



Carmage Walls
Commentary Prize

2019 Entry Form

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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 campaign to bring a Major League Soccer team to Austin was one of the city's hottest-button issues in 2018, stirring the passions of sports fans, business leaders, activists opposed to government incentives and residents concerned about a stadium's impact on their neighborhoods. American-Statesman editorial writer Bridget Grumet wrote numerous columns and editorials that challenged assumptions, highlighted disparities and successfully advocated for a better deal for the city of Austin.

Team owner Precourt Sports Ventures wanted to have virtually free and tax-exempt use of valuable city-owned land for its stadium, as well as other perks. From the outset, Precourt made a public case for the benefits an MLS franchise could bring to Austin. One of Grumet's columns provided a reality check on the economic benefits of having a pro sports team. Another column highlighted the fact that the largest piece of the community benefits package, a youth soccer academy, would benefit only boys. That revelation prompted intense backlash among City Council members and led Precourt to promise to fully fund a Women's Premier Soccer League team, providing more equitable benefits for female players.

Meanwhile, Grumet's unsigned editorials repeatedly pressed for a financial accounting of the terms and a detailed plan to safely handle game-day traffic. When opposing factions of the City Council put forward two resolutions -- one to proceed with soccer stadium negotiations at the city-owned site, another to allow other developers to bid on the site -- Grumet urged the council to proceed with *both* to put itself in the strongest negotiating position. The council followed this advice, and the competitive pressure produced a better package: Precourt ended up putting millions of dollars on the table for rent, transportation improvements and affordable housing. Grumet also successfully argued the city should publicly post the final contract, something Texas officials sometimes refuse to do when high-profile contracts are involved.

Council members, city negotiators and the public all played a role in demanding better terms from the Major League Soccer franchise, but Grumet's opinion writing steered and informed the conversation in vital ways.

VIEWPOINTS

Austin American-Statesman

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Viewpoints
EditorAlberta Phillips,
Bridget Grumet
Viewpoints Writers

City's stadium numbers may be weaker than they appear



Bridget Grumet
Commentary

If you're a city looking to bring some fancy new thing to town — like, say, a Major League Soccer franchise — there's basically one way to make money.

You've got to bring in *new* dollars. New spending, by people who otherwise wouldn't be here.

I'd be happy to see the Columbus Crew SC come to Austin. My family and I would go to some games, and in time my husband might go all in on face paint. But the money we'd spend on tickets and nachos is money we otherwise would have spent dining out or going to the movies. Since we already live here, we wouldn't be generating new sales tax revenue for the city or pumping new money into the local economy. We'd just be spending our old dollars in a new place.

Only a fraction of the visitors to a stadium at McKalla Place, if such a thing is built, would be out-of-towners dropping *new* dollars on tickets, meals and maybe a night or two at a hotel. But they're an important X-factor in whether this deal makes financial sense for the city.

So, it's a problem if the financial impact of these out-of-towners is overestimated. And that's what a couple of sports economists I've talked to see with this deal.

The city of Austin hired consultant Brailsford & Dunlavey this spring to run the numbers on a potential MLS stadium. Among many things, those projections assumed 10 percent of the people coming to soccer matches and other stadium events would stay overnight at a hotel.

That was a nonstarter for Stanford University economist Roger Noll, who co-wrote the book "Sports, Jobs, and Taxes: The Economic Impact of Sports Teams and Stadiums."

"For stadiums as a whole, the fraction of people coming from outside the metro area is about 3 percent," Noll told me. "Occasionally, it gets as high as 5 percent, but never as high as 10 percent. Even Anaheim stadium, which is across the

street from Disneyland, doesn't get as high as 10 percent."

Part of the reason, he notes, is that the big five pro sports leagues have some 150 teams between them, scattered all across the country. With the exception of events like the Super Bowl, he said, people rarely travel far to see a game.

I reached out to Brailsford & Dunlavey, which fielded my questions through a city spokeswoman, and the firm said the 10 percent assumption was "based on its professional experience with other major stadium projects." They did not specify which ones when I asked.

At 10 percent, the overnight visitors were projected to contribute \$322,000 a year in hotel taxes — not a major sum, but that becomes even smaller (\$96,600-\$161,000) if overnight guests account for only 3 to 5 percent of the stadium visitors.

