



Carmage Walls Commentary Prize

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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 Terrebonne Parish Sheriff's Office was involved in several public scandals that involved deputies' treatment of local residents. In one case, deputies bullied a resident, demanding that he stop recording the actions of another deputy. In another case, the Sheriff's Office and several other local agencies and officials were involved in searching a home and seizing computers and cell phones because a local resident had launched a website that was publishing material critical of those public servants. The opinion pieces attached here tried to frame the debate over these officers' actions in the light of their significance to local people and their implications for local people's constitutional rights.

THE COURIER

LEE BACHLET | Publisher
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OUR VIEW

One hurdle cleared for coastal plan

The state Senate on Wednesday approved the most recent update of the coastal master plan.

Now, the plan goes to the House of Representatives, where it should get a hearing in the coming weeks.

With every step it takes through the legislative process, it becomes one step closer to becoming the new framework for coastal projects planned to give us the best chance of continuing to be able to live and work in south Louisiana.

The plan, which lays out five decades and \$50 billion worth of work, doesn't contain the money to become a reality. But it is an important part of the process.

It is the work of engineers and experts, including public input and revisions.

It is a vastly important part of public policy, and the Legislature should learn what's in it and pass it into action.

"This is going to be one of the most important endeavors undertaken by the state of Louisiana," said state Sen. Norby Chabert, R-Houma. This Legislature needs to be engaged on this.

And Chabert was correct.

The Legislature should enthusiastically embrace the ideals and ideas in the plan — much of which involves projects right here in Terrebonne and Lafourche parishes.

Even the best-case assumptions in the plan look terrible for south Louisiana in general and for our region in particular.

But the plan is a place to begin.

It gives us a way moving forward to keep as many people and communities as safe and as dry as possible, considering that we live along an eroding coast and will continue to deal with rising seas and subsiding land.

The plan is an excellent example of the state doing what it can — within considerable budgetary and bureaucratic constraints — to keep its people safe.

The process will require the help of the federal government. It is unlikely that Louisiana can generate the tens of billions of dollars the plan will cost to fully put into action.

Although state and local governments and taxpayers have made progress, it won't be enough in the long run to make sure our children and grandchildren can continue to live here.

But the plan provides a footprint, a map for the way ahead. And it is a good-faith indicator to the feds that we are indeed doing all we can until we get the help we need and deserve.

Our Legislature must get onboard and lead the way for the revised coastal plan to become official state policy.

This week's action was important. But more steps are needed before it is approved. Let's hope the progress continues.

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ANOTHER VIEW



@Ramireztoons

WHEN COMEY SHOULD HAVE BEEN FIRED.



WHY NOT NOW?

WHAT APPEARANCE of a COVER-UP?



michaelpramirez.com

Who polices the police? You, if you can



Mike Gorman

Who does police the police? That's a good question, particularly in light of frequent local events.

In the case of the Terrebonne Sheriff's Office, the answer came in the form of a man with a phone who was willing to ignore a bullying officer to record inappropriate police behavior — an action that ultimately led to the firing of two cops and disciplining of a third.

It all started at 6:45 p.m. Saturday with a frantic call to 911.

According to the Sheriff's Office, Christopher Verdin Jr.'s mother reported that her son was on crystal meth, had shot a gun at the family's dog and had hit the animal in the head with a crescent wrench.

Deputies went to look for Verdin, 18, of Dulac. The allegedly found him carrying a .45-caliber pistol. They took the teen back to his house to continue the investigation.

This is where the story enters the public eye.

Three of the deputies had a confrontation with Verdin, who was handcuffed in the backseat of a police cruiser.

Frankie Duplantis, whose daughter is Verdin's girlfriend, took out his cellphone and started recording the cops' questionable actions.

This didn't go over well with the deputies, one of whom shoved and cursed at Duplantis,

demanding that he move away.

All the while, Deputy Joseph Cehan III can be seen and heard screaming and cursing at Verdin and challenging him to a physical confrontation.

He even jerks Verdin out of the back of his car, removes the handcuffs and asks him to fight.

Charles Cook Jr., the deputy who was pushing and cursing at Duplantis, can be seen throughout the confrontation simply watching it — when he's not trying to get witnesses out of the way.

Eventually, a third deputy re-handcuffs Verdin and leads him to another police car and the video ends with a voice sarcastically saying, "Terrebonne's finest."

That would have been the end of it except that Duplantis put it on Facebook, where it gained popularity quickly. It was viewed and shared repeatedly Saturday and Sunday and led to a vibrant public discussion over the deputies' actions.

According to a report by the Sheriff's Office, Cehan was reacting to Verdin, who was allegedly yelling and spitting at the officers.

None of that is evident on the video. And Verdin is charged with illegal use of a weapon, illegal carrying of a weapon and aggravated cruelty to an animal — but, significantly, with no charge related to his alleged misbehavior in the backseat of the cop car.

And, Sheriff Jerry Larpenter said earlier this week that neither Cehan nor Cook got the incident on his body camera.

So, if it hadn't been for a lone amateur videographer, there's a pretty good chance we would never have heard about this incident. We would have just gotten an arrest report, curtly describing

the charges against Verdin.

And that is the case with the vast majority of arrests.

Instead, following an investigation, Cehan and Cook were fired and the third deputy was got a reprimand for failing to report the incident. That was Monday, after an internal investigation.

