Branch Times**

out “propaganda news networks” — for creating a political atmosphere so unruly that Republicans are justified to resort to obscene gestures.

“I won’t be lectured by you or anyone on your side ... you stop assaulting us in the newspaper with your words, with your protests, hurting our cities,” Millam said.

Oleson attempted to respond, but Kaufmann raised his hands to try to quell the exchange.

“We are going to move on,” the legislator said.

However, about 15 minutes later, the subject came up one more time.

A man whom Kaufmann referred to as “Tim” said the legislator “had every right” to make the gesture.

Tim chuckled when he identified himself as a “non-partisan Democrat,” but said both Democrats and Republicans should “rip apart the party platforms” because of “partisan gridlock.”

“You’ve got your freedom of speech to give them the double-birdie,” he said, giving his own example of being confronted by an angry person. “I would have

liked to have done the same thing you did to that other person in Tipton.”

Kaufmann repeated an earlier point, saying “If you threaten to blow up my 1 1/2-year-old nephew, you better be hopeful that’s all that happens to you.”

## ‘Discord’

He then tried to move the conversation on to other topics, but was interrupted.

Blake Shultice, a fourth-grade teacher since 2011 who taught at schools in Milwaukee and West Branch, said he empathizes with Kaufmann’s experience but not how he dealt with it.

The teacher recalled a time when a 10-year-old threatened to kill his family.

“Even though he was only 10, that really upset me. I lost sleep. I get it,” Shultice said. “That context is important, however, all of us — I think every person in this room laments the growing political discord over the last decade ... At every single moment when we encounter a tough situation, politically, we have a choice whether we’re going to escalate the situation or

de-escalate the situation.

“Nope,” Kaufmann said tersely. “This conversation is over. You threaten to blow up my 1 1/2-year-old nephew and that’s what’s going to happen. There’s no de-escalation. There’s no turning the cheek. There’s no talking about it. This conversation is over. I did it. I’d do it again. And I’m damn proud of it. Moving on.”

After the event, Shultice said that had he been allowed to finish his thought, he would have emphasized the difference between “intent” and “impact.”

“All citizens, especially elected representatives, are responsible for de-escalating (a situation) not escalating it,” the teacher said.

He agreed with Oleson that the gesture “felt directed at any and all political opponents.”

Kaufmann wore the rare suit to the Listening Post and stated up-front that he must leave after an hour because he was heading to a funeral in Wilton. This meant he did not stay for follow-up conversations or questions as he usually would.

# Representative Bobby Kaufmann Explains Actions, Incidents That Have Occurred

On Jan. 25, state Rep. Robert “Bobby” Kaufmann gave a speech that ended with an obscene gesture and then granted interviews to further explain his intentions.

His answers revealed more information over time.

Below is a transcript of the speech and excerpts from interviews and public comments that followed.

## Jan. 25 speech

The Jan. 25 speech took place at the Iowa Capitol in the rotunda during a Convention of States Project gathering with hundreds in attendance.

“I was going to take some notes and try to be scripted, but I tend to be too politically correct. I’m just going to wing in here ...

“I ran for office on basic freedoms. I ran for office to make sure the federal government does not dictate your daily lives, but the ways the Founders intended it, that you dictate theirs.

“But if you look — I think many of us today, myself included, would’ve probably been in that ship in 1776 on a Christmas evening crossing the Delaware River dodging icebergs to overthrow a regime.

“But what the federal government does and what we do in response are two completely different things. You look at the common denominators from today to back in 1776 when King George reined over us. Sometimes the similarities are a little eerie.

“We’ve got a federal government filled with hubris that just oozes with contempt for the average American. They think they’re better than us. They think they’re smarter than us. And they think that they should control us.

“Well, the Founders gave us an opportunity — the politically correct erosion to push back — and that’s the Convention of States.

“But we in Iowa are a citizen legislature. We are not career politicians. I’m a farmer by trade and most of us have real jobs out with real people, so I don’t always like to subscribe to political correctness.

“So, politically speaking, we do have the Convention of States to push back. But for me, the citizen, and on behalf of what I believe is many of you and what our Founders would do, when it comes to these gun-grabbing, freedom-hating, over-regulating, civil-liberty-violating tyrants, here’s my message (raises two middle fingers). Thank you”

(The crowd applauds.)

## KCCI comments

A Jan. 27 interview with KCCI of Des Moines included a video of Kaufmann’s responses. There, he states the federal government was the target of his words and gestures:

“But the three very specifically (sic) issues that I was directing my comments and my gestures to the federal government and the party in charge of Washington D.C. was rampant crime, out-of-control inflation, and a wide-open border. ... The time for civility,

in terms of words, is over. It’s time to say things that are controversial. ...

