In this Sunday morning piece, Gary Benz tees off on former Ohio State president Karen Holbrook (pictured), who recently slammed the university while pandering to locals down in Florida, where she is lobbying for another job. Gary examines Holbrook's statements, compares them with some things she's said in the past, and also looks at the issues surrounding drinking and excessive behavior in Columbus on football Sundays.

Apparently hell really hath no fury like a woman college president scorned. No sooner had former Ohio State University president Karen Holbrook opened her mouth to the trustees of Florida Gulf Coast University about the, ahem, “culture” at Ohio State than did Buckeye nation come down on her, and hard.

Holbrook, who supposedly voluntarily retired from Ohio State this past June, has spent most of her time since trying to land another job, this time at FGCU, a school a decade old and about half the size of Bowling Green.

Perhaps because the prospective new job was in Florida, the Buckeyes white whale of last season, Holbrook felt a need to pander to the locals, telling them that one of the hardest things she had to do was reign in a “culture of rioting.” According to Holbrook, "I was told that was the culture and I was ruining football,” she said. “I don’t want to be at a place that has this kind of culture as a norm.” They must have loved hearing that.

And there was more: “Any good excuse gets some of the people on the street and they think it’s fun to flip cars and have absolute drunken orgies.” While most assumed her comments were in reference to a variety of football-related incidents, the most notable of which was the fan reaction following the Buckeyes victory over Michigan in 2002, Holbrook wasn’t so confining. Holbrook essentially claimed that European-style soccer hooliganism was engrained throughout the campus, saying “When you win a game, you riot. When you lose a game, you riot. When spring comes, you riot. African-American Heritage Festival weekend, you riot.”

Though Buckeye fans are enraged by Holbrook’s recent remarks and the publicity they’ve drawn, it’s worth noting that she essentially said the same thing while she was president of OSU. Last year, the Columbus Dispatch ran a story analyzing drinking-related issues at various Big Ten schools. (Note, the article does not appear any longer on the Dispatch web site, but a copy can be viewed here) At that time, while still president, she said that when she first got to OSU “t here was a culture of, 'That’s what we do at Ohio State; we riot.”

The contrast between her use of the “R” word then and now is as interesting as the differing fan reactions. But in the end, what is clear is that the real purpose of Holbrook’s drama on both ends was the aggrandizement of Holbrook herself. A year ago, she was patting herself on the back about how all the strides she had made in this regard since 2002, telling the Dispatch that there had been various initiatives underway that were working, including some by student groups working hard to change the perception.

Now, her purpose seemed to be to leverage her escape from a withering culture as a means of securing a new job. Both uses seem just a tad sordid, don’t they?

For an academic with some level of accomplishment, Holbrook displayed an amazing lack of savvy if not outright ignorance, and I’m not talking about her interpretation of various incidents of inexcusable conduct by students and others. If she didn’t think that her comments were likely to find their way back to

Columbus or anywhere out of the cocoon that is Naples, Florida, then maybe someone ought to introduce her to this new fangled technological innovation called the internet.

Now, predictably, she's in damage control mode. She told the Columbus Dispatch that she was, perhaps in retrospect "a little melodramatic" in her depiction of Ohio State. She even went as a far as to say that she really didn't mean to imply that this was the norm at every football game. But hey, what's a little drama and fudging if it will help in a job interview?

As an interesting postscript to all of this, Holbrook took herself out of the running for the job, likely sensing that she wasn't going to get the job anyway. Maybe, in retrospect, laying it on a little thick and telling the trustees that she presided over a modern day Sodom and Gomorrah wasn't such a good idea.

It's hard to know what possibly could motivate Holbrook to bite the hand that fed her so generously for the last seven years and even gave her a tidy $250,000 bonus on her way out the door. But having done so, it raises all manner of other questions, not the least of which is if things were so bad in Sin City, why didn't she do more to change it?

Part of the answer to that is that Holbrook did try to quell the public drinking and drunkenness that surrounded the football games and other events. The other part of that answer is, as Holbrook belatedly admitted, things may not necessarily have been as bad as she portrayed. As with most things, the truth is in the middle.

This isn't of course, to excuse what can't be excused. But it is a matter of putting it into perspective, something Holbrook sorely lacks at least when it comes to her own self-interests. By publicly and nationally trashing Ohio State recently as if it

is the exception that necessitates a new set of rules, she has contributed mightily to undoing much of the good she was attempting to accomplish on this score while she was president.

For Buckeye fans, and I'm certainly one of them, just shooting the messenger might feel good, but let's also recognize that as we're doing so we run the risk of ignoring some underlying truths. Ohio State has had their share of incidents, none of which put the university, its students or its sports teams in the most flattering light.

But here's a news flash: college kids drink. Here's another news flash: college kids are immature. Thus when these two elements mix, which they often do and have probably since the first time a group of 20-year olds parked their chariots outside the Roman Colosseum to watch that week's lineup of the Christians vs. the lions, misbehavior is likely to break out.

Unfortunately, the NCAA also isn't helping much on this score, something Holbrook could have pointed out. As the Dispatch story from last year noted, the majority of issues at Ohio State and elsewhere in the Big Ten occurred when games started at 3:30 p.m. or later, even though the majority of games actually start earlier. In other words, given more time until kick off, fans will do what fans do—use the extra time to drink.

Fans, particularly college-age fans, are going to drink no matter when the game starts. But it's one thing to start drinking at 10:30 or 11 for a noon kickoff and an entirely other matter to start drinking at noon for a 3:30 kickoff. And don't even get me started on the kind of damage a kid can inflict with an eight hour start on an 8 p.m. kickoff. The point is, the earlier the game starts, the less likely fans will be drunk when they enter the stadium, plain and simple.

Eliminating the late games, which are mandated by the television networks, is not

so plain and simple and never will be. The unfortunate spinoff of the increasing popularity of college football is that such feature games will be more and more common and thus, too, will be an increase in alcohol-related incidents.

Holbrook may have been wrong, and she was, that Ohio State has a culture of rioting. She's also even more wrong to single out Ohio State for her own self-interests. But she isn't wrong that this is an issue that needs to be addressed. It would be nice, but naïve, to believe that the issue is self-policing and that eventually fans will tire of stepping over piles of discarded beer cans or puddles of vomit on their way to the game.

But the one undeniable truth in all of this is that if the fans don't take care of it someone else will and soon. Whether it's Holbrook or new/old OSU President Gordon Gee or any one of the other college presidents across the country wrestling with these issues, there will come a tipping point. And when that's reached, the response isn't likely to be simply increasing the police presence in and around the various pre-game activities. More likely it will come in the form of an all-out prohibition on such activities, something no one wants to see.