Thank goodness Duplantis wasn't swayed by Cook's obvious displeasure at being filmed.

And thank goodness some people are willing to record the misdeeds of even the most powerful among us. Without that cellphone video, Cehan and Cook would likely be wearing badges today.

And what are we to think of cops who don't want their actions to be recorded? Well, we should look at them with suspicion, of course. Why would a law enforcement officer turn off his body camera.

More importantly, why would a sheriff — Lafourche Sheriff Craig Webre — refuse to use body cameras in the first place? Webre's agency remains the only major local department that fails to record evidence through this useful and ubiquitous tool.

Duplantis has shown us the use of calling out wrongdoing, even by those who wield guns and badges. And Larpenter showed what can happen when officers fall short of expectations.

But I guess we have to hope there's always a camera phone at the ready. We clearly shouldn't assume officers will police themselves.

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Time for the finger pointers to take a walk



Stephen Waguespack

Finger pointers are out in full force these days in the State Capitol.

Louisiana is once again facing many of the same problems we have faced for decades. Ask anyone in the Capitol why and watch the fingers start pointing.

The state budget is once again in a deficit, a problem we hear could easily be fixed if someone else somewhere would just do something in some way at some time. The tax code is an ever-changing mess, and it's all the other guy's fault. The economy is struggling thanks to the policy decisions of the other dude.

It must be the fault of "big business." Those folks have the audacity to want to be treated similarly to how they are treated in other states. The wealthy are blamed

for not paying government more, though most people would be amazed how broadly the government defines "wealthy."

It must be the Democrats' fault. They want more tax dollars to fund more government programs intended to solve Louisiana's perennial problems, a recipe the Legislature cooked up time and time again for decades when they controlled the votes in the Capitol. It must be the Republicans' fault. They are now the legislative majority and they have the nerve to want their ideas on smaller government to get more votes than the other party — a trait that historically comes with the majority territory. Imagine that.

Whatever the cause, finger pointing in the Capitol is at an all-time high, and it's not going away anytime soon. Instead of trying to suppress it, perhaps we should try to channel the blame game into a productive direction. To do so, might require all those finger pointers in the Capitol to take a walk. If the Capitol finger

pointers walked outside that beautiful building and headed south on the gracious lawn about a hundred yards away, they would find themselves standing next to the statue of former Gov. Huey Long. If they turned around and looked back at that impressive Art Deco building, I would urge them to raise their hands and point their fingers in that direction.

Huey Long created Louisiana's modern form of government. This model was that everything had to flow through a few well-connected hands in Baton Rouge. The concept was every man could be a king and the politicians of Louisiana's state government would decide the terms, prices and processes. Great things were promised for all. Many of these promises never came to fruition.

Local government has been told over the years to beg Baton Rouge for money rather than face local voters and live within their constituents' direction. That outdated and top-heavy concept of government is

starting to fray at the seams. This is the largest problem we face and will continue to face until we embrace a holistic reform of the Huey Long model of government.

In many other states, a larger percentage of regulatory decisions and tax dollars stay closer to the people at the local level. In these states, local taxpayers look more often to local government for good schools, safe communities and a healthy economy. States like Texas, Georgia, Florida and Tennessee spend much less per capita than Louisiana does at the state level, yet they seem to prosper more and more each year. How many of us would trade for their school systems?

We have a problem. It's a big one, but it is not one any politician wants to talk about because it has no easy solution. Our system of government has shown its age and no longer functions appropriately. It has led to low outcomes in pretty much any performance metric a state can track. This system of government is uncompetitive. It

is unaffordable and incompetent at meeting our needs. It can no longer be patched up with new taxes, budgetary tricks or sporadic oil booms.

The gig is up. Louisiana's state government must decentralize, shrink, reorganize and become more locally accountable. The people have been told for generations they can only prosper with a strong and growing state government. History has proven this wrong. The future offers no hope this generational trend will change without drastic restructuring of state government's role in our lives.

For better or worse, the political finger pointers are likely here to stay. Instead of lamenting that reality, let's unite and demand they all finally point those fingers in the right direction. That starts with taking a walk outside the Capitol, looking back, thanking Huey for his past service and letting him know his services are no longer needed.

Stephen Waguespack is president of the Louisiana Association for Business and Industry.

THE COURIER

LEE BACHLET | Publisher
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Don't let our good luck fool you

South Louisiana can celebrate. The first real threat of the season brought wind and rain. There was some street flooding and some nervousness about levees and rising water. But, Tropical Storm Cindy didn't pack nearly the punch that it could have brought. So rejoice. We have made it through another one.

We had the good fortune to escape from what could have been a terrible situation with just a glancing blow. While we appreciate our good luck, though, we must resist the temptation to let it lull us into a dangerous sense of complacency. We are always better off for a storm to pass by and leave us alone or to simply fall apart before making landfall. But we cannot assume that every storm will do that.

We have just gone through an anxious several days of anticipating the storm's arrival even as we hoped it would leave us alone. Great relief is a natural reaction, and there is plenty of that all around us. This feeling, as important as it is now, cannot color the way we view future storms. Our luck has been good in recent years. Last year, we escaped the devastation and misery that was felt by our neighbors around the state.

