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What is the subject/title of the entry? An open community needs an open government:
Editorials urging transparency in local government

Date(s) of publication? 6/2/2017, 6/9/2017, 7/14/2017, 9/19/2017, 5/12/2017

Is your newspaper under 50,000 circulation or above 50,000 circulation? UNDER

Please give a brief explanation of issues discussed and the results achieved. (This space will expand as you type in your comments.)

These five editorials changed the culture of a local city government, and city council, that was insular, closed, and arrogant. As a result of Gerritt's relentless pressure, public officials in Palestine, Texas, became more responsive to media requests. The city's media policy changed to enable reporters to talk directly to department heads, instead of having to get everything through Public Information Officer Nate Smith.

Until Gerritt became editor of the Palestine Herald-Press in May of 2017, elected officials in Palestine and Anderson County operated largely without scrutiny. They were used to having their own way with the local press. Up until 18 months ago, former City Manager Michael Alexander actually read and edited newspaper stories on city government before they were published. Anderson County Sheriff Greg Taylor, an imposing figure, silenced reporters and editors by bullying and intimidating them.

That changed after Gerritt, who spent 17 years at the Detroit Free Press, took charge. Two weeks after starting, he took Sheriff Taylor to task for refusing to provide information about a prisoner's death and closing his jail to the public. He also told city officials they had no right to interfere with independent reporting.

Public officials knew things had changed. They were stunned and angry: The local newspaper was holding them accountable to the citizens they serve.

After Gerritt's first editorial, "Shedding light on death," Sheriff Taylor imposed an information embargo on the Herald-Press. He cancelled his subscription in an angry letter to the editor, refused to allow Gerritt in the jail, and harangued him for nearly an hour at a meeting called at Gerritt's request. None of that stopped the paper from doing its job, which contributed to a federal investigation of the Sheriff's Office.

City officials reacted similarly, but gradually opened up, following public pressure sparked by Gerritt's editorials. The city stopped making reporters submit freedom-of-information requests for routine reports. Gerritt's editorials gave local public officials, and our readers, a civics lesson on how the press should operate in a democratic society.

Jake Mienk,
Publisher

OUR OPINION

An open community needs an open government

Palestine is an open community. People look you right in the eye and tell you what they think. They speak to strangers when they pass. If they like you, you know it. If they don't, you know that, too.

An open community deserves an open and transparent government. That's not what the people of Palestine are getting. Local officials typically withhold as much information as they can from the public.

Here's a simple example from this week: After the city hired a consulting firm to recruit a new police chief, a Herald-Press reporter asked Communications Officer Nate Smith how much the city paid the company. Smith said the city couldn't disclose that.

Why in blazes not? How much the city spends on outside contracts is routine information the public should know. City Manager Mike Alexander should realize that he's spending the people's money, not his own. They pay for the city's budget, including Alexander's \$150,000-a-year salary.

New Palestine Mayor Steve Presley has vowed to be more

open. But first, Presley will need to change the culture of city government. That will take more than talk; it will take commitment and backbone.

Now, reporters requesting customary documents given to City Council during public meetings are told to make written requests. Texas law gives the city 10 days to respond.

Normally, the city takes the full 10 days before giving up information it could easily, in most cases, release immediately. Stonewalling for the sake of stonewalling is childish.

City Finance Director Steve Groom releases his information and documents upon request. But he's the exemplary exception.

During last year's budget sessions, City Secretary Teresa Herrera went so far as to solicit an opinion from the state Attorney General to determine whether she had to give a reporter basic budget documents received by City Council.

The problem runs beyond City Hall. In April, Anderson County Sheriff Greg Taylor didn't report the death of 31-year-old prisoner William Edward Brown III. Nor would he pro-

vide details on how Brown died. Later, Taylor wouldn't allow a Herald-Press editor to tour the jail, citing liability concerns.

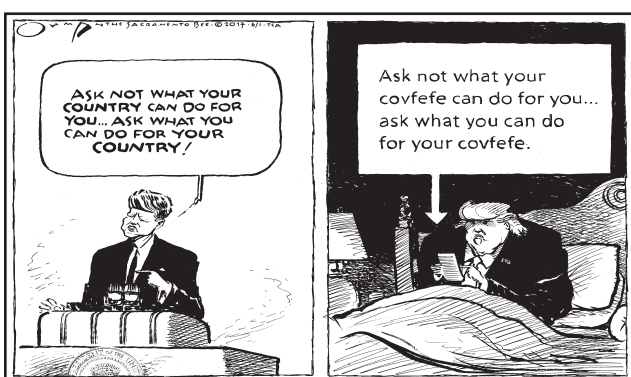
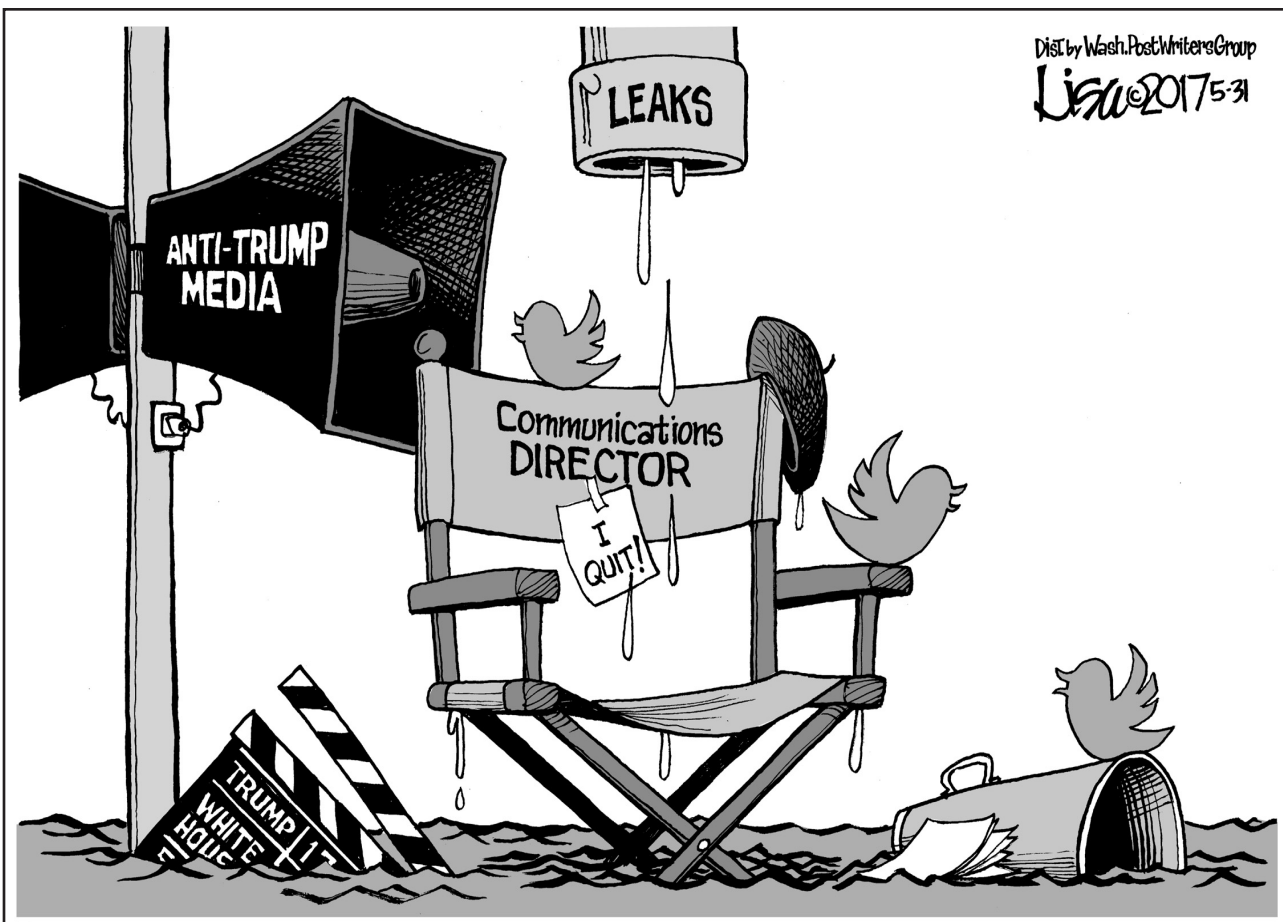
Nonsense. Sheriffs nationwide open their jails to the media and public, sometimes even permitting young people to speak to prisoners. Sheriffs with liability concerns simply require visitors to sign waivers.