Smith College economist Andrew Zimbalist, who co-authored "Sports, Jobs, and Taxes" with Noll, said a different number caught his eye.

Brailsford & Dunlavey assumes half of the stadium visitors will be city residents, people like me bringing only old money to the table. In calculating the estimated \$25.6 million a year in economic impact the stadium would bring the city, the consultant is mainly looking at the 10 percent of overnight guests and the remaining 40 percent of the fans, visitors who aren't staying in a hotel but are considered "out of market."

These "out of market" people include some Travis County residents just outside the city limits, in places like Pflugerville and Bee Cave, as well as folks just across the county line, in places like Cedar Park and Round Rock. Brailsford & Dunlavey assumes all of these "out of market" people are bringing entirely new dollars to Austin, which strikes Zimbalist as unlikely.

"Presumably, people living in a suburb are making the choice they want to live near a major city, an entertainment-oriented city, and they have certain amount of money in their budget to spend there," Zimbalist said. If they come to Austin for a soc-

MORE ON MLS STADIUM

Coming Saturday: Who would fill the jobs a soccer stadium would bring?

Coming Sunday: The editorial board weighs whether this is a good deal for taxpayers.

cer game instead of live music or barbecue, he said, "it's not new money being spent."

Brailsford & Dunlavey figures that people spend most of their money close to home, in their suburban communities, because that's most convenient. In reality, I suspect the "out of market" folks would probably bring a mix of old and new dollars. I bet many of them already come to Austin for some events, but not for all of their entertainment needs.

Brailsford & Dunlavey, through the city spokeswoman, acknowledged the projections aren't a perfect science. They said other projections may serve as a "counterbalance" by underestimating other sources of spending.

For instance, the consultant assumes overnight guests will stay only one night in a hotel, but some may stay longer. The firm also assumes city residents like me wouldn't contribute a dime of new money, but if I go to the soccer stadium instead of heading out of town for a Round Rock Express game, that would be new money to Austin.

Austin is crunching and weighing all kinds of numbers as Precourt Sports Ventures, which owns the Columbus Crew SC, pushes for a commitment soon on soccer stadium negotiations. Precourt is asking for virtually free use of city-owned land at McKalla Place, where it would build a stadium that would pay no property taxes.

Make no mistake: Very real money is on the line.

While it's tempting to stack up the numbers in cost and benefit columns, it's not that simple. Projections are packed with assumptions that make the figures more of an educated guess than a crystal ball.

Numbers are important. But not all numbers count the same.

BOB GORRELL CREATORS SYNDICATE



YOU SAY LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Delusional to justify border separations

The policy that results in the separation of minors from their parents for no other reason than the parents brought their children with them across the border into the United States to seek asylum is morally repugnant and reprehensible. It must be rescinded immediately — and those parents and minors separated must be reunited as soon as that can be reasonably accomplished.

Such a cruel assault on human dignity by our nation in the service of goals that are themselves morally questionable is outrageous — and such inhumane injustice from our Department of Justice is ludicrously Orwellian. How far are we willing to compromise our deepest senses of humanity? What kind of person does it take to do this? What delusions do we need to have to make this seem right to us?

BOB JARVIS, AUSTIN

Sessions' Bible citation borders on heresy

Re: June 17 commentary, "Families seeking asylum deserve compassion and due process."

While there is no basis in fact for the claim that "Democrats' law," or any other rule of law, mandates the inhumane separation of children from families seeking asylum, it's almost heresy for Attorney General Jeff Sessions to cite the Bible to justify such a cruel aberration from the "Rule of God."

Using Romans 13 to justify such heartless acts by our government becomes even more objectionable when one recalls that this passage was invoked by the defenders of slavery.

A much more appropriate passage in this case would be the verse from Exodus 23:9: "You shall not oppress a stranger, for you know the feelings of the stranger, having yourselves been strangers in Egypt."

Your editorial says it all: "This is not who we are as a nation. We cannot be silent when our immigration policy terrorizes families and tears them apart. Separating children from their parents is bar-

baric and it must end."
DORIAN DE WIND, AUSTIN

Ask Obama about Russian manipulation

Re: June 14 letter to the editor, "Putin knows just how to manipulate Trump."

