

OPINIONS

The News-Gazette

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EDITORIALS

C-U Scholars plan looks good

Local education enthusiasts have proposed a plan to put meat on the bone of a high school education.

Let's be frank on the subject of education. Getting a high school degree that is worth something — like being prepared for the modern workplace or pursuing an advanced college degree — is hard, particularly for those who are not well prepared.

So when local representatives of the Champaign-Urbana Schools Foundation recently announced an initiative to encourage high school students to enroll in a more challenging curriculum, do community service work, engage in summer academic activities, achieve high attendance rates and be physically active, they were aiming high.

But nothing worth doing comes easily, so here's hoping that the community at large as well as young people from all kinds of backgrounds embrace this incredibly promising exercise in educational uplift. If the schools foundation can pull this off, it will pay huge dividends to individuals and community alike. Further, it could set the kind of example that communities and school districts across the country will want to emulate.

But let no one underestimate the difficulty of what's been proposed. High-achieving students already meet most, if not all, of the program's goals. Persuading mid-level or lower-level students to enroll, and then helping them to achieve success, is the real issue.

The program and its specific goals are the result of a collaborative effort involving the local schools, the business community,

the University of Illinois and Parkland College. They hope to sell students on the idea that working harder in tougher classes will be worth the extra effort in the long run — whether it's in the work force after high school or at various levels of higher education.

Frankly, that sounds like a tough sell, particularly to those who view attending school as frustrating and inconvenient fact of life.

The program will cost an estimated \$500,000 over five years, and fundraising is part of the plan. The time line calls for meeting with eighth graders starting in January and persuading them to enroll in the C-U Scholars program the following fall of 2011. The academic load exceeds the legal minimums set for high school graduation. The plan requires four years of English, three years of math, laboratory science and social studies and two years of a foreign language. In addition are the less demanding requirements for summer activities, physical fitness, attendance and community service.

The idea is to produce a well-rounded young person who both can do and understand the importance of classroom work but is equally comfortable and reliable in a private workplace.

That will require young people to abandon the attractions of the moment for the possibilities of the future. But it will be just as important for the purveyors of this tough sell to back up the program's promise with the concrete reality of a rewarding experience. There's no understating the challenge, but the C-U Scholars programs is chock full of attractive aspirations.

Judicial disgrace

A lot of people suspect there are two sets of rules — one for the privileged and another for everybody else. This is why.

A couple of Sangamon County judges are in hot water over their roles in fixing a traffic ticket.

Obviously, they deserve a presumption of innocence in a pending investigation by the state's Judicial Inquiry Board. But if they did what it's alleged they did, both judges deserve the harshest possible treatment.

This allegation goes to the heart of what the judiciary is supposed to represent.

The fixed ticket was issued to the 16-year-old daughter of Associate Judge Christopher Perrin. On June 7, after consulting with Perrin, another associate judge, Robert Hall, dismissed the traffic case, initiating a court document affirming that the state attorney's office had moved for dismissal. The website of the Sangamon County circuit clerk's office

indicates the ticket was dismissed for insufficient evidence, according to the Springfield Journal-Register.

The state's attorney's office had made no effort to dismiss the ticket. When it discovered court records showing the dismissal, State's Attorney John Schmidt informed Chief Circuit Judge Patrick Kelley of what had occurred.

Kelley, calling the judges' action "mind-boggling," subsequently removed Hall from traffic court. Perrin remains in small-claims court.

Hall is scheduled to retire in September. Perrin just joined the bench last year.

Although it's not a traffic court, the apparent abuse of power is a disgrace to the judiciary that strikes at the core value the courts are supposed to represent — equal justice under law.

The alleged misdeed, if confirmed by the pending investigation, cannot be tolerated. Heads must roll.

DAVID BRODER

Dems hoping GOP gaffes will forestall election doom



WASHINGTON — The eagerness with which Democrats pounced on the foolish to the South Carolina GOP gubernatorial candidate Nikki Haley. Endorsed by Sarah Palin, Haley

Barton, a longtime advocate of the oil and gas industry, right after President Obama had extracted a promise from BP executives that they would create a \$20 billion trust fund from which to compensate families and companies victimized by the accident on its offshore drilling platform.

While almost everyone else congratulated the president for nailing down the commitment that gave force to BP's pledge to satisfy all legitimate claims, Barton discerned in the transaction a terrible threat to the free enterprise system, calling it a "Chicago-style" "shakedown."