Taylor told the Herald-Press that a prisoner dying of natural causes isn't news, but that's not his call. When public officials can define what's news and what isn't — God help us all.

Members of the media have no special legal or First Amendment rights. Open government isn't just about them. If public officials deny information and access to journalists, they can withhold it from all citizens.

Journalists do, however, have a special responsibility to give people the information they need to hold their government — at every level — accountable.

In Palestine, they can't do their jobs, nor can residents stay informed, if government officials aren't as open as the community they serve.



The First Amendment

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Palestine Herald-Press

A Newspaper Holdings Inc. Newspaper

Jake Mienk, Publisher
Jeff Gerritt, Editor
David Benini, Production Manager
Bill Hamilton, Business Manager

The Herald-Press is an independent newspaper which supports what it believes to be right and opposes what it believes to be wrong. It has no affiliations, political or otherwise, which can interfere with its editorial policy or its handling of news. Any erroneous reflection upon the character, standing or reputation of any person, firm or corporation which may appear in the columns of this newspaper will be corrected upon being brought to the attention of the publisher.

The Palestine Herald-Press is a consolidation of the Palestine Daily Herald founded June 4, 1903, by W.M. and H.V. Hamilton, the Palestine Press and Daily Visitor, founded 1898, and the Sunday Herald-Press, established in 1849. Original publication on which this newspaper is based is the Palestine Advocate, founded in 1849. Patrick Management Corp. sold the newspaper to Community Newspaper Holdings Inc. (CNHI) in August 1998.

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WORDS OF WISDOM

What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?

Romans 6:1

A conservative mom breaks the pot taboo

Let's talk about marijuana.

Specifically, let's talk about how and why I came to be one of the countless parents across America (and around the world) who have let their chronically ill children try it.

A groundbreaking new study published last week in the New England Journal of Medicine reported on the health benefits of cannabidiol for children with epilepsy. The randomized, double-blind, controlled study found that among children with Dravet syndrome taking cannabidiol, the decrease in the frequency of convulsive seizures was 23 percentage points greater than the decrease in seizures among children taking a placebo.

Cannabidiol is one of hundreds of chemical components found in cannabis plants. Unlike THC, the most famous of marijuana's compounds, CBD is nonhallucinogenic and nonaddictive. It doesn't make you high. CBD can be extracted from hemp and sold as an oil. That's what the pioneering Stanley Brothers of



Michelle Malkin
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Boulder, Colorado, did several years ago when they conceived and manufactured "Charlotte's Web" — named after Charlotte Figi, a Colorado Springs girl with Dravet syndrome whose seizures dramatically decreased after using CBD.

Until now, evidence of marijuana's benefits for pediatric epilepsy patients has been largely anecdotal. The new CBD study, led by researchers at the NYU Langone's Comprehensive Epilepsy Center, is a hugely significant development because it uses the scientific gold standard of a randomized controlled trial. Other limited clinical trials involving CBD have explored the drug's

therapeutic benefits for pediatric patients with conditions ranging from anxiety to movement disorders to inflammatory diseases, multiple sclerosis and cancer.

My own interest in pediatric use of medicinal marijuana is more than academic.

When my daughter, Veronica, fell ill in late spring of 2015 — unable to breathe normally, bedridden with chronic pain and fatigue — she saw dozens of specialists. Among those doctors was a leading neurologist at one of Denver's most well-regarded hospitals who treated intractable cases. The various drugs prescribed to my daughter weren't working and had awful side effects.

One of them, a potent anti-epileptic drug called Trileptal, was supposed to treat the severe motor tic that left her gasping for air nonstop for months. But Trileptal ended up causing extreme loss of appetite, more fatigue and temporary dystonia, while doing nothing to alleviate the tics. The constant jerking of her body caused one of my

daughter's hypermobile shoulders to dislocate multiple times a day — increasing her pain and anxiety.

To our surprise, the mainstream neurologist suggested Veronica try CBD. This doctor had other young patients who used CBD oil with positive results, but she could not directly prescribe it because of her hospital affiliation. So we did our own independent research, talked to a Colorado Springs family whose son had great success using CBD to treat his Crohn's disease symptoms, consulted with other medical professionals and friends — and entered a whole new world.

Two physicians signed off on our daughter's application for a medical marijuana card. She became one of more than 360 children under 18 to join Colorado's medical marijuana registry in 2015.

And we became pediatric pot parents.

For Veronica, CBD provided more relief than all the other mainstream pharmaceutical interventions she had endured, and without

the scary side effects. But ultimately, it was a temporary remedy for her complicated basket of neurological and physiological conditions. We were glad for the chance to try CBD at the recommendation of medical professionals, and glad that so many other families are having success with it.

Our experience showed us the importance of increasing therapeutic choices in the marketplace for all families — and trusting doctors and patients to figure out what works best.

It flies in the face of current science to classify CBD oil as a Schedule I drug, as the feds did at the end of 2016. Nor does it make sense to draw the line at CBD if some patients and doctors believe that the benefits of using THC therapeutically outweigh the potential harm.

As a lifelong social conservative, my views on marijuana policy may surprise some of you.

I used to be a table-pounding crusader for the government's war on drugs. When I

worked in Seattle in the 1990s, I initially opposed efforts to legalize medical marijuana. I also opposed efforts to loosen restrictions on conducting studies on the potential therapeutic effects of using marijuana.

But the war on drugs has been a ghastly quagmire — an expensive and selective form of government paternalism that has done far more harm than good. What has this trillion-dollar war wrought?

Overcrowded jails teeming with nonviolent drug offenders. An expanded police state enriched by civil asset forfeiture. And marginalization of medical researchers pursuing legitimate research on marijuana's possible therapeutic benefits for patients with a wide variety of illnesses.

The Trump administration has sent mixed signals on a medical marijuana crackdown.

So let me be clear as a liberty-loving, conservative mom: Keep your hands off. Let the scientists lead. Limited government is the best medicine.

OUR OPINION

Sheriff's ire doesn't trump transparency

Anderson County Sheriff Greg Taylor is entitled to voice his opinions as vociferously as he wants — and God knows he does.