We have to remember, though, that each storm carries with it real danger. We continue to live and work in an area of the world that is prone to tropical storms, and we have to recognize the threat that they bring — even if we have not experienced the worst of one for several years.

Anyone who has lived here for more than a few years knows firsthand how quickly our luck can change and how bad it can get — even in storms that never develop into major hurricanes or that do not strike us directly. We endure half of every year in a hurricane season. Please remember that each storm poses a potential threat of flooding and wind damage.

A good way to think about our situation with every storm is to keep in mind the common disclaimer used in commercials for mutual funds. Past performance is not an indicator of future outcomes. This is true regardless of how well we have weathered past storms. For instance, people invariably say after a storm that they weren't worried because their street had never flooded before.

Our entire region is at risk when there is a storm in the Gulf of Mexico. We can and should express relief when we escape relatively unscathed, as we did this week. But we have to remain realistic about the future potential for danger.

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ANOTHER VIEW



Expensive lessons learned by taxpayers



Mike Gorman

The arrogance of power can be as impressive as it is terrifying. Take for instance the ongoing saga that pits the public of Terrebonne Parish against a tiny group of powerful and well-connected politicians and their business associates. They include the parish president, the sheriff, the district attorney and a host of hangers-on. What ties them together is their collective targeting by the political blog ExposeDAT, which few of us would have ever seen except for these officials' overblown and unconstitutional reaction to it. Mistaking themselves for some sort of south Louisiana politburo, these folks attempted to silence criticism through police harassment and the confiscation of private property. When finally a court was found that was willing to acknowledge that the U.S. Constitution applies even to small-town politicians, the legal nightmare for the bloggers more or less ground to a halt. But there was still the matter of the serious lawsuit she had against these officials. Terrebonne Parish settled its part of the suit earlier this month with a \$50,000 payment. But that wasn't the end of our politicians' attempts to hide the truth from the taxpayers. The parish sought to have

the settlement closed by the federal judge who was overseeing the case. Fortunately, he refused. So we got to find out how much these officials' hubris cost the people of Terrebonne. Well, we got to find out part of it. In due course, we will learn the total amount the parish paid in legal fees and court costs. And all of it utterly wasted. Parish President Gordy Dove has been reluctant to speak about the case recently, but he still insists he has the parish's best interests at heart. "State law required us to release the settlement," Dove said. "State law also supersedes a civil confidentiality agreement, but we're still bound to that confidentiality agreement with the plaintiffs. Now that it's been released, I think the numbers speak for themselves. My role as parish president is to be the negotiator on what's best for the people of Terrebonne Parish, and that's what I did." But if Dove had actually been protecting the interests of all the people of Terrebonne Parish — and not just his group of friends and allies — he would have steered clear of this business from the beginning. And so would the sheriff. The part of the lawsuit against Sheriff Jerry Larpen, by the way, is still active. He was not part of the settlement, and he has been adamant in defending his office's actions. At the time when the Sheriff's Office raided the home and confiscated computer and phone equipment, Larpen said it was because the blog makes erroneous statements under a fictitious name. "If you're gonna lie about me

and make it under a fictitious name, I'm gonna come after you." Through this entire ordeal, no one has said exactly which statements on the blog were untrue. More importantly, though, neither the Sheriff's Office nor any other member of the Terrebonne elite has been able to show how the parish's cops could legally be used to settle what should be a civil matter. Although the raid had the blessing of a local judge, it was a transparent effort to use a law — that was decades ago declared unconstitutional — to silence political speech. And now the bills have to be paid. The courts ultimately will decide whether Larpen owes anything for his part in this sordid affair. But the parish has cut its check, just part of what all this nonsense will cost the taxpayers. In the end, this was an expensive lesson in civics and intimidation. Yes, there are limits to what the police can do in the furtherance of political vendettas. But, you'd better be prepared to have them storm your house and take your possessions. And then, if you expect anything close to justice, you have to be willing and able to take legal action. And we still haven't learned whether the zeal with which the "truth" was protected in this instance will carry over to members of the public who aren't part of the inner circle. Actually, I guess we have.

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Is the answer in a monarchy?

By Walt Garlington
Guest Columnist

Another year, another budget mess in Louisiana. Why are Louisiana's politics so often dysfunctional? Let's look at the question from two perspectives, which actually overlap: the political and the religious. Politically, Louisiana has a government that does not match the nature of its people. While it is a mix of different nationalities, the French seems to predominate. And the French are a people who were traditionally used to a strong centralized monarchy. When Louisiana joined the union in 1812, it adopted the constitution of Kentucky with some minor changes. This overlaying of monarchy with republicanism was bound to cause difficulties. It did, and it continues to do so. One can no more shift suddenly between the two and expect for harmonious government than one can treat a cow like a caterpillar and expect to walk home in one piece. Nor should one expect

too much good from elected governments in and of themselves. St Gregory the theologian said that a multiplicity of wills leads to disharmony, and disharmony leads to dissolution. A king is necessary. One cannot get around this. Society, like the family and like the kingdom of God, is a hierarchy. Just as heaven is ruled by one God, the father, the son and the Holy Ghost, so it is natural that there should be a king over a people. There can be institutions and officials around the king — judges, elected representatives and so on — but the king must have the final word. Religiously, the worship of the Holy Trinity and the salvation of the people have been subordinated to notions of freedom and rights. The disestablishment of religion has relegated Christianity to a private concern, with no place for it in public life but a superficial one. In other times and places, we saw something quite different. Christianity was at the heart of national life. The emperors, the