Does anybody else remember this off-mike comment from President Obama to outgoing Russian President Dmitry Medvedev: "After my election I have more flexibility." Once that happened, perhaps somebody besides me can remember what happened in the Ukraine. Need I say more?

KENNETH K. EBMEIER, ROUND ROCK

The college experience is not what it used to be

Believe it or not, I can look back to the day when football players were just that — players; when students sat on the 50-yard line for a nominal price. When boys and girls lived in separate quarters. When fraternities did not kill one of their own. When college professors had time for a student having a problem. When a degree provided opportunities for a student after four years of classes. And, finally, when college didn't mean graduating in debt.

What's my point? My grandchildren plan to go to college — and I don't like the looks of it.
MERRILL WHITEHEAD, WIMBERLEY

Invest in finding a cure for Alzheimer's disease

Our family has been touched by Alzheimer's disease in many ways. While the financial expense to our family feels a bit overwhelming, the emotional expense, missed work and lost opportunity to spend time with others is often not calculated.

The Alzheimer's Association reports it the most expensive disease in America, with an estimated cost of \$277 billion in 2018, with 67 percent paid by Medicare and Medicaid.

I urge you to reach out to Congressman Roger Williams and ask that more of our tax dollars be allocated to finding a cause or cure. Perhaps spend a little now to save a lot later.
EDWIN YOUNG, AUSTIN

OTHERS SAY ALLAN HUGH COLE JR.

Special Contributor

Separating families at the border belies most basic Christian beliefs

GOP leaders seem to be looking the other way as children are separated from their asylum-seeking parents at the U.S.-Mexico border — Mitch McConnell, Jeff Sessions, Mike Pence and, until recently, Paul Ryan, all of whom boldly declare their allegiance to President Donald Trump's immigration reforms and to cracking down on those crossing our borders illegally.

They're looking the other way because these same men proudly declare themselves to be Christian and, thus, presumably, pledge at least an equal allegiance to Jesus of Nazareth and his values. In fact, each has said he does publicly; and, recently, Jeff Sessions appealed to the Bible to justify the practice of separating families.

This contradiction should give all of us pause, regardless of whether we identify as Christian. It is baffling how those who say they're "pro-family" and "pro-life," who run political races on these platforms and who routinely cite their faith as the bedrock of their personal and political lives, could square their positions on immigration with the personal values they say they so deeply embrace — namely, the values of Jesus. And if they are insincere about things that they say lie at the heart of who they are, what else might they be insincere about?

Consider what Jesus says about children. He says: "Let the children come to me, and

do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs" (Matthew 19:14; Mark 10:13-16; Luke 18:15-17). He also says: "Whoever welcomes [a] little child in my name welcomes me ... and the one who sends me" (Luke 9:46-47; Mark 9:35-37).

Further, in the parable of the lost sheep, he declares, "Take care that you do not despise one of these little ones; for, I tell you, in heaven their angels continually see the face of my Father in heaven" (Matthew 18:10); and "It is not the will of your Father in heaven that one of these little ones should be lost" (Matthew 18:14). For thousands of years, these passages have been interpreted by Christians to mean, at the very least, that Jesus held a special place in his heart for children and believed that God did, too.

And what did Jesus have to say about the stranger — or, in this case, the immigrant? Speaking about God's judgment of nations in his parable of the sheep and the goats, Jesus says those who do not feed the hungry and provide for the poor, and who refuse hospitality to the stranger and care for the sick, fail to be faithful to his example and to God's expectations (Matthew 25:34-46).

Elected leaders who say they follow Jesus but who support "zero tolerance" immigration policies that separate children from their parents at the border are violating his most fundamental commitments, including the unwaver-

ing value he placed on children and on extending hospitality to the poor, hungry, sick — to the stranger. This disconnect between their policies and values raises the additional question of whether these leaders are insincere or simply inhumane.

But we can't place all of the responsibility on the politicians. We also have to look at ourselves, including the 81 percent of white evangelical Christians who voted for Donald Trump knowing that he planned to take an unprecedented hardnosed stance against immigration.