It's also his prerogative to cancel his subscription to the Herald-Press, as he stated he would in a June 6 letter to the editor that blasted this newspaper for disrespecting him and his office.

Taylor is not, however, entitled to withhold or restrict information from the Herald-Press because he doesn't like the editorials. As an elected official, his duty to comply with state public information laws and run an open and transparent office supersedes whatever personal beef he has with the newspaper.

In stating that he would no longer be open with the newspaper, Taylor cited editorials on

May 12 and June 2 that urged him to release details about the recent death of a 31-year-old prisoner, and criticized his decision to deny Editor Jeff Gerritt a tour of the jail. In rejecting Gerritt's request, the sheriff cited "liability concerns."

The Herald-Press, Taylor wrote, "has hired an editor from up north that unfortunately brings his liberal nonsense with him."

Denigrating an editor, or anyone else, because he or she grew up north of the Mason-Dixon line diminishes the sheriff's office. It's downright laughable.

Nor should partisan politics and loaded labels drive the debate on transparency. Open government is not a liberal or conservative ideal. It's about keeping citizens informed and public servants accountable. Politics aside, everyone should applaud that.

Anderson County taxpayers can't know what their govern-

ment does if officials won't release information and records that enable them to detect problems and make informed decisions.

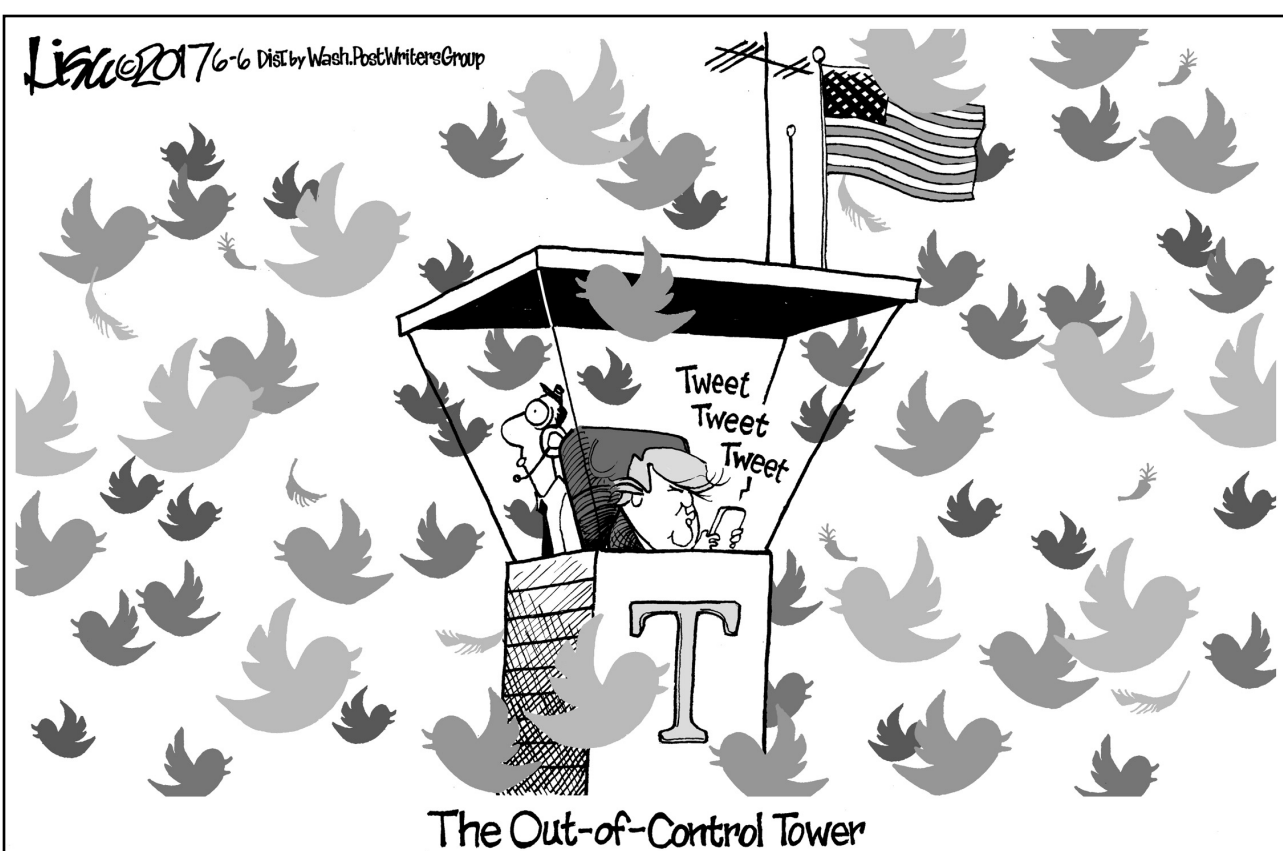
Journalists routinely request budget documents, certain personnel records, communications, logs, video, salaries, incident reports, 911 recordings, and other information. When local government denies those requests, or imposes unreasonable delays or costs, public officials operate without scrutiny.

We hope Taylor doesn't cancel his subscription. We value our readers and subscribers. We're committed to giving them an informative, entertaining, fair, accurate, and engaging newspaper. But we won't stop doing our jobs because Taylor stops buying the Herald-Press.

We urge Sheriff Taylor to do his job, too — including providing information and access to the public in a timely matter.



Taylor



The Donald Trump Apology Tour

Barack Obama much annoyed many of his critics when he noted less-than-stellar moments in American history during his trips abroad. They called it Obama's apology tour.

While greatly admiring Obama's polish on the world stage, I did find these we're-not-perfect flourishes to be mildly irritating. We're all flawed nations talking to other flawed nations. No need to publicly admit one's faults. This is not couples therapy.

But President Trump has launched his own brand of apology tour. The big difference is that Obama was apologizing for our country. Now the country is apologizing for Trump.

The most straightforward apology was offered by Defense Secretary Jim Mattis while at a security conference in Singapore. Trump had delivered a double whammy of pulling out of the Pacific trade agreement and the Paris climate accord. Mattis was trying to reassure Asian allies that the U.S. position on global cooperation isn't as bad as it looks.

"Bear with us," he said in response to some pointed questions. And he shared a famous quotation often attributed to Winston Churchill: "Once we have exhausted all possible alternatives, the Americans will do the right thing."

So glad Obama didn't say that. The public can only guess at this point why the highly competent Mattis subjects himself to the grueling job of explaining Trump to the world. One suspects that he's doing it as a patriotic



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gesture, to somehow shield American interests from the erratic president's eruptions. I eagerly await his autobiography, as well as the prison memoirs sure to emerge from others in the administration.

In retaliation for German Chancellor Angela Merkel's remark that Europe can no longer rely on American leadership, Trump tweeted: "We have a MASSIVE trade deficit with Germany, plus they pay FAR LESS than they should on NATO & military. Very bad for U.S. This will change."

The general manager of the American Chamber of Commerce in Germany felt obliged to intercede. "It's important that we differentiate between politics and business," she said. "A trade war is in the interest of no one — especially not the U.S. administration."

Trump used the recent terrorist outrage in London as an occasion to both malign and misquote the city's besieged mayor. He tweeted, "At least 7 dead and 48 wounded in terror attack and Mayor of London says there is 'no reason to be alarmed!'"