“My intentions were to catch people’s attention and say, hey, this is a real problem and — what I did was simple: I channeled what many, many, many have been thinking and I just happened to do it.”

## WHO13 comments

A Jan. 27 interview with WHO13 of Des Moines went further with its questioning and also showed video of Kaufmann’s responses. Again, the state legislature explains the federal government is the target of his words and gestures:

“So, no. I don’t regret what I did whatsoever. And the outpouring of support — I have definitely received some criticism, so question about that — but in my inbox, in my Twitter feed, on my cell phone, the number of constituents back home, regular Iowans, not partisan, Democrat and Republican — that said thank you for standing up to a tyrannical federal government; thank you so much for being our voice. (That) has been overwhelming in over 90 percent of the responses that’s I’ve gotten.

Who13 asked why it was appropriate in that setting:

“Well, it’s very appropriate because of the following. Right now, the federal government is creating a dangerous environment for families. You’ve got people wondering if their kids’ educational savings accounts are going to keep dwindling, their 401(k)s, their retirements, their wallets, their paychecks. You’re seeing the dollar bill go not nearly as far as it used to. You see rampant open borders. You see soaring crime across the country. When people fear for their lives and their loved ones and their well-being — they’re going to lash out. And so, we’ve tried being nice. We’ve tried asking the federal government to fix all this, but it just keeps getting worse. So at some point when your finances, livelihood, when your civil liberties, when you are having your own federal government come down on you with illegal mandates and spending money like drunken sailors, the time for nice is over and the time to say things that catches (sic) attention is now. And clearly what I said caught some attention, thankfully.”

## Feb. 3 column

On Jan. 31, Kaufmann sent a column to newspapers in District 73. The Times published it in its Feb. 3 edition. It opened by discussing the speech and mentioning for the first time the threats against his family:

“Let me begin the column by explaining to you the bluntness of my comments last week when talking to the radical political forces attacking the Legislature and me personally.

In the last month, I have been accosted at a Cedar County business ...an episode that occurred while having a toddler with me in my truck.

Birthday card she received that year. Ted told us, “Sure am glad I was able to brighten her day.”

To take part in sending a message and or photo or to support the efforts of this business aimed at communicating with those living in senior facilities, go to happygram.org.

## Women in Agriculture Conference is March 26 in Washington, Iowa

“Setting the Table for Success” is the theme for this year’s Women in Agriculture Conference, to be held at the Knights

of Columbus Hall in Washington, Iowa on March 26.

The event is being hosted by the Iowa State University Extension and Outreach Washington County office, along with the Washington County Women in Agriculture Advisory Board.

The goal of this year’s conference is to show women of all ages how they can set their table for success in agriculture by surrounding themselves with the right people and resources to make informed decisions.

The conference will feature four speakers: Scott Siepker, Iowa Nice Guy; Elaine Kub, grain market economist; Steve

Bohr, with Farm Financial Strategies Inc., and Larry Tranel, dairy specialist with ISU Extension and Outreach.

Siepker will kick off the conference with a little bit of humor, sharing his insights on how “Setting the Table for Success” starts with who should be around the table, as well as how we can steal from the best and tell our story.

Kub will follow, expanding on how women can set their own table for success by examining the makeup and motivations of the grain market’s most influential players, as well as pinpoint some price opportunities for the grain markets in 2022.

Bohr will discuss farm succession and transition planning and how to be successful when passing or transitioning the farm to the next generation.

Finally, while agriculture and “Setting the Table for Success” may be stressful at times, the final speaker, Tranel, will help give attendees some pointers about how to better manage stress, so it doesn’t manage us.

For more information or to register, you can register by calling the ISU Extension and Outreach Washington County office at 319-653-4811 or register online at <https://tinyurl.com/WIAConf2022>.

## HAPPYGRAMS FROM P9

HappyGrams from families with pictures of newborn babies, marriage proposals, vacations, and photos from weddings that residents could not attend during Covid. A favorite HappyGram recently sent to a great grandparent—was when the family announced their son’s birth and used Happygram to tell their grandpa they had named their child after him. That was pretty cool.

**KA:** When the pandemic hit, we became laser-focused on our mission of connecting seniors with their loved ones and are grateful we were in a

position to grow. Families tell us how grateful they are to be able to use HappyGram as a way to connect with their loved ones. It’s hard for many seniors to hear a conversation on the phone or use their email, social media, etc.

**KA:** We have one super user who is a resident at Meth-Wick {a senior- living community}, Ted Smyth. He often sends other residents HappyGrams for their birthdays, anniversaries and to welcome new residents to the community. He told us that he was stopped in the hallway by a woman he had sent a Birthday HappyGram to. She thanked him and told him that his HappyGram was the only