Recent polls indicate that a large majority of Americans say they too are Christian; 75 percent in fact. This raises still another question. What is 75 percent of the population willing to do about this abominable practice of separating children from their parents, which inflicts further injury on the most vulnerable in our midst — and those whom Jesus championed?

A failure to pressure lawmakers to create better immigration policies and practices immediately, and not holding them accountable at the election polls, forces us to consider whether we are looking away from this travesty — and, whether we too are insincere or simply inhumane.

Cole is a senior associate dean for academic affairs and director of undergraduate programs in the School of Social Work at the University of Texas.



Demonstrators gather June 14 at the Capitol to protest the separation of immigrant families at the border. AMANDA VOISARD/AMERICAN-STATESMAN

BE A PART OF THE DISCUSSION

The Austin American-Statesman encourages feedback from readers. Please include a full name, address and daytime and evening phone numbers. We edit letters for brevity, grammar, style and clarity. Edited letters address a single idea and do not exceed 150 words. Anonymous letters will not be published. Letters become property of the Austin American-Statesman.

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WE SAY MAJOR LEAGUE SOCCER

Put Austin first in stadium talks

It's easy to envision the benefits a Major League Soccer franchise could bring to Austin: a team that is a source of community pride, a stadium that is a gathering place for people from all over the city, matches that entertain thousands of fans and inspire a new generation of players, parklike grounds that provide a respite of green space in the middle of the city.

Those are all worthy and valuable things, even if it is difficult to put a price tag on them.

But the proposal by Precourt Sports Ventures to move the Columbus Crew SC to Austin would also cost real dollars, including long-term use of city-owned land that was privately appraised at \$29.5 million under a deal that would potentially deprive the city, Austin schools and other taxing districts of millions of dollars in property tax revenue for decades to come.

If Austin leaders move forward with this deal, taxpayers deserve assurances that this use of public land and money will deliver a commensurate public benefit.

The Austin City Council should proceed Thursday with two resolutions related to the

24-acre tract at McKalla Place: a resolution by Council Member Kathie Tovo directing staff to start negotiations with Precourt, which wants to build a \$200 million soccer stadium that would be owned by the city; and a resolution by Council Member Leslie Pool directing staff to solicit bids from anyone interested in developing that city-owned site for other uses.

Taken together, the two resolutions put Austin in a stronger negotiating position.

Tovo's resolution, cosponsored by Mayor Steve Adler and Council Members Delia Garza and Sabino "Pio" Renteria, includes a checklist of the council's expectations in this deal, which would return for a council vote once all the details are hammered out.

Among other things, Tovo's resolution calls for exploring construction of affordable housing on part of the property, serving an obvious community need. It also calls for perks like more free or low-cost tickets, but we'd like to see more focus on opportunities for the city to reap money from the site through hosting special events or receiving a cut of certain stadium revenues.

As we've stated, any nego-

tiated deal must include a detailed plan for handling traffic and parking needs on game nights, when up to 20,000 fans would be converging on a stadium site with scant on-site parking. Precourt should also help address a community need by filling its hundreds of part-time game-day jobs with workers who have faced barriers to employment, such as a criminal conviction.

Precourt is pushing for a deal to be finalized in the late summer or early fall, as it hopes to bring the team here for its 2019 season. But Austin's negotiating timeline must serve the city's interests, not Precourt's, with enough opportunity to craft a thorough contract and provide the necessary staff analysis of the financial impacts. We are dismayed that this far into the process, city staffers have not produced even a rough estimate of the property taxes that such a stadium would pay if it remained on the tax rolls, or a range of property tax revenue that might be realized under other uses of the site.

The council must recognize that members of the public are more than city taxpayers. They are Austin school district families, Travis County residents,

Central Health clients and Austin Community College students — all served by taxing entities that would be short-changed if a soccer stadium is kept off the property tax rolls, as Precourt proposes to do. City negotiators must challenge Precourt to deliver meaningful benefits to those constituencies, too.

We don't buy the argument from Precourt lobbyist Richard Suttle that forfeiting future property taxes on the site isn't a real loss because the city and other taxing entities currently collect nothing on the empty site. Other developers have expressed interest in building on the site and would pay millions of dollars in property taxes.