For the record, here's what Mayor Sadiq Khan said:

"Londoners will see an increased police presence today and over the course of the next few days. No reason to be alarmed."

The acting American ambassador to London quickly stepped in with broom and sanitizer to clean up the droppings.

"I commend the strong leadership of the (mayor of London) as he leads the city forward after this heinous attack," Lewis Lukens tweeted.

Translation: Don't pay attention to that crazy man in the Oval Office. Deep down we're the same old United States of America.

The ambassador's rejoinder is an example of an apology wrapped in an alternative response. The thankless task of covering for Trump's verbal stampees could well explain why leading law firms have turned down invitations to represent Trump in the Russia investigation.

Furthermore, close association with Trump has become hazardous to one's reputation. And even if he offered to pay handsomely, actually getting paid could be another matter. Trump's record of stiffing contractors is impressive.

I never thought I'd miss the days when President Obama would say such things as, "There have been times where America has shown arrogance and been dismissive, even derisive." That it's true didn't make it appropriate.

But alas, Trump is proving the point. And for that, on behalf of most good Americans, I would like to apologize.

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LETTER TO THE EDITOR

City has come a long way in transparency

In the time I have been employed by the city of Palestine, this city has strived and fought for transparency for our citizens.

Since I started in March 2016, this city has become the leader in Anderson County for providing information to the public and the press. Here are just a few examples of our efforts.

- On our website, the city started a Transparency Page, where information on city government, finance, and tax information has been posted on an easily accessible page on the city's homepage.

- Financial information, including monthly budget and quarterly investment reports, have been posted on our website. The city also posts monthly check registers.

- Before every city council meeting, the city posts the entire agenda packet. This step allows the public to view the same information the city council has before any decisions are made in open meeting.

- The city posts restaurant and health inspection information online, so residents are informed about local establishments.

- When boil water notices, or road or utility construction happen, the city of Palestine lets our residents know as soon as possible, following state law and maintaining a responsibility to inform residents.

- The city live streams city council work sessions and meetings on Facebook. This measure allows the public to see discussion of the issues and interaction with city staff. It also shows the deliberation city council members make in deciding those issues.

- The city held Town Hall meetings on issues affecting residents, like water quality, zoning ordinance update and the recent Proposition 1 ballot measure. On Proposition 1, a question where voters decided to rededicate a portion of sales tax towards road improvement, this city held three town hall meetings, produced informational material and explained the ballot measure to various media outlets.

- Since March 2016, the city has produced over 200 press releases and advisories for local and regional media outlets. This city has also posted countless social media posts for residents on their city and the information they need to know about.

While the Palestine Herald-Press does not believe the city is not being transparent, these examples beg to differ. The frustration the Herald-Press has expressed with the city of Palestine stems not from an actual lack of transparency, but from an attempt of selective disparagement by the newspaper.

It has been my professional and personal mission to provide people with the facts, and this city works hard to be transparent.

Nate Smith
Communications and Best Practices Officer
City of Palestine

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WORDS OF WISDOM

He has shown you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.

Micah 6:8

OUR OPINION

Do your job, public officials — and let us do ours

Local public officials could use a civics lesson on the media's job: It's not to serve as government information officers. Nor is it to endure the harangues, rants and tantrums of elected officials or their surrogates for newspaper stories that don't sound like they wrote them.

Full of bluster, Anderson County Sheriff Greg Taylor will demand a retraction or apology for stories he doesn't like, intimidate a local radio station to pull a broadcast, or keep reporters out of the county jail following an inmate's death.

City officials are more subtle, as they continue to suppress public information or lecture reporters on how to do their jobs.

Last week, for example, Herald-Press reporter Jennifer Kimble attended a public dinner with the four finalists to become Palestine's next police chief. She wanted to interview the candidates, or arrange to interview them later. All four candidates agreed to talk with her.

Whether or not Palestine's public information officer, Nate Smith,



Taylor



Smith

approved of Kimble's assignment, he should have stayed out of her way.

Instead, he used his cellphone to photograph, without permission, a list of questions Kimble put on the table. Smith showed the questions to his boss, City Manager Mike Alexander.

Smith, a former Herald-Press editor, later told Kimble she could not ask the finalists the questions, but could ask the new police chief, after City Council names him. The questions covered police/community relations, the force's diversity and other issues.

Whom reporters talk to, and when, and what questions they ask, are none of the city's business. Smith's crude attempts to interfere were unprofessional. If Kimble tried to interfere with a council meeting, or photographed Alexander's notes as he spoke, she would be tossed out of council chambers.

Palestine Mayor Steve Presley vowed to run a transparent local government during the campaign; he continues to talk



Alexander



Presley

about it. "It's the public's money," he told the Herald-Press on Thursday. "They need to know how we're spending it ... We don't have anything to hide."

Even so, the new mayor has done little, so far, in changing the culture of secrecy at city hall. City Council or staff continue to deny Herald-Press reporters routine information, such as budget documents.

Sadly, the Herald-Press might have contributed to the city's confusion. Some years back, one or two Herald-Press reporters would send their stories to city officials for their blessings, before sending them to their editor.

Such a practice dishonors the lynchpin of journalism: independent reporting. It violates the readers' trust, compromises the credibility of reporters, and shames the newspaper they work for. For that, we apologize.

Herald-Press reporters who cover city hall now know their jobs: It's not to be pushy, insensitive jerks. It's to persevere in getting the information they need to keep readers informed and public officials accountable.

City officials should do their jobs and let Herald-Press reporters do theirs.

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Be outraged

If his love letters with the Russians weren't bad enough, Donald Trump Jr.'s sarcastic non-apology makes clear just how much he deserves what he is about to get.

Trump Jr. tweeted: "Obviously I'm the first person on a campaign to ever take a meeting to hear info about an opponent ..."

No, Junior, you're not the first person to take such a meeting. But you're the first and only one that I know of to take such a meeting with representatives of an adversarial foreign government seeking to influence the results of our presidential election.

That would only be you, Donald Trump Jr. — the very first to be consorting with the enemy in an effort to undermine the democratic process.

And there is a word for people who do what you did.

The word is *traitor*.

He is one. No one should take this lightly. No one should dismiss it as just more "Russia" stuff. It is not time to move along.

While his father was out there leading the crowd in cheers of "Lock her up" because Hillary Clinton received emails from a former White House aide on her home server, his son was exchanging conspiratorial come-on's with the Russians.

"I love it," Trump Jr. said — "it" being the Russian government's offer to help his father steal the election by passing them dirt on Hillary Clinton.

"This is obviously very high level and sensitive information but is part of Russia and its government's support for Mr. Trump," the intermediary wrote on behalf of the high-ranking Russian government official who wanted to set up the meeting. They made no bones about it. And little Trump Jr. came running.

Of course, he didn't come alone. This is not a crowd with only one nut case. He brought his brother-in-law, Jared Kushner, and the campaign manager, Paul Manafort.

Not just a happenstance, off-the-cuff get-together: a big meeting, one that Donald Trump Jr. reportedly ran — the big man.

Trump Jr. says that he "had to listen."

No, you didn't, Junior. When the Russians come calling, you don't have to listen; as a matter of fact, you don't have to listen or talk. No wonder Jared Kushner wanted that private line.