tsars, the kings and queens would personally lead their people into the churches for the divine liturgy. The national life was a great, unending divine liturgy, a public work, a work of the whole people offered to God, a breaking through of heaven into earth by receiving God's grace in the sacraments, through the veneration of the relics of the holy saints (whose feast days were national holidays), the creation of sacred art (churches, icons, monasteries, illuminated manuscripts, music), by loving one's neighbor, by participating in the daily cycle of the services of the church, by keeping the fasts, by reading holy scripture and the lives of the saints, by the practice of prayer. The work of Christian countries in the past was to create saints, not to produce ever-bigger GDP numbers or to multiply consumer goods or entertainment. These are only substitutes for a true Christian culture. An overlap occurs in the person of the king. He is not just one among a number of

secular officials subject to the will of the majority. He is God's anointed, an icon of Christ's kingly rule, one who exercises authority in God's name for the good of the people. When we reject royal authority, we reject hierarchy, we reject humility, we reject God. And what do we get instead? What we see day after day in the news: politics bent on the kingdom of man, where petty, selfish interests disguised as rights and freedoms lead to budget deadlocks and other policies more disastrous than that, to endless discussions and arguments and to other maladies. The king helps secure Christianity among the people and, along with it, harmony in government and throughout society. This sounds strange to people with a Western European heritage where Christianity and politics became rather deformed through the power grabs and other abuses of Roman Catholic popes, Protestant princes and similar characters after the Great Schism of 1054 A.D. But it is true nevertheless.

There are plenty of examples in lands where the Orthodox Church took root in the West and East. Monarchy is close to us in Louisiana, more so than in other places. The fleur-de-lis is one of our symbols, and the fleur-de-lis is also the symbol of the French Bourbon monarchy, which ruled Louisiana for much of its life until the Louisiana Purchase. This heritage is to our benefit. Many people are sick of politics as usual, and they are right to feel that way. But the answer isn't in the false choice of Republicans and Democrats, of right versus left. The true choice is between an Orthodox Christian monarchy or the antichristianity of the republic or democracy. The Return of the King is a very good book by J.R.R. Tolkien, but it is also what those longing for good government and a sane culture in Louisiana and elsewhere should work towards as well.

Walt Garlington lives in Swartz.

THE COURIER

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OUR VIEW

Governor, schools chief must come to a truce

The friction between Gov. John Bel Edwards and Schools Superintendent John White has steadily increased since Edwards took office. But lately, the public disagreement has become even more intense. Edwards earlier this week suggested that White is not legally in his position and said he is studying what can be done to remove him. Edwards said White should have been reconfirmed by the state Senate to stay in his post. This is not at all what the students, teachers, parents, administrators and taxpayers of Louisiana need. White and Edwards are trapped by political circumstances beyond either man's control. Edwards lacks the majority vote of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education, which hires the superintendent, to fire White. And White lacks the two-thirds vote of the board he would need to be given a new contract. As a result, White has been working on a month-to-month contract since the beginning of last year. None of this is ideal.

Ideally, White would work with Edwards and BESE to formulate the state's educational strategy and see it through to fruition. That plan should include vastly improved expectations for our students, who have long underperformed compared to their counterparts across the nation.

Ideally, the schools superintendent wouldn't be constantly worried about losing his job due to concerns unrelated to the educational outcomes he oversees.

And ideally, the governor would be more concerned about our schools than who is in the superintendent's office.

However, far too much time and attention have been devoted to political maneuvering, all of which comes at the expense of our schools.

Edwards and White should take stock of the political realities that have created their current difficulties. And they should resolve to transcend those realities by working together for the good of the state. It will be difficult.

Edwards is close to the education unions that oppose White. And White must guard against being removed from his job by White and his political allies.

But both men should be able to rise above the differences that separate them. They should be able to work together with BESE to get a plan in place to improve our schools and set our students on a better path toward their respective futures.

That should be the goal, regardless of the names of the people who are in office.