Nor are we convinced that local governments get a sufficient benefit from the general economic activity a stadium brings, especially as the city consultant's projections for this stadium were buoyed by optimistic calculations of out-of-towners' dollars flowing into Austin.

At a council work session this month, several council members asked for information on how a proposed soccer stadium would stack up financially against other poten-

tial uses of the site. The resolution by Pool, whose District 7 includes the McKalla Place tract, can help answer that question.

Pool's measure, cosponsored by Council Members Alison Alter, Ora Houston and Ellen Troxclair, opens the door for other developers to pitch plans for the property. Those plans could include affordable housing, possibly in combination with retail and office spaces, or other creative or green spaces.

Knowing other developers have a shot at the site will push Precourt to put its best deal on the table. Having pitches from Precourt and other developers will help the council assess the trade-offs before taking a final vote.

Suttle has suggested this competitive process could blow up Precourt's timeline for moving the team for 2019. That may be the case. But a move that makes sense for the Crew in 2019 still works in 2020. Austin shouldn't expedite the franchise's needs over the taxpayers' interests.

Precourt has said Austin is a great market for soccer. Now's the time for Precourt to demonstrate it will be just as great for Austin.

YOU SAY LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Austin will never get big-league team

I don't believe Austin will ever get a major league sports team. The people who run the city either don't want a team, or choose to make it impossible for a team to come here.

While I don't have a dog in this hunt — as I have never attended a soccer game — it seems the team from Columbus is being mistreated.

Austin is now the 11th-largest city in America. It has a greater population than many of the cities with major league teams. There are enough people to support major league sports.

There are intangibles that come with having such a team, and it certainly helps selling a city. I am not certain those in charge understand this.

CHARLES TOUBIN, AUSTIN

Developers ruining our city

Re: June 16 article, "Owner's plan for Lake Austin site: elevator tower, restaurant, marina."

Another assault on Austin from outside developers. Our neighborhoods, our parks, now Lake Austin.

The idea of a 15-story elevator on one of the iconic views of Lake Austin is ludicrous. Its sole purpose is for Coon's restaurant guests to have a "cool option" to get there by boat when he says the "vast majority will arrive by foot or car."

So, it's just to be cool? Unbelievable.

He claims that his 24-slip marina with the 15-story elevator is far superior to the 12 home lots along the cliff that would be allowed under the present plan. Ridiculous.

A huge marina, with high density boat traffic, is in no way better than lightly used private docks. Coon bought the property knowing that 64 home sites were allowed. That's how it should stay. When will we get a council that will say no to developers ruining our city?

WILLIAM CAMPBELL, AUSTIN

Trump, his followers are an 'anti-' force

I have long felt that President Trump and his political hangers-on have created a seriously destructive "anti-" force in our nation.

Trump is anti-truth, anti-media, anti-environment, anti-minority, anti-health care, anti-poor, and anti-education.

His aggressive policy of ripping children from their parents at our borders demonstrates the height of anti-human decency.

The trauma and scars that he inflicted on impoverished and suffering children is unconscionable; it should be condemned by all Americans who value our history of caring and kindness to others.

There can be no excuse for using innocent children as pawns in a strategy to achieve political goals and ego enhancing deals.

ROBERT MARKMAN, SAN ANTONIO

Migrant mother to blame for crying child

Re: June 20 article, "The story behind the image of a migrant child crying."

That crying child is an example of child abandonment, endangerment, trauma and abuse perpetuated by the irresponsible mother who knowingly subjected her to sex trafficking, violence and starvation. By our standards, Child Protective Services would have taken her away and mom would be incarcerated. Cost to us for housing is \$700 per day per child.

PEGGY MORSE, AUSTIN

Harm done to kids at border undeniable

Re: June 17 letter to the editor, "Isolating children at border is harmful."

The June 17 letter by Dr. Louis Appel concerning the separation of a child from his or her parent at the border hit the nail right on the head.

As a retired family physician with over 50 years of family practice experience, I know only too well the short- and long-term damage done to the psyche of these young,

impressionable, sponge-like minds.

As a parent, each of us needs to walk in the shoes of these children, even for just a brief moment.