Trump Jr. told his brother-in-law, and he told the campaign chair. So why in the world should we believe he didn't tell his dad? I can just imagine it: "Good news, Dad, it looks like the Russians are coming through. Republican leaders had their doubts, but not Mr. Putin. He knew whom he could count on."

This is what happens next: Trump Jr. gets investigated, along with his brother-in-law, the campaign chairman and every friend and neighbor they've ever had. Some of the best prosecutors in America have nothing better to do with their time. They will turn on that spotlight so hot it burns his backside.

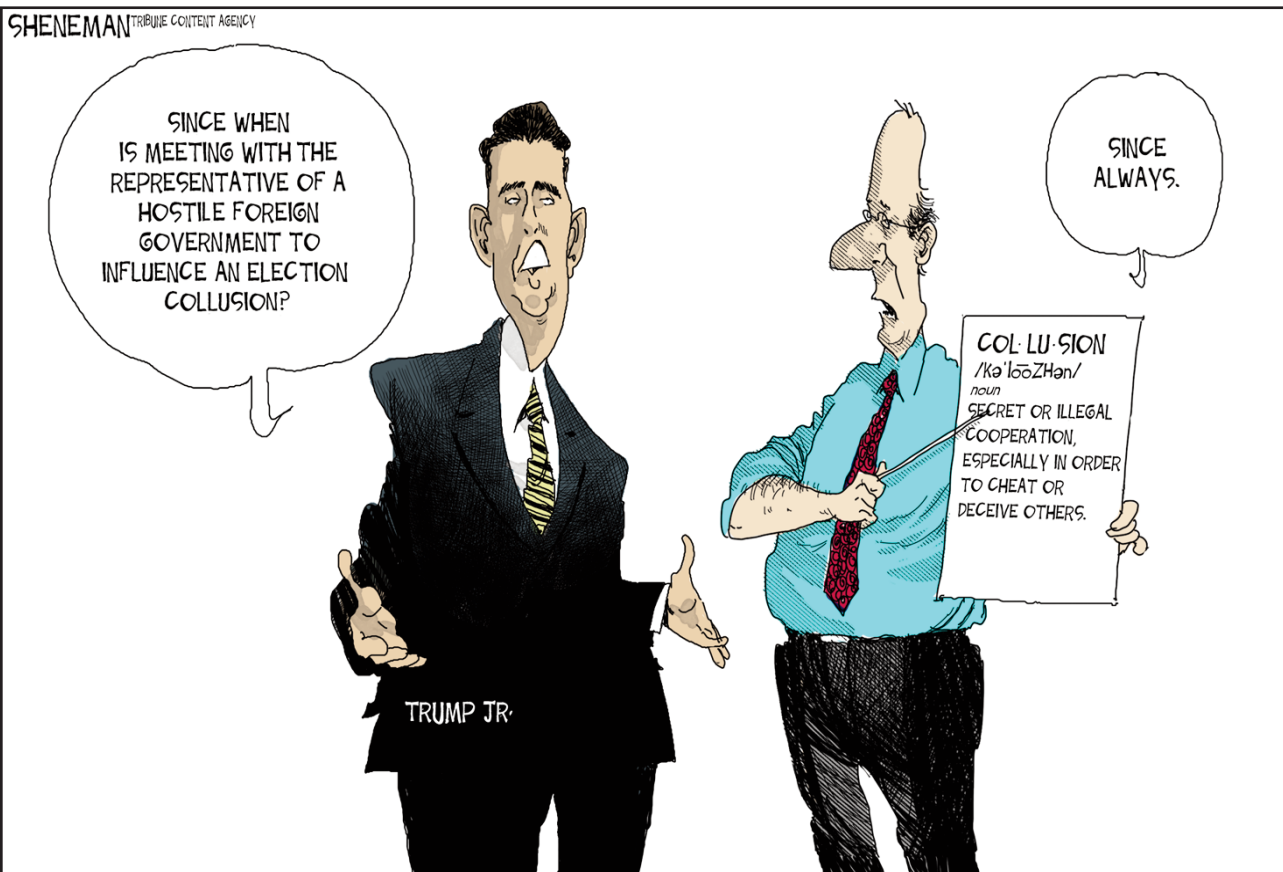
It is not fun to have a team of special prosecutors on your case for an indefinite period of time to determine what your father knew and when he knew it, and just how stupid and venal you and your relatives and friends are (as if we didn't already know).

This much we know already. Trump Jr. has some very powerful enemies: That email chain is *bad*, and someone who had access to it gave it to The New York Times. Ouch, Junior. Who knows what other evil deeds such a person — or persons — could unleash.

Junior can drown in sarcasm, but anyone who's been around the block in politics knows that loyalty is a rare commodity, and one that is in short supply in Trump-land. A White House that leaks like a sieve to the press is a prosecutor's garden. Imagine facing a ship full of rats with the power of a subpoena and the threat of imprisonment.

We already know the name of the man who will hold the Trump family accountable. The only question is when.

There are many of us who wish that Donald Trump had never won that election. Presumably the Trump family is not among them. Yet.



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

City Council should leave Laza alone

I'm glad to see someone else sticking up for Jerry Laza, the lawn-mower guy.

Jerry has kept my lawn equipment running for almost 20 years. Without him, my lawn would be head-high, and I'm sure I speak for other senior citizens who rely on him.

Jerry is hard working and honest and a person you can rely on. If he says your lawn mower will be ready on Friday, you can pretty much take it to the bank. I see Jerry as a local treasure!

What I don't understand is city council's obsession to put him out of business. I understand "eye sore." But the city streets are the biggest "eye sores" in Palestine. Perhaps the money spent to persecute Jerry could be put to better use.

I like Jerry, and I admire his toughness. It takes a special person to stand against the pressure the council can generate. He reminds me of the main character in a Louis L'Amore novel.

It would be easy to bankrupt Jerry or any other business. After all, a council with unlimited use of other people's money can eliminate a man's life savings very quickly. Still, it isn't right.

Jerry's site is valuable property. I would suggest that to condemn it would be a windfall to many others.

This is a mower repair service. The mowers and edgers in his yard are used to repair lawn equipment. He salvages parts from them to save us money. A lawn-mower repair service is what it is!

The Herald-Press reported that Jerry offered to erect a fence but was ignored. We only ask for a fair shake and a compromise that doesn't close his business.

I've always thought that a city council was supposed to help small business, not destroy them.

Clark Walser
Palestine

Fireworks illegal in city; should be policed better

Year after year, the City falls miserably short of educating the residents of Palestine that using fireworks in the city limits is against city ordinance. I live in the Southside Historic District and fireworks were extremely rampant this year. They started popping them on July 3 and continued until three days after July 4. Some of the fireworks were those rockets that make a whizzing sound and can land on roofs to ignite. And, no, they weren't done at a public event, but by residents on private property.

I called Dispatch on my teenaged neighbor who was brazenly throwing them in his front yard. It appeared his parents were gone. Dispatch informed me the officers were simply patrolling around to catch people in the act. What if the teenaged neighbor had caused a fire, or blown off some of his fingers? I wondered if he knew it was illegal or not?