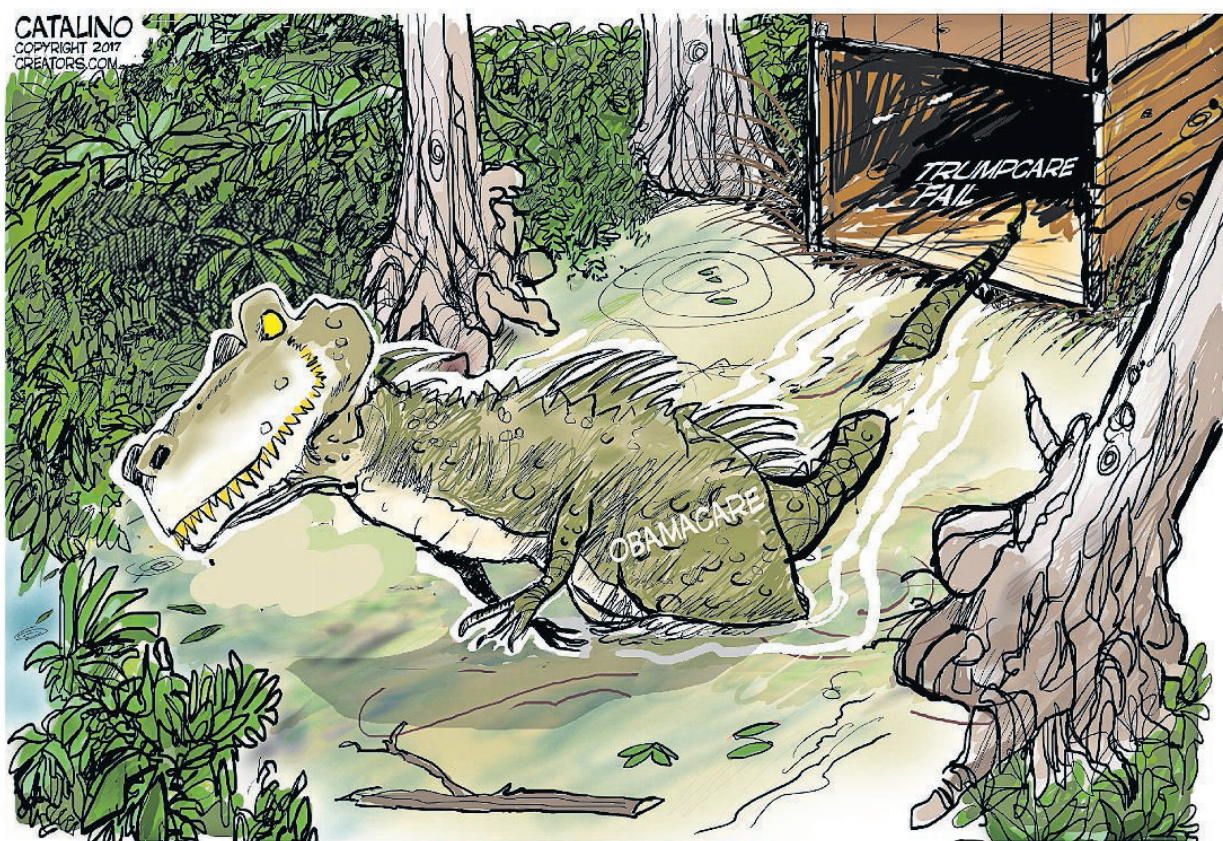
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ANOTHER VIEW



RESTOCKING THE SWAMP

Stories that epitomize America's endurance



James F. Burns

America is built upon a cultural foundation of ambition and excellence. Four short stories involving physical challenges of endurance — a hazardous hike, a death march and two long races — illustrate these traits.

Ohio, 1798 — John Hosbrook, having hiked eight miles to a fort to replenish his supply of salt, set out on the return trip — not knowing that a fierce blizzard awaited him. When winds began to whip through the forest and a heavy snow soon covered his path, eventually he plunged to the ground and froze to death.

John's 13-year-old son, Dan Hosbrook, helped his mother cope with their tragic situation. In time, the family flourished, and Dan became the county surveyor, court sheriff and a member of the Ohio Assembly. My mother was Dan's great-granddaughter and grew up on the farm where her ancestor had perished a century earlier. My father's from the same small village of Madeira, Ohio, and his best life-long friend was Howard DeMar, the postmaster of Madeira.

The Boston Marathon. Howard's first-cousin was Clarence DeMar — who had a gift and a gait for running, chasing jack rabbits down the Madeira hills on his way to school. Clarence never stopped running, even to work as an adult. Someone suggested he enter the Boston Marathon. He did. He won the 1911 race but was advised by his doctor to give up running due

to a heart murmur. A decade later — and after his doctor had died of cardiac arrest — Clarence felt fine, became a fierce competitor, and entered the 1922 race. He won six times between 1922 and 1930.

The Korean War. My brother was the captain of our high school football team, and his best buddy, Leigh Whitaker, was the play-by-play announcer for home games. Leigh was light-hearted, a fun guy. Graduation came. War came. My brother ended up on a Coast Guard cutter in the north Atlantic; Leigh ended up in Korea, an army medic whose unit was overrun by a pre-dawn attack south of Seoul.

One of the few survivors and initially lined up for execution by a firing squad, Leigh became a POW, kept on the march and sleeping on the ground for over three years. For 37 agonizing months, his family only knew he was missing in action.

I was a freshman in high school and the only one awake in our house when I heard a voice on the radio reading off one of the list of prisoners coming home from Korea. "Charles Leigh Whitaker, Cincinnati, Ohio." Fighting tears, I jumped out of bed and woke up my parents and sister. "Leigh's coming home."

Like Clarence DeMar, Leigh's life had a remarkable future as well as a past. He wed his high school sweetheart, Joyce Knippling, and, with her, raised two beautiful children.

The Boston Marathon. The year is now 2013. Competing in the disabled division is Kris Biagiotti, pushing her daughter Kayla in a wheelchair designed for road racing. Kris took up distance running with Kayla shortly after her husband died of a heart attack. Known as Boston's "K Girls," Kris and Kayla do road races to raise money for handicapped

children. Again, there's a family connection — my niece is Kayla's godmother and Kris had recently attended our son's wedding.

Kris and Kayla had circled the 2013 Boston Marathon in hopes of becoming the first mother-daughter duo to complete the storied race. But darker forces were at work. Kris and Kayla would collide with the radicalized evil of the Tsarnaev brothers at the finish line.

