



Carmage Walls
Commentary Prize

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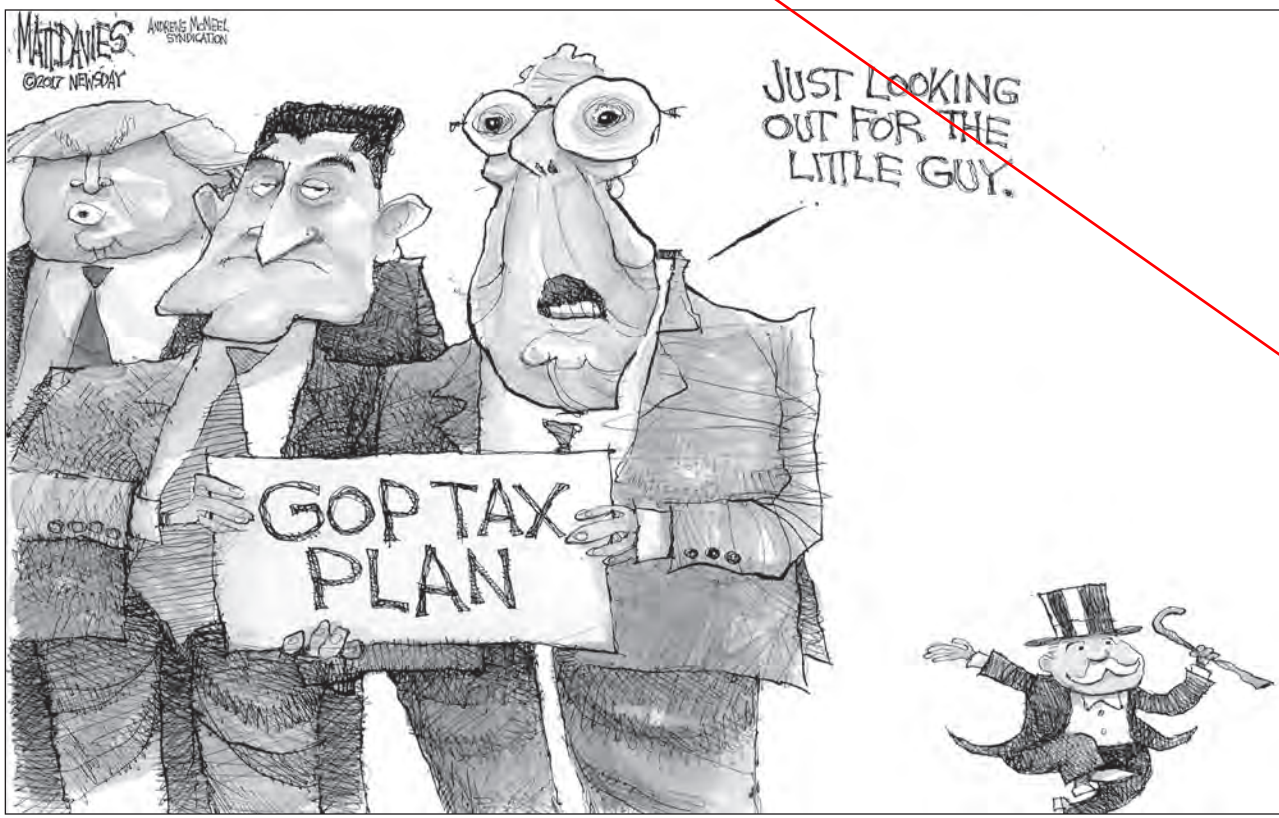
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What is the subject/title of the entry? Board must verify

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Please give a brief explanation of issues discussed and the results achieved. (This space will expand as you type in your comments.) The hospital district/Memorial Hospital, a tax supported hospital has been experiencing serious financial problems for several years. It came to light after a CEO left abruptly and a forecasted \$600,000 surplus turned into a \$9.3 million deficit when the books were audited. The hospital board of directors rubber stamped everything management wanted. Since this came to light, we have held them accountable for what they discuss in closed session, published financial numbers and a more senior attorney has been representing the board.



OUR TURN

Memorial's board must verify actions

The Nacogdoches Memorial Hospital board finally released its financial statements for the 2016 fiscal year under former CEO Scott Street, and the results weren't pretty.

The unaudited figures for the year show a profit of \$675,000. But auditors said, in reality, the hospital lost \$9.3 million. It took a year for this to come out in public, and we still aren't certain of the full story.

Again and again at Tuesday's meeting, members of the board heard that hospital administrators had grossly overestimated revenue in ways that weren't just simple mistakes.

"In our view there were changes made to the financial statements by the previous management team that had no real basis," auditor Chris Clark of BKD told the board.

Interim Chief Financial Officer Scott Bentley rightly described the overestimates as "suspect."

"A lot of the methodology that was used was suspect methodology. If you look at how they were going to estimate some of these things, the estimates were not based on any solid accounting methodology," Bentley said.

We don't know how such a discrepancy could exist, and hospital officials aren't saying much in public. Most of the discussion about the hospital financials has happened behind closed doors. At Tuesday's meeting, several seemingly innocent questions by new board members were cut off, and they were told their concerns would be addressed in a closed session.

For example, Anita Kite wanted to know why the board had let administrators end regular assistance from the hospital's accounting firm.

"If the board used to do it, and things were financially more stable, why did the board decide not to continue that practice?" she asked.