What I can't understand is why the City never ever puts a colored flyer in the water bills to inform residents it is illegal? Or, why the

City never posts posters at City Hall or the Mall or other public buildings several weeks prior to July 4 to educated the public about the danger and illegality of fireworks in the city limits? People generally don't read the newspaper; social media is not enough, either. Several alternative means of education are needed. Also, representatives from the City could go and speak at area schools. Nothing of the kind is ever done. Why?

The City now has a risk management officer, an emergency management director, and a communications officer. These are all brand new positions created recently, and are large draws on the City's budget. They all boil down to matters of protection, security and education. Yet the City can't come up with a method of fireworks prevention.

Related to this is the issue of burning in the city limits. This use to be illegal, but now anybody with a permit from the fire department can burn basically any type of hazardous rubbish or building materials he or she wants, no matter if their unfortunate neighbors have to smell the stench or breathe the noxious fumes of whatever's being burned. Often residents don't know a permit is required. This lack of education is synonymous with the fireworks problem. Both are just as hazardous. Burning ought to be banned, also.

Every year the City avoids the fireworks problem, and they ought to re-address the possibility of a burn ban. Both put residents and homeowners at risk. The City doesn't care at all.

Elise H. Dean
Palestine

Palestine Herald-Press

A Newspaper Holdings Inc. Newspaper

Jake Mienk, Publisher
Jeff Gerritt, Editor
David Benini, Production Manager
Bill Hamilton, Business Manager

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WORDS OF WISDOM

I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do.

John 17:4

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OUR OPINION

City manager’s resignation best for Palestine

The resignation last week of Palestine City Manager Michael Alexander — just as he shook down the city for another \$100,000 — is best, not only for Alexander but also Palestine. With Alexander no longer calling the shots at City Hall, members of City Council should usher in a new era of accountability and transparency.

But they’re off to a poor start. In recent weeks, City Council members, behind closed doors, fought hard to keep him in Palestine, before relenting and awarding him a \$100,000 contract for consulting services over the next year — an unnecessary and extravagant expense.



Alexander, who oversees a \$33 million budget and 200 employees, had wanted out for weeks — out of Palestine and the city’s two-year contract that paid him \$150,000 a year, plus a car allowance.

His displeasure was abundantly clear at a town hall meeting last month, when he said “a bunch of cannibalism” infected the city. Those remarks came a week after he said, during a budget workshop, that city workers should call in sick if they don’t feel like working.

Keeping a disgruntled employee from leaving is rarely a good idea. Moreover, nothing in Alexander’s performance as city manager over the last 18 months — eight as interim city manager — warranted the devotion and deference that City Council members showed him.

They had practically begged Alexander, who lives in Austin, to take the city manager’s job, after he told them he didn’t want it. They then waived the city charter’s residency requirement and made him an offer he couldn’t refuse.

Before becoming Palestine’s city manager, Alexander served as interim city manager and interim police chief. He came to Palestine after 20 years with the Austin Police Department, where he rose to the rank of sergeant.

Alexander leaves the city with an operating deficit in next year’s budget. Its financial operations, according to a recent audit, are plagued with accounting errors and weak oversight. He pursued a costly and unnecessary lawsuit against a Palestine businessman and cultivated a culture of secrecy.

Alexander required the media and public to submit freedom-of-information requests for practically all public documents and information. He tightened the city’s media policies and, with a straight face, told a Herald-Press reporter to send him his stories, so that he could read and edit them before publication.

With a consulting business in Austin, Alexander’s attention was divided. A Herald-Press investigation found that he was gone nearly 40 percent of the time. Small wonder the city made little progress on planning, economic development, creating a city brand, alleviating blight, improving race relations, or reducing poverty. A much-needed study on downtown development went nowhere.

Alexander left town last week after announcing his resignation, which takes effect Oct. 1. He has put Palestine in his rear-view mirror and moved on.

This is one time City Council members ought to follow his lead.

WORDS OF WISDOM

For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them.

Matthew 18:20

A hilarious and elementary lesson on the burdens of progressivism

WASHINGTON — Life is exhausting — and daily choices are unbearably burdensome — for some Americans who are so comfortably situated that they have the time and means to make themselves morally uncomfortable. They think constantly about what they believe are the global ripples, and hence the moral-cum-political ramifications, of their quotidian decisions. And they are making themselves nervous wrecks.

If your anthropological curiosity is aroused, venture to gentrifying Brooklyn, in the spirit of Margaret Mead going among the Samoans. It is not necessary to actually go to Brooklyn. You can observe Karen Kipple’s agonies while she drives herself to distraction and her life into a ditch as the protagonist of Lucinda Rosenfeld’s novel “Class.” It is a book with which to begin another school year. The drama swirls around two elementary schools that, because of the vagaries of neighborhood boundaries, are physically proximate but socially miles apart.

Karen works for a nonprofit — what else? — and has been “trying to write” an op-ed “for the past two years.” Her daughter, Ruby, attends Constance C. Betts Elementary, which epitomizes Karen’s fervent belief that “racially and economically integrated schools” are essential to “equal opportunity.” Still, Karen is vaguely troubled because Ruby’s class “completed the same study unit on [Martin Luther King] four years in a row. Ruby could even recite the date he’d married Coretta (June 18, 1953). At Betts, it sometimes seemed to Karen that every month was Black History Month — except when it was Latino History Month. In keeping with the new Common Core curriculum, Ruby had recently written an ‘informative text,’ as essays were now known, on Cesar



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Chavez’s advocacy on behalf of Latino migrant workers.”

“Over the past several weeks,” Ruby’s teacher tells a parents’ meeting, “your *awesome* kids have been busy creating their own *amazing* community.” The parents, however, are problems, including some white mothers, “new to the school and likely soon to depart it, who were constantly complaining about how the milk served in the cafeteria came from hormone-treated cows” rather than from “aseptic eight-ounce cartons of organic vanilla milk” suitable to wash down seaweed snacks.

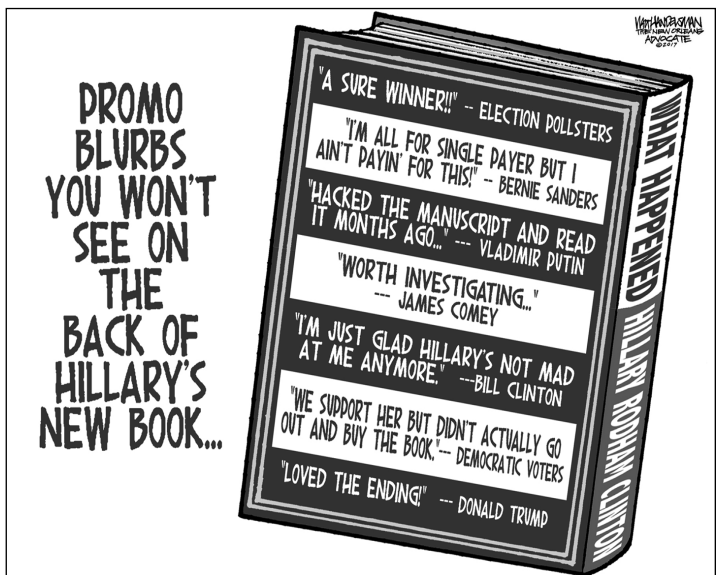
Karen knows that “the outsize importance” that people like her place on food has “become a dividing line between the social classes, with the Earth Day-esque ideals of the 1960s having acquired snob appeal.” Karen, who favors single-origin organic coffee from Burundi, takes Ruby to the artisanal ice cream shop with flavors such as Maple Fennel, and no corn syrup. When Ruby, pausing over her organic Applegate turkey sandwich on European rye, pronounces a classmate’s lunch — white bread sandwich, Cheetos, grape soda — “disgusting,” Karen frets that in her effort to simultaneously save “both the health of her daughter and that of the planet” she has produced “a hideous food snob.”