Having conquered Heartbreak Hill, Kris and Kayla were approaching Copley Square as the Tsarnaevs placed their bombs on the sidewalk and melted away in the crowd. The bomb placed directly behind a family of four exploded just seconds after Kris' fiancé, Brian, left that area to assist Kris and Kayla deal with a pool of reporters waiting to interview them.

Shrapnel flew through the air like bullets. Brian was grazed in the head and bleeding as he helped Kris and shielded Kayla from the full force of the blast. Fortunately, they all survived, and Kris returned the next year to run the Marathon and defy the terrorists.

John Hosbrook, Clarence DeMar, Leigh Whitaker, Kris and Kaya. Each showed courage and endurance while contributing to the family stories that form our American mosaic. Everyone's now doing DNA to trace their roots. But you may find interesting family stories if you look elsewhere — in old letters and stacks and scraps of family memorabilia before they're thrown out, and in the minds and memories of older family members while they're still here. Everyone has a story worth telling. What's yours? Find it and write it down for future generations.

James F. Burns is a retired professor at the University of Florida.

Making sense of the senseless



Mike Gorman

Being a federal judge must be nice ... most of the time.

And then there are times when a judge has to sort out the sordid mess left behind by an unconstitutional police seizure of personal property.

Such is the case as U.S. District Judge Lance Africk delves into the facts and arguments surrounding the case of Terrebonne Parish Sheriff Jerry Larpenfer vs. the U.S. Constitution.

OK, that's not the name of the case. But it is the basis of the case.

Larpenfer's deputies secured a search warrant as part of an "investigation" into the political blog ExposeDAT, which took aim at Larpenfer and an alleged

web of business associates.

Because of that public criticism — which ironically became a lot more public after Larpenfer and his pals tried to silence it — the sheriff brought the full weight of his office to bear. His deputies searched the home of Jennifer and Wayne Anderson and seized their computers and cell phones.

Although the search and seizure clearly violated the U.S. Constitution, it took an appeals court ruling to that effect to get the sheriff to relent.

Having found themselves on the business end of Terrebonne's power structure, the Andersons filed suit in federal court. They claim that the sheriff's actions were unconstitutional and that their rights were violated.

Earlier this week, Africk slapped down Larpenfer's attempt to have their lawsuit thrown out of court.

"Given the longstanding and robust constitutional protections afforded speech

involving public officials (and speech involving public funds), it can be argued based on these allegations that Sheriff Larpenfer acted with at least deliberate indifference to the risk that his actions would violate the Andersons' constitutional rights," Africk wrote.

That is a sensible conclusion based on what we know about the case. And, as far as it goes, it should be relatively easy to prove.

The larger point here, though, is that everyone in Larpenfer's jurisdiction now knows that criticism of the sheriff or his business buddies can mean a knock at the door and a police search.

That is a more serious concern even than the Andersons' constitutional rights.

Individual rights exist only as long as we are willing to fight for them. And, regardless of what you think about the sheriff and the rest of Terrebonne's elite, most will agree that we should be free to speak to

and about the powerful.

Africk said as much in his order.

"That message — if you speak ill of the sheriff of your parish, then the sheriff will direct his law enforcement resources toward forcibly entering your home and taking your belongings under the guise of a criminal investigation — is inseparable from the injury and would certainly chill anyone ... from engaging in similar constitutionally protected speech in the future," Africk wrote.

That is the danger that flows from this case. Not only have the Andersons been wronged by the sheriff, but the whole parish has been.

If anyone's rights are trampled, all of our rights are trampled.

When the powerful undertake unconstitutional activities to silence their critics, we all have to worry.

The "aw shucks, I didn't know the Constitution applied here" defense is weak. And Africk called it what it is.

The strong possibility that he "acted with at least deliberate indifference," in the judge's words, toward the Andersons' constitutional rights means that Terrebonne has far greater troubles than allegations on a website.

It should be entertaining to watch as this case gets to the heart of what happened to the Andersons and the rest of Terrebonne's people.

Unfortunately, only Larpenfer is left to explain himself. Terrebonne Parish paid the Andersons \$50,000 last month under a cloud of secrecy to settle its part of the lawsuit.

This is an ugly episode that just keeps getting uglier. And Judge Africk has a front-row seat for what looks like the ugliest part of the whole affair.

Maybe he can make some sense out of it.

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THE COURIER

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A win for the public, lawsuit can proceed

A federal judge ruled last week that a lawsuit against Terrebonne Sheriff Jerry Larpenier can proceed.

Good. Terrebonne's voters, taxpayers and residents deserve to know exactly what their sheriff did and why.

In an effort to shut down a political blog, ExposeDAT, Larpenier's deputies raided the home of Jennifer and Wayne Anderson and seized their computers and telephones.

Larpenier tried to have the lawsuit over the raid thrown out of court by arguing that there was no harm done because the seized equipment was never searched.

A search of the phones and computers would certainly have added to the violation of the couple's constitutional right to free speech.

But the raid itself was a violation, one that could chill political speech throughout our parish.

U.S. District Judge Lance Africk agreed last week, saying that the outcome of the search is the important fallout from this case.