The leaders of the Republican minority on Capitol Hill had managed to swallow without gagging the musings of a Kentucky candidate who criticizes the Fair Housing Act of 1968 and a Nevada nominee who has problems with the Social Security Act of 1935.

But when Barton — on the very day when the BP chief executive officer was demonstrating his political ineptitude to derisive Republicans and Democrats on a House energy subcommittee — appointed himself the defense attorney for Big Oil, it was more than even the GOP leadership could tolerate.

House Minority Leader John Boehner and his lieutenants summoned the Texan to his chambers, ordered him to recant and apologize — which he promptly did. But not before White House press secretary Robert Gibbs had issued a stern

rebuke on behalf of the president, followed swiftly by virtually every Democrat on Capitol Hill in reach of a camera, a fax machine or a phone.

To hear them tell it, Barton was not a solo maverick, but the guy who had given away the secret Republican command: Go forth and pollute. We've got your back.

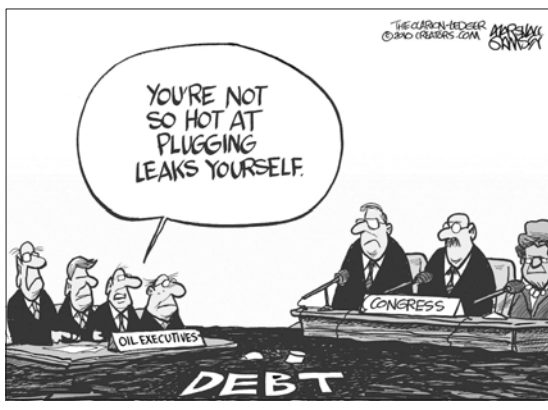
Barton was the best thing that has happened to the Democrats in months. All of a sudden, they were not defending the undersea gusher they don't know how to cap, they were charging that the opposition was in bed with the corporate bad guys.

Why so eager? Because in the past few days, they had read election analyst Stuart Rothenberg forecast that five of their Senate seats are leaning Republican and two others they now control are toss-ups. If they lost all of them, their Senate margin would be down to four seats.

A similar House analysis by academics Alan Abramowitz and Larry Sabato projects Republican gains of 32 to 39 seats. The latter number would be just enough to make Boehner the speaker, replacing Nancy Pelosi.

These numbers will change as the campaign unfolds. But you can see why the Democrats pounced on Barton, and why Boehner and Co. might want to hand out muzzles to their members.

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GENE LYONS

Poking into private lives helps to create public mess



Here's the deal: Other people's marriages are a foreign country where you don't speak the language. Every marriage has a public face and a private reality; indeed, different faces for different audiences. It's a happy couple that always agrees which masks to wear. Penetrating these disguises has preoccupied small-town gossips and would-be Tolstoyans throughout recorded history.

Like all voyeurism, it's a sadistic activity.

Broadly speaking, the more certain people are about their own domestic arrangements, the more they're fascinated by the sins and sorrows of others. As full-fledged TV celebrities, politicians have been deemed fair game for the Hedda Hoppers and Louella Parsons of the Washington press corps for more than 20 years now. Play-acting and jack-of-lantern smiles have accordingly become an occupational necessity.

Hence what's true of all marriages becomes even truer of politicians — the George and Laura Bushes no less than the Al and Tipper Gores, even (maybe especially) the Bill and Hillary Clintons. Barring untimely exposure — the senator caught patronizing prostitutes or propositioning an undercover cop, the congressman making videos promoting sexual abstinence with the cute aide who's his mistress, the president entangled with the former White House intern — voters only get to see what the power couple wants them to see.

Millions, therefore, get a cheap thrill out of seeing the masks removed and the mighty brought low. Grim economic news and the ongoing catastrophe in the Gulf of Mexico have also left many yearning for a distraction. Media careerism plays a strong role, too. In the quest for readership and ratings, it's

getting to where the fastest way for a politician to make it into a New York Times or Washington Post op-ed column, or to get talked about on "Hardball," is to be accused of marital indiscretions.

Problem is, you not only don't know public figures' intimate lives, you can't know. Maureen Dowd and Chris Matthews sure as hell don't know. What sane politician would share a private confidence with any journalist? Most pundits psychoanalyze politicians' intimate lives as simply narrating what my friend Bob Somerby of the dailyhowler.com describes a "brainless Group Novel" of their own invention, featuring imaginary characters they pretend are real, and themes revelatory of their own preoccupations.

It's backstairs gossip, nothing more.