Ruby became such at her mother’s

knee. Karen has one of her tsunamis of disapproval when another mother brings to a playdate chocolate-chip cookies with embedded Reese’s Pieces. “Dark visions of polyunsaturated cooking oil” addled Karen’s head. Her adherence to the “urban-farming movement” — evidently there is one — is strained by a restaurant offering “pan-seared locally sourced pigeon.”

Reluctant to disadvantage her daughter because of her own progressivism, Karen lies about her residential address in order to sneak Ruby into a school that is less diverse than Betts but more financially flush, thanks to more affluent parents — the kind who arrange playdates by saying, “Have your nanny text our nanny.” Karen is, however, a virtuoso of guilt, and to assuage hers she embezzles money from the new school and mails it to Betts. By the time her lies and stealing are revealed, she realizes that her “negativity was like a wisteria vine that, if left to its own devices, would creep into every last crevice of her conscience.” So she returns Ruby to Betts, leaving behind the school where “the experimental puppeteering troupe Stringtheory is performing a kid-friendly version of ‘Schindler’s List.’”

Rosenfeld’s novel is a glimpse of how arduous life is for progressives, bowed as they are beneath the crushing weight of every choice’s immense social significance. Convinced that people, like the planet, are frightfully fragile — vulnerable to ingesting refined flour and countless other dangers — it’s no wonder progressives want a caring government to superintend our lives. This is for our own good, so they are, in their meddlesome way, nice. They also are tucked out by their incontinent conscientiousness, so take one to lunch, if you can think of something he or she will eat.



All rise, or not, for the United States of Football

Once again, we’ve got a lot going on in my hometown of Cleveland that’s attracting national attention.

Even as I write on this Wednesday afternoon, the background noise of my television is making me dare to believe that our baseball team is about to make American League history by winning its 21st consecutive victory. Shh. I just typed that in a whisper. I’ve got no use for jinxes or other crazy superstitions except when it comes to Cleveland baseball.

This column isn’t about baseball. It’s about Cleveland Browns football players, the national anthem and a police union president who has a habit of making us sound like a town of time travelers who just arrived with a thud from somewhere in the 1950s.

First, some history: Last year, now-former San Francisco 49ers quarterback Colin Kaepernick protested racial oppression and inequality in the United States by sitting down during the national anthem before a preseason game. In later games, he kneeled when the song was played.

Kaepernick remains a free agent this season. Apparently, this is what happens when a black athlete dares to exercise his First Amendment rights during a white guys party.

Until Kaepernick refused to stand for the national anthem, I had no idea so many Americans think there is a constitutional exemption for black men who play football. This is especially curious when the white Founding Fathers agreed to set the census value of a black slave as 60 percent of a free



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person.

Aaaanyway. Kaepernick is teamless, but his protest lives on. Throughout this preseason, a number of teams’ black players sat or kneeled during the song. A week after Browns coach Hue Jackson said “everybody has a right” to protest but he hoped his team wouldn’t do such a thing, about a dozen of his players kneeled.

Most were black, but not all; Browns tight end Seth DeValve joined them.

That got attention, in a “what’s this white guy think he’s doing?” kind of way. An inevitable fascination, I suppose, when so many white Americans still want to believe racial injustice is just black people’s problem.

DeValve said the U.S. is the “greatest country in the world” but equal opportunity for all remains elusive. “I wanted to support my African-American teammates today who wanted to take a knee,” he said. “I myself will be raising children that don’t look like me, and I want to do my part, as well, to do everything I can to raise

them in a better environment than we have right now.”

His wife, Erica Harris DeValve, is black. In a blog post for The Root, she cautioned against making her husband the hero of this story. He’s an ally, she insisted.

“To center the focus of Monday’s demonstration solely on Seth is to distract from what our real focus should be: listening to the experiences and the voices of the black people who are using their platforms to continue to bring the issue of racism in the U.S. to the forefront.”

Our young people will save us from ourselves, I swear.

Steve Loomis, who is head of the Cleveland Police Patrolmen’s Association, was having none of this. His union members, he declared, would boycott the Browns’ pregame flag ceremony.

Loomis is white — but in that way that makes a lot of us white people wince.

Last Sunday, during pregame ceremonies, the Cleveland I love came through loud and clear. The Browns aired a one-minute video starring white and black players and Coach Jackson. They emphasized their commitment to justice and their support for the promise of America.

During the national anthem, Browns players locked arms with law enforcement agents and emergency workers and stood tall and strong.

And then they played football. (P.S. The Cleveland Indians just won game 21. I’m whispering.)

Give us a holler

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elapse between each published letter. Letters should be emailed to letters@palestineherald.com. They can also be mailed to the Palestine Herald-Press, P.O. Box 379, Palestine, TX 75802; or faxed to 903-729-0284

OUR OPINION

Shedding light on death

On Tuesday, the people of Anderson County, who pay for the local jail and its employees, knew almost nothing about a prisoner's April 17 death. In fact, they wouldn't have known that an inmate had died if Herald-Press reporter PennyLynn Webb had not gotten wind of it Sunday through a source.

Getting pertinent information to a community is what newspapers should do. Withholding such information is not how government, at any level, ought to operate.

The death of 31-year-old William Edward Brown III was confirmed by record searches and a Herald-Press interview with Brown's probation officer. She called Brown a "big, strong, healthy man" who, before his arrest, had been working in an oilfield.

Nothing that the Herald-Press found suggests that negligence by the sheriff's department contributed to Brown's death. The department is entitled to the presumption of innocence, just as are the men and women it arrests. Even so, Sheriff Greg Taylor's virtual silence only raises suspicions that might be — and probably are — entirely unwarranted.

Texas Rangers are investigating Brown's death. Like Sheriff Taylor, however, they have refused to provide details. Results of the state's investigation ought to be released as soon as possible.

Prisoners are completely reliant on their keepers for care. If there are broader problems with healthcare at the local jail, the citizens and taxpayers of Anderson County need to know.

Responding to a reporter's questions, Sheriff Taylor said Brown died of natural causes at Palestine Regional Medical Center. "Natural caus-

es," however, covers a lot of ground and does not preclude negligence.

At the very least, the sheriff's department, after notifying Brown's family, should have promptly reported the death, including the victim's name and age, to the public and media. It should have answered as many questions as it could: Did the inmate report any health problems when entering the jail? What did the inmate say, and how did he act, before he was taken to the hospital? How much time passed before officers responded to Brown's complaints? Were officers placed on administrative leave following the death?

Brown was serving four years' probation, after pleading guilty to burglary in 2016. His probation was revoked last month for technical violations of his probation rules. Brown was jailed on April 13, four days before he died.

Many county jails have healthcare problems. Federal courts have established adequate medical care for prisoners as a constitutional right, but healthcare in the nation's prisons and jails remains generally abysmal.