"That message — if you speak ill of the sheriff of your parish, then the sheriff will direct his law enforcement resources toward forcibly entering your home and taking your belongings under the guise of a criminal investigation — is inseparable from the injury and would certainly chill anyone ... from engaging in similar constitutionally protected speech in the future," Africk wrote.

This has been an unfortunate episode from the beginning.

Larpenier pursued an investigation of the Andersons based on a criminal defamation law that was decades ago ruled unconstitutional by the U.S. Supreme Court.

The idea that the sheriff would try to silence political speech by intimidating bloggers, searching their homes and seizing their personal property could well have the effect of silencing future criticism.

That is a deeply troubling thought in a nation where our robust marketplace of ideas is crucial to our free system of self-government.

Fortunately, Africk ruled that the potential harm here extends far beyond the Andersons' computer equipment and the information it may have contained.

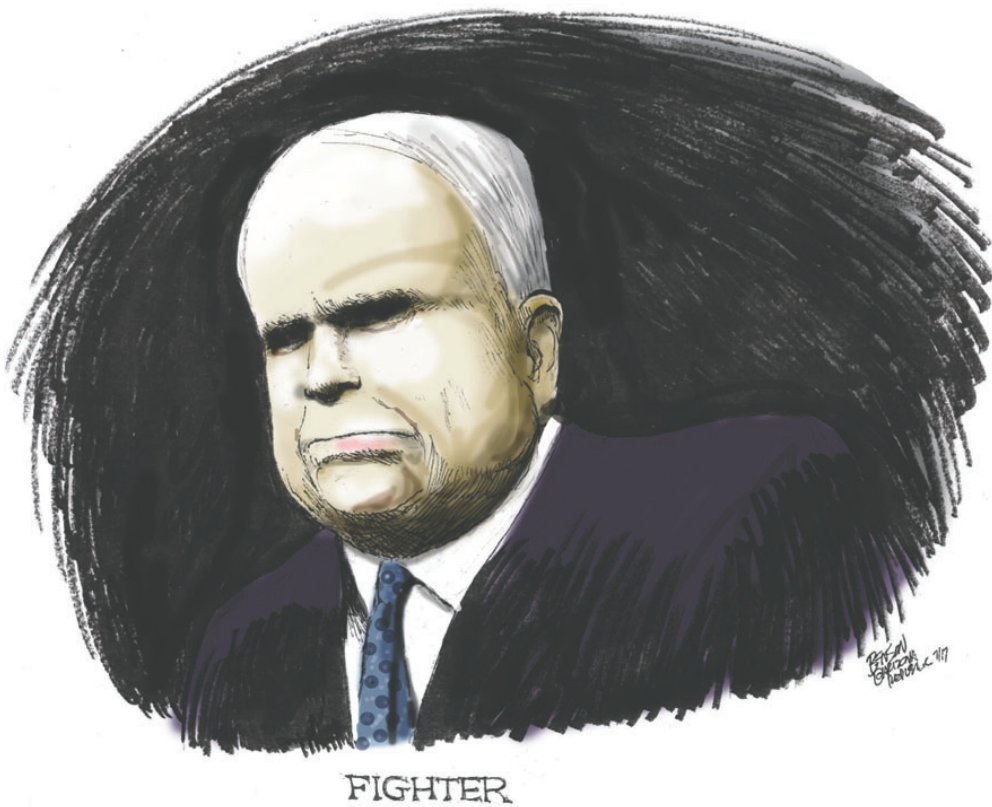
The potential harm of the Sheriff's Office search goes to the heart of the public's relationship with our government. We should be able to comment on our public officials and their actions in office without fearing a police search.

And if the sheriff allows such a scenario to play out at the expense of political speech, he should have to answer for it in court.

Africk's decision certainly sets us on a path toward resolution.

Editorials represent the opinion of the newspaper, not of any individual.

ANOTHER VIEW



Pigging out with your money



Cal Thomas

Citizens Against Government Waste, a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization working to eliminate governmental waste and fraud, just released its "2017 Congressional Pig Book," an annual publication highlighting wasteful government spending that should embarrass each and every member of Congress.

While it is true that most government spending is for "entitlements" and other fixed costs, the "Pig Book" properly ridicules politicians who waste significant amounts of money on questionable programs.

In 2011, Congress promised to go on the wagon when it came to pork. That didn't last long because pork to politicians is like blood to a vampire.

Members promised to swear-off earmarks, which is spending attached to bills that don't go through the appropriations process. As CAGW notes, despite that supposed moratorium, earmarks keep showing up in numerous bills. The "Pig Book" exposes 163 earmarks in the fiscal 2017 budget, an increase of 32.5 percent from 123 in fiscal 2016.

You owe it to yourself to get this book at cagw.org. Check your outrage meter when you're done. In 2014, Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., called earmarks "a corrupt system." And it's bipartisan, perhaps the only activity that

qualifies for such a designation in divided Washington.

There's \$150 million going to the Department of Defense for the National Guard Counter-Drug Program. The Drug Enforcement Administration, which has a budget of \$2.1 billion, is already responsible for these activities, but duplication is no reason to stop the spending.

How about \$15 million for alternative energy research within the Combat Vehicle and Automotive Technology program? Since FY 2004, Congress has used the Defense Appropriations bill as a vehicle to insert 27 earmarks worth \$289.9 million for this purpose, despite the billions already appropriated for alternative energy research through the Energy and Water Development Appropriations Act. Aren't we already exporting natural gas and headed toward energy independence with less reliance on Middle East oil?