The pain and angst are unimaginable. JAMES R. LUCIE, AUSTIN

Shuffle migrants off to other countries

We need to help those folks from Central America find sanctuary and safety from the criminal elements harassing them. I propose the following path to freedom.

First, we charter a fleet of buses — with air conditioning and toilets — and food trailers. Reunite the children with their parents, board them on the buses and have that caravan north to the Canadian border, where they are released to begin a new life in Canada.

Once completed, we go to Carnival and Celebrity cruise lines, charter several luxury ships and board more "freedom seekers," giving them free cruises to England, France and Italy, thus giving those folks lobbying insults at us a chance to share in this humanitarian effort.

CHARLES SMITH, CEDAR PARK

Trump's policy besmirching Texas

Gov. Greg Abbott, President Trump's policy of zero tolerance is giving Texas a bad name. When will you join other Republican and Democratic governors in withholding any state support for this anti-American policy?

You can withdraw National Guard troops from the border right now because separating parents from their children and babies is not moral.

John Cornyn and Ted Cruz, neither of you need to propose legislation to overcome cruel or inhuman immigration "laws." There is no "law" involved here. There is only the policy that Jeff Sessions and Donald Trump have pushed on to our government. Trump can change it tomorrow.

PAUL SCHULZ-BEHREND, AUSTIN

America the beautiful turns ugly under Trump



Alberta Phillips
Commentary

So, this is our America. We're now a country that gives cover and comfort to white supremacists who publicly slur Jews, African-Americans and Latinos.

We're a nation that defends extremes in gun regulation, even as our children and families are gunned down in our classrooms and churches by persons armed with weapons of war.

We're a government that paints Muslims with a broad — and ugly — brush.

We're a sovereign power that wants immigrant kids who grew up in our neighborhoods — where many have made us proud with academic accomplishments or service in our armed forces — to be exiled to the shadows of our cities or other countries because they lack legal papers or citizenship.

And we're a country that rips migrant children from the protective, loving arms of their parents.

This is what America has become under the leadership of President Donald Trump. And it's an America that we the people have endorsed with our votes, legal and justice systems, apathy and void of moral clarity.

Trump might have conceived it, but we now must own it.

That hard dose of reality reverberates in the voices of crying children seized at the Mexico-United States border.

Between May 5 and June 9, more than 2,300 children were separated from parents or adults with whom they were traveling, according to the Department of Homeland Security. Family separations are the result of Trump's new zero tolerance policy, which refers all border crossings for federal prosecution.

The nonprofit journalism organization ProPublica last week published a recording made inside one of the U.S. gov-

ernment facilities where children taken from their parents are housed.

On it, we heard the raw, unfiltered cries of children calling out in Spanish for "Daddy!" and "Mommy!" We heard a girl repeatedly pleading with adults to call her aunt, whose phone number she had memorized.

"My mommy says I'll go with my aunt and that she'll come to pick me up there as quickly as possible," says a 6-year-old from El Salvador.

That was gut-wrenching. But then we learned of the "tender-age" facilities across Texas set up by the federal government to house infants, toddlers and young kids.

Radio commentator Dave Ross for Seattle's KIRO-FM brought into focus how far we've strayed from President Ronald Reagan's America as a "shining city on a hill." How far removed we are from the hope the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. expressed in speeches that cited the biblical parable of the Good Samaritan.

Ross said: "Those are American border agents, trained in America, paid by American taxpayers, following orders from an administration that ran on this policy and was elected by Americans!"

"I'm sure we very much would like to be a 'beacon of hope to the world,' but that brought too many strangers banging on the door. And, so, it appears we will snuff out that light and change the locks, at least for now."

Though Trump officials vehemently defended the policy and — unbelievably — justified it with Scripture, officials abandoned it last week amid public outcry and criticism from Democrats and Republicans.

On Wednesday, Trump signed an executive order ending the separation of children from families after they are detained crossing the border illegally.

It seems the cries of frightened children melted America's indif-

ference — at least for the moment.

The issue is far from settled: Family units will be kept together, but in detention facilities akin to jails. A 2014 court decision that limits to 20 days such detentions of migrant children means separations might resume unless Congress acts — or Trump allows kids to be released with their parents to homes of family or friends, or nonprofits.