Moreover, across the country, conditions are bleakest at local jails, which serve as short-term lockups and typically lack resources. Mentally ill inmates don't get psychotropic medications; medical staff aren't on duty; drug-addicted inmates don't get treated.

In Anderson County, there are few answers and many questions concerning William Edward Brown III's death — and whether other prisoners are at risk. The sooner Sheriff Taylor answers them, the quicker he will put them to rest.

The First Amendment

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

Will we ever learn?

President Trump is about to score a religious tri-
fecta, visiting Saudi Arabia, Israel and Rome, the "home" of three monotheistic religions. The president



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has said he wants to make the ultimate deal and achieve peace between Israel and the Palestinians.

While the goal is similar to a high school kid attempting to hit a curve ball from an all-star pitcher, the scenario cannot end well for Israel. How do I know this? One has only to look at history. There has never — never — been a time when an American president has sought to lessen tensions in the region that Israel has not been smeared as the main impediment and required to "do more" to make peace happen. Israel is not an impediment to peace. Her enemies are.

Here's the danger for President Trump. The Koran allows Muslims to lie to "nonbelievers" in pursuit of Islam's goal of an earthly kingdom ruled by their religion. An example occurred last week when Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas met at the White House with President Trump. Abbas said, "Mr. President, I affirm to you that we are raising our youth, our children and grandchildren, in a culture of peace."

That is a flat-out lie, as even a cursory Google search or visit to the Palestinian Media Watch website proves. President Trump correctly saw the problem in a campaign speech to the American Israel Public Affairs Committee: "In Palestinian textbooks and mosques, you've got a culture of hatred that has been fomenting there for years. And if we want to achieve peace, they've got to go out and they've got to start this educational process. They have to end education of hatred."

Which country promotes the most extreme form of Islam in children's textbooks, mosques and their media? It is Saudi Arabia. If a person, or nation, believes they have a mandate from their "god" to lie to achieve their goals, how likely is it that even a president is not regarded as an "infidel" whose desire for peace can be used to damage Israel's best interests?

As Jerusalem Post columnist Caroline Glick correctly noted last week: "Israel is the most immediate casualty of Trump's decision to embrace Abbas and the PLO, because the PLO is Israel's enemy. Abbas is an anti-Semite. His doctoral dissertation, which he later published as a book, is a Holocaust denying screed."

"Abbas engages in anti-Semitic incitement on a daily basis, both directly and indirectly. It was Abbas who called for his people to kill Jews claiming that we pollute Judaism's most sacred site, the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, with our 'filthy feet.' The Palestinian media and school system which he controls with an iron fist both regularly portray Jews as evil monsters, deserving of physical annihilation."

This is not the attitude of one with whom a president or prime minister of Israel can make peace. A virus of hatred toward Israel and Jews is epidemic throughout the region. One is as likely to change the minds of such people as persuade a serious Christian to deny the resurrection of Jesus, or an Orthodox Jew to accept Him as Messiah. The difference is that Christians and Jews do not have world domination as their goal and violence as their method.

President Trump should re-read his AIPAC speech, because he was right to say what he said then. Abbas lied to the president during his visit. Mr. Trump can expect more lies on his trip to Saudi Arabia, whose leaders may promise all sorts of things and tell the president what he wants to hear, but won't mean it. The proof is in their interpretation of their religion. As always, the West must pay less attention to what the enemies of Israel say and more attention to what they do.

'Animal House' governance

"But what good came of it at last?"
Quoth little Peterkin.
"Why that I cannot tell," said he,

"But 'twas a famous victory."
— Robert Southey
"The Battle of Blenheim" (1798)

WASHINGTON — Southey, a pacifist, wrote his anti-war poem long after the 1704 battle for which the Duke of Marlborough was awarded Blenheim Palace, where his great-great-great-great-great grandson Winston Churchill would be born. We, however, do not need to wait 94 years to doubt whether the Trump administration's action against "sanctuary cities" is much ado about not much. Four months have sufficed to reveal it 'twas a constitutionally dubious gesture.

The executive order was perpetrated in a helter-skelter, harum-scarum, slapdash manner five days after the Inauguration, before the administration was humming like a well-tuned Lamborghini. The order says that sanctuary cities have caused "immeasurable harm" to "the very fabric of our republic," a thunderous judgment offered without evidence of the shredded fabric or even a definition of "sanctuary city."

They are cities that limit the cooperation of local law enforcement personnel with federal immigration enforcement efforts. There are defensible reasons for some non-cooperation: e.g., preserving cooperative relations between local police and immigrant communities, which facilitates crime-fighting. But many such cities anoint themselves sanctuaries as an act of self-congratulatory virtue-signaling and to pander to immigrant communities.

The executive order is either a superfluous nullity or it is constitutional vandalism. It says cities "that fail to comply with applicable federal law" shall "not receive federal funds, except as mandated



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by law." A U.S. district judge in Northern California has held that the executive order is "toothless" if it pertains to merely a few federal grants, and even they do not unambiguously state in their texts that fun ding is conditional on active cooperation with federal immigration enforcement. If, however, the order extends to other federal grants, it violates the separation of powers: The spending power is vested in Congress, so presidents cannot unilaterally insert new conditions on funding.

Several senior White House officials, operating in pre-Lamborghini mode, denounced this judge's decision as another excess by the much-reversed 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals. Actually, although this court might hear an appeal of the judge's decision, it had nothing to do with the decision.

It is federal law that a state "may not prohibit, or in any way restrict, any government entity or official from sending to, or receiving from, the Immigration and Naturalization Service information regarding the citizenship or immigration status, lawful or unlawful, of any individual." This does not, however, prevent any government entity from voluntarily withholding information.

Furthermore, the Supreme Court has held that the 10th Amendment ("The powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the states, are reserved to the states respectively, or to the people") means that the federal government may not "commandeer"

state and local officials to enforce federal laws. The function of the anti-commandeering doctrine is, in the words of Justice Antonin Scalia, the "preservation of the states as independent and autonomous political entities."

Last Sunday, Texas Republican Gov. Greg Abbott signed legislation setting criminal and civil penalties for state and local officials who refuse to comply with federal immigration laws and detention requests. As policy, this may or may not be wise; as an exercise of the state's police power, it is not constitutionally problematic. But regarding the federal executive order, professor Ilya Somin of George Mason University's Antonin Scalia Law School says:

"Trump's order is exactly the kind of high-handed federal coercion of states and undermining of separation of powers that outraged conservatives under [President] Obama. In fact, Obama did not go as far as Trump seems to do here. Obama never claimed sweeping authority to impose new conditions on federal grants beyond those specifically imposed by Congress."

Neither the Trump administration's semi-demi-ukase against sanctuary cities, nor the judge's ruling against it, has significant discernible consequences. The executive order illustrates the descent of American governance into theatricality.

In the satirical British television series "Yes, Prime Minister," a politician exclaims: "Something must be done, this is something, therefore we must do it." The executive order is barely anything at all, beyond, in the words of the Cato Institute's Ilya Shapiro, "just one more episode of Trumpian signaling." It is government inspired by "Animal House," in which movie the character Otter says: "I think this situation absolutely requires a really futile and stupid gesture be done on somebody's part!"

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WORDS OF WISDOM

"But I tell you who hear me: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you..."

Luke 6:27