"Legislators have long treated the Army Corps of Engineers as a prime repository of pork," notes CAGW, "and it is among the most heavily earmarked areas of the federal budget. Since FY 1996, members of Congress have added 6,916 earmarks for the Corps, costing taxpayers \$12.8 billion."

A lot of this spending, of course, goes straight to a member's state or congressional district and is designed to sustain politicians in office.

One item not in the "Pig Book," but reported by the Washington Free Beacon, is \$224,999 for a clean water video supplied by the National Institutes of Health that is aimed at helping children "right the environmental wrongs" in a fictional town. My free "program"

growing up was from my conservationist father who told me not to throw trash on the ground or in the creek behind our house.

Back to the "Pig Book": \$2.387 million for "advanced materials and structural safety within the Airport and Airways Trust Fund (AATF), through which the Federal Aviation Administration finances infrastructure improvements for airports."

The CATO Institute, a public policy think tank based in Washington, D.C., has noted that the AATF has the indirect effect of preventing competition among airlines at airports. Because the AATF allows for only limited funding for maintenance and improvements, airports are limited in the number of gates they can build. As a result, airports ration gate access through long-term contracts with established companies, creating a barrier for potential competitors.

I'm betting that some of the recipients of this largesse probably contribute to their benefactor's political campaigns. It's the way Washington works, or more accurately, doesn't work, at least not to the benefit of taxpayers.

The larger point is not whether any of these earmarks produce anything that benefits anyone other than the recipients of the money. It is whether all this spending is constitutional and something the federal government should be doing in an age when the national debt continues to grow.

Don't read the "Pig Book" and weep. Read it, get angry, call your representatives and ask them to give up earmarks for good.

Readers may email Cal Thomas at tcaditors@tribpub.com.

LETTERS POLICY

Letters to the editor should be 400 words or less and include your name, address and daytime phone number. Address letters to: The Courier, 3030 Barrow St., Houma, LA, 70360. Email: news@houmatoday.com

Spending a lot on health care is the American way



Tyler Cowen

The U.S. has some of the most expensive medicine in the world, with health-care spending now almost 18 percent of gross domestic product. But why? And might we hope to get this spending down? Unfortunately, expensive health care is embedded in the American way of life — more specifically, the American desire to live it up with high consumption.

As outlined by the blog Random Critical Analysis, U.S. health-care expenditures go well beyond what the U.S.'s relatively high per capita GDP might lead us to expect. But viewed through the lens of consumption behavior, American health-care

spending is typical of this nation's habits and mores. Relative to GDP, Americans consume a lot more than Europeans, and our health-care spending is another example of that tendency.

Why is American consumption so disproportionate to American GDP? One reason is the relatively low household savings rate, or possibly American net wealth is high relative to GDP.

Consumption in the U.S., per capita, measures about 50 percent higher than in the European Union. American individuals command more resources than people in countries such as Norway or Luxembourg, which have higher per capita GDP. The same American consumption advantage is evident if you look at dwelling space per person or the number of appliances in a typical home.

Once we focus on consumption, America's high health-care expenditures no longer appear so unusual. In fact, if you

graph health-care expenditures, per capita, against individual consumption, the fit is very close across developed nations. In other words, the spending bug tracks into health care, too.

To put it most simply, we Americans spend a lot on health care because we spend a lot period.

Is health care best thought of as a kind of consumption decision? That's debatable, because spending on better health is also an investment in longevity, comfort and lifetime earnings. It's not like buying a new dress or a fancy ski vacation. Yet Americans nonetheless seem to mentally treat a lot of health care as similar to personal consumption. They may want a particular doctor, or a sufficiently comfortable hospital, the latest technology or the very best prescription drug to make them feel better as quickly as possible. As a nation, we are relatively intolerant of long waits, and we're not sufficiently focused on the long-term solutions of exercise

and good diet. We love the quick fix, we want it on our terms, and we hate being told no. We're willing to go to extreme lengths to keep medical patients alive, rather than giving up hope, even when less intervention might be the more rational medical decision.

I do think these tendencies reflect a kind of American national weakness, and that we would be better off if we had a less consumerist, more philosophical, and indeed more spartan approach to our health and well-being. That would lead to less overtreatment, less strain on health-care resources, and in the longer run a healthier nation with a sounder fiscal position for the federal government.

But I just don't see this nation on the verge of such a change, and so the message here is somewhat pessimistic. Americans love their personal consumption, and household savings rates have been mostly falling since the early 1980s. Those are long-term cultural trends that no health-care

policy will reverse. We should be grateful for whatever cost control we can get, because it is running counter to some fairly fundamental principles of the American economy and what the American people expect out of life.

Furthermore, we shouldn't take the lower health-care spending in many European nations as a sign of better health-care policy. It's a reflection of a broader cultural difference. If the U.S. someday did move to a single payer system for health care, it probably would be a relatively expensive version of that idea. The U.S., of course, does have a partial single payer system through Medicare, and it is still more expensive per beneficiary than its European equivalents.

When it comes to understanding America, including its health care, the spending bug is more important than you might think.

Tyler Cowen is a Bloomberg View columnist.