Also, there remains a serious question about whether migrants fleeing violence and political persecution in their countries will be fairly handled by U.S. courts regarding asylum claims. Instead, we might see them, and their children, swiftly deported by Trump policies that make it tougher to win asylum.

The U.S. should have secure borders. But Trump's — and now our — America is an eternity away from an Ellis Island that welcomed poor immigrants from across the globe.

Some, no doubt, will say that America never was perfect. That is true. But the nation was continually striving to perfect its flaws and right past wrongs. It had leaders in Susan B. Anthony, who led the movement to win the vote for women; Eleanor Roosevelt who tackled racism by flying with black pilots at Tuskegee Institute during WWII; her husband, FDR, who took on the Nazis in Germany; and Thurgood Marshall, a fearless champion for racial and social justice.

Many in that America stood tall for our values. Today, we pamper dictators.

That is the truly scary thing about our America. We are becoming desensitized to the pain and suffering of strangers and neighbors alike.

Our hope — and future — relies on rebuilding America humanely and sanely. If we do that, we rebuild ourselves.

Contact Alberta Phillips at 512-445-3655.

Be a part of the discussion

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Give girls equal benefits as boys in MLS stadium deal



Bridget Grumet
Commentary

This being 2018 and all, I naturally assumed the girls would share in the perks.

But as we found out during last week's City Council discussion on the proposal to move the Columbus Crew SC to Austin, the largest piece of the community benefits package, an elite youth soccer academy worth \$48 million over 25 years, is for boys only.

I hope that fact doesn't sit well with you, either.

The proposed stadium deal coming before the Austin City Council on Thursday has evolved over the months to include more tangible benefits in exchange for use of the city-owned tract at McKalla Place. With Precourt Sports Ventures now agreeing to pay rent and provide more public use of the facility, among other things, the deal has improved for Austin taxpayers.

But the negotiations aren't done, and the city deserves better terms on several fronts. Among them: With taxpayer resources at stake, the council must ensure girls aren't left on the sidelines if this deal proceeds.

The reasons Precourt cites for not providing a girls' academy are somewhat nuanced, and I'll explain them further in a minute. Precourt officials also emphasize that the \$7.6 million promised over 25 years for youth soccer clinics, camps, club scholarships and soccer gear will equally benefit boys and girls. And they told me this week they'll contribute to a local girls' soccer academy run by Lonestar Soccer Club, though they declined to say how much.

That's a start. But the council should press for a specific, equitable commitment Thursday when Precourt returns to City Hall.

Major League Soccer requires each professional soccer club to sponsor competitive teams of youth players, ages 12-19, through the U.S. Soccer Development Academy to help grow the next generation of soccer greats. The MLS franchise picks up the tab while these players get top-notch coaching, game time with the best players in the country, and eventually the attention of college recruiters and professional scouts.

One could argue, as Precourt initially did, that this program is logically geared toward boys because MLS is a men's league.



Lake Travis Cavaliers midfielder Trinity Clark (right) moves the ball against Taft Raiders defender IJayla Criswell during a high school girls soccer playoff in April. JOHN GUTIERREZ / FOR AMERICAN-STATESMAN

And yes, at a minimum, the program must have boys.

But that doesn't prevent an MLS franchise from also sponsoring a girls' academy. FC Dallas has academies for boys and girls — the latter being a particular source of pride for the franchise, as the girls' under-15 team last month won the first national championship offered in the division.

The New York City FC and the San Jose Earthquakes also have boys and girls academies, and the Los Angeles Galaxy operates academies for both genders in two cities, Carson and Carlsbad. The MLS franchises in Houston and Portland offer girls' academies in conjunction with the National Women's Soccer League teams they also operate.

An academy typically serves about 120 players a year, roughly 20 in each of six age divisions. Given that Lonestar Soccer Club alone has more than 7,000 players at all ages and levels of play, including about 2,500 at the elite level, all evenly divided among boys and girls, I wouldn't expect a lack of interest if Precourt opened a girls' academy in Austin.