"There are things that we will go into in executive session that is attorney-client privilege that we cannot talk about in open session," board chairperson Lisa King responded.

That makes no sense to us. The hospital board must be transparent in its dealings with taxpayer money. It is their duty to the public and a part of their code of ethics.

"The key to a positive work experience is an environment with open and honest communication," reads part of the code, later followed by "This also means that we share the good news and the bad news — all the news to ensure that complete information is available."

As the situation now stands, complete information is not available.

"Isn't ultimately the board responsible?" new board member Farrar Bentley asked.

"Absolutely," King said. "But the board doesn't sit in accounting and try to figure things out."

King is correct in one aspect. The board does not sit in accounting. But members of the board must be able to analyze financial statements in a way that ensures the information they are being given is true.

When Bentley tried to interject with "But we should ..." King twice told him "That's not our role."

We respectfully disagree. A board of elected officials is not simply a rubber stamp committee. A board must be able to trust the administrators it hires, but it must also verify their work. That series of checks and balances is vital in businesses and in governmental agencies.

Going forward, it is our hope that this and future boards hold administrators accountable. From everything we know so far, we believe that would have helped keep Nacogdoches Memorial Hospital out of this financial mess.

A cloud hangs over college basketball

Although it is plausible to suspect this, it is not true that the Credit Mobilier scandal of the late 1860-early 1870s (financial shenanigans by politicians and others surrounding construction of the Union Pacific Railroad) and the 1920s Teapot Dome scandal (shady dealings by politicians and others concerning government oil leases) were entangled with Division One college basketball programs. Back then, there were no such programs. About the 1970s Watergate scandal, however, suspicions remain.



George Will

The college basketball season has begun under two odiferous clouds, making it reasonable to wonder why this athletic appendage of higher education seems so susceptible to smarminess. Here is a hint: This season will culminate in the March Madness tournament, for which the National Collegiate Athletic Association reaps, for its well-compensated self and its members, more than \$700 million annually from various television entities whose coverage of the student-athletes (the NCAA's cherished locution) will be interspersed with commercials for beer and pickup trucks.

In September, an ongoing FBI investigation produced 10 indictments, including those of four Division One assistant basketball coaches (from Arizona, Auburn, Oklahoma State and Southern California), and an executive of Adidas, one of the shoe and apparel companies that spend princely sums to have their merchandise worn by college teams. (Under Armour pays UCLA \$18.7 million per year.) One assistant coach is charged with accepting bribes to connect an amateur "blue chip" recruit — pre-

sumptively NBA material — with a financial adviser.

Seventeen days after these indictments, the NCAA's anemia was displayed when it said it could do nothing seriously punitive after its seven-year investigation of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, last season's NCAA basketball champion. UNC administered, for almost two decades, a "shadow curriculum" of 188 fake classes in the formerly named African and Afro-American Studies Department. Taken disproportionately (about half) but not exclusively by athletes, the classes required no attendance and only a minor paper. The NCAA — what is its purpose? — concluded that this was beyond its purview: The fraud was academic, not athletic, because some non-athletes also took the courses.

Of the many proposals for fixing, or at least perfuming, the current system, the most common is to pay the players. This might serve equity. (Karl Marx had a piece of a point: Exploitation is depriving workers of the value created by their labor.) Coaches could share their share of the wealth: Kansas' Bill Self's total pay is \$4,932,626, Duke's Mike Krzyzewski \$5,550,475, Kentucky's John Calipari \$7,435,376, Louisville's Rick Pitino made \$7,769,200 until he was fired in October. He professed ignorance of goings on upstairs in the bordello: Pitino had been surprised to learn about the prostitutes-for-prospects dimension of Louisville's recruiting. Then he was surprised to land a prized recruit whose family allegedly received \$100,000 plus monthly payments from Adidas.

But paying the players sums commensurate with the value that their talents create would mean a few staggeringly large "student-athlete" salaries, and comparative pittances

for the rest. It also probably would make the players qualify as university employees — hello, workers' compensation, unionization and other intricacies — and still would leave so much money sloshing through the system that there would be ample incentives to cut corners for competitive advantages.

The Wall Street Journal's delightfully acerbic Jason Gay notes that the NBA (an \$8 billion business) could afford to have academies where athletic prodigies could hone their skills agreeably free from the higher-education pretense. The NBA's developmental G League already is, for 18-year-olds, an alternative to college.

The NBA's minimum age of 19 has produced the "one-and-done" travesty of "blue chippers" playing one season as cheap rentals (the price of athletic scholarships) at universities, then skedaddling to greener pastures. An NBA rule forbidding teams to sign a college player until three years after he matriculates would lessen universities' importance as incubators of NBA talent.

However, no matter how many ameliorative measures are adopted, this truth will remain: There is no way gracefully — without unseemly accommodations — to graft onto universities an enormously lucrative entertainment industry. We have been warned (by the political philosopher Michael Oakeshott): "To try to do something which is inherently impossible is always a corrupting enterprise." But to be fair to basketball, the other high-revenue college sport has its difficulties. Twenty-four years ago, The New York Times noted: "At the University of Washington, Don James resigned as head [football] coach after failing to notice that his quarterback owned three cars."

George Will's email address is georgewill@washpost.com.

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The Daily Sentinel welcomes letters on any subject that might be of interest to our readers. Keep letters to 350 words or less. Letters will be edited for length, clarity or possible libel. Unsigned letters will not be published. Include a daytime phone number for verification.

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