Furthermore, it's none of their business, none of yours or mine. I fail also to see how any American who's been paying attention could think the national political press' descent into quasi-fictional celebrity journalism has been good for the country. At least Hollywood gossips Hedda Hopper and Louella Parsons understood that many of their "scoops" were studio press releases thinly disguised.

In that sense, I agree with former Bush speechwriter Michael Gerson's recent Washington Post column. Moved by the plight of his friend Rep. Mark Souder (the abstinence crusader), Gerson wants to know, "What does sexual conduct have to do with the qualifications I have known politicians who are cold, arrogant, reckless — and faithful to their spouses. And I have known politicians who have been unfaithful and served the public well."

That said, before I start trouble in my own marriage, I should concur in my wife's strongly held view that the spectacular indiscretion of America's most famous unfaithful politician

led directly to the disastrous president of the cold, arrogant, reckless, but ostensibly faithful one.

No Monica Lewinsky, no Bush tax cuts, no doubled National Debt, no Iraq War. Who knows, maybe no 9/11? President Gore wouldn't have blown off that CIA briefing, that's for sure.

Something else Bill Clinton's folly also led to was the Beltway media's mendacious "War on Gore." Shedding crocodile tears, they were all given a chance to air the favored canards all over again by the recent announcement of Al and Tipper's separation. On CBS Evening News, Katie Couric and Sharyl Attkisson reminded us that the Gores actually were the inspiration for "Love Story" as the former vice president once claimed. ... But their love story lasted 40 years.

Actually, ladies, Gore never said that. The Nashville Tennessee did. Moreover, novelist Erich Segal told The New York Times they'd gotten it half right. His former student Al Gore was the model for his novel's preppy hero. Not that any of the Times' political gossip columnists ever noticed. But hey, if Al and Tipper are going to frustrate our appetite for melodrama, why not invent some?

But the politician who's really caught like the proverbial deer in the headlights is South Carolina GOP gubernatorial candidate Nikki Haley. Endorsed by Sarah Palin, Haley's been accused of adultery by two political consultants connected to her opponent. She denies it. Both have produced purely circumstantial evidence; she's been challenged to take a lie detector test.

OK, so it's North Carolina. Anything goes. So where are the Southern gentlemen we've heard about?

Because true or false, both cads should be horsewhipped. Arkansas Gazette columnist Gene Lyons can be reached by e-mail at eugenelyons2@yahoo.com.

FROM OUR READERS

Roundabouts ensure safe intersections

It was recently reported that traffic signals will soon be installed in the intersection of Mattis Avenue and Curtis Road in Champaign. A few days after that news report, a two-car crash occurred at the signalized intersection of Cunningham Avenue and Perkins Road in Urbana. The accident was caused by a driver running a red light and both cars being heavily damaged.

According to the federal officials, approximately 20 percent of all crashes in the U.S. occur at signalized intersections. In contrast, intersection crashes are much less frequent at properly designed modern roundabouts. A study sponsored by the Insurance Institute of Highway Safety in 2000 found conversions of stop signs and traffic signals to roundabouts resulted in a 40 percent reduction for all crashes, an 80 percent reduction for injury crashes and a 90 percent reduction for fatal and incapacitating injury

crashes.

Modern roundabouts have such an impressive safety record that in June 2008 federal highway officials issued a memorandum stating that "roundabouts are the preferred safety advantage for a wide range of intersections."

Roundabouts are being installed throughout the U.S. Champaign, Ind., has over 50 roundabouts.

Roundabouts are long overdue in the Champaign-Urbana area. Planners and traffic engineers, please do what you should to reduce crashes and improve the safety of our intersections.

GARY CZIKO
Urbana

U.S. government clearly on the take

Why can we not make clothing and other goods? Why are we protecting the borders of other countries and not our own? Why, when you can't companies like Dell, do you talk to someone from

a foreign country? Why for over 30 years have these jobs been transferred to other countries while our Congress and media stood by without opposition?

The answer is clear. We do not have many intelligent people running our government. Plus, there are a lot of crooks who should be in prison.

This current administration apparently is in on the take for the crimes of the last administration, which far exceeded any in history. These crimes have affected the whole world, which cries out for justice. Again, our Congress will stand on the sidelines and not protect Americans from the coming doom.

The Obama administration wants to restrict the press by making embarrassing news leaks a capital crime, like secret CIA prisons and torture. America is already ill-informed by the media. If one wants to get world news, turn on the BBC.

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