Not just anyone can start an academy, though. The U.S. Soccer Development Academy must provide approval first, after looking at the market need and the strength of the sponsoring club. Because Lonestar already operates a girls' academy, Precourt has suggested it might not be able to get U.S. Soccer approval for a second such program in Austin.

OK. But I haven't heard anyone voice a similar concern about Precourt opening a boys' academy in the same city where Lonestar already has one, doubling the number spots available to the most elite male players.

I caught up this week with Lonestar executive director of business Allen Fincher, and as you might expect of some-

one whose love of soccer runs through his veins, he's excited about the possibility of MLS coming to Austin. His organization is still talking with Precourt about what its support for girls' soccer would look like. But Fincher said he's confident that "it would be a major benefit for the girls of this town if this stadium deal were to go through and they're able to come to town."

I hope so, because the benefits to girls who participate in sports are undeniable. Numerous studies have shown they're more likely to excel in school, attend college (in part because of the availability of scholarships) and rise to higher-paying jobs, particularly in male-dominated professions. Teens who play sports are physically healthier and show more signs of mental and emotional well-being, such as high self-esteem and a stronger social support network.

Beyond promising to write a big check to Lonestar, Precourt must explain how its contribution will benefit girls. Lonestar can't simply create more development academy spots for girls, because each organization can field only one team per age group. Lonestar is maxed out.

Precourt money could make it more affordable for girls to compete with Lonestar, which is a pay-to-play club. But Fincher told me Lonestar already provides more than \$300,000 a year in needs-based financial aid to players in various divisions. "We don't turn kids away" if families can't afford to pay, he said.

If Precourt wants lucrative use of city-owned land for its stadium, plus the boon of paying no property taxes, its community benefits package must extend equally to girls and boys. Their families are all taxpayers here.

Contact Bridget Grumet at 512-912-2964.

SIGNIE WILKINSON PHILADELPHIA DAILY NEWS



YOU SAY LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Abbott's capitalism take just California dreaming

Re: Aug. 4 article, "Amid Trump-Koch feud, Abbott talks Texas v. California."

Gov. Greg Abbott, given his long reign as top politico in this one-party state, must be credited for his electoral prowess and devoted partisanship, though his views regarding matters of political economy and social theory are peculiar.

His vision of Texas as the "leader of the national movement for capitalism" and of California as a leader in the race "toward socialism," apart from its naiveté, distorts a less dramatic contrast between private versus public interest.

In Texas, government policy is mostly driven by private interest, whereas in California public interest is always a matter of consideration in government policy. Capitalism, of course, reigns supreme in the political economies of both states, as it does nationally. Isn't Abbott aware that world capitalism's first trillion-dollar corporation, Apple, is a California native?

H. SCOTT COOK, SAN MARCOS

Focus on real problems and leave women alone

Re: Aug. 5 commentary, "Women should decide what happens after an abortion."

It was so refreshing reading Rabbi Amy Cohen's comments about women who really know how care for themselves and decry the need for inane governmental interference or regulations.

It would be equally refreshing if those politicians who think they know what's best for women and which public restroom one should use would do something beneficial for our state: determine how to improve infrastructure, attack the property tax inequities, or ensure equitable public education funding throughout Texas. GARY GIUS, KYLE

City should hold off on charter amendments

Re: Aug. 4 commentary, "Give Austin a broader voice; vote on democracy dollars."

The League of Women Voters Austin Area commends Erik Moore's commentary in

the Statesman about democracy dollars, a program that puts the power of the vote before the power of the money in Austin elections.

The league has been communicating with the City Council because there have been no public discussions on the Charter Commission amendments. Their plan is to put two amendments on the November ballot with no public input. If these two charter amendments are adopted by voters in November, it will be two years before others can be reconsidered.

The league asks the council and mayor to put no charter amendments on the November ballot. Instead, put them on a 2019 ballot, and have opportunities to discuss the amendments next year. It is ultimately up to the voters to decide the merits of the programs — but they must be informed.

DIXIE DAVIS AND FRANCES MCINTYRE, LEAGUE OF LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS AUSTIN AREA ADVOCACY, AUSTIN

Renewals commentary misses on some charges

Re: Aug. 5 commentary, "Myth, not renewable energy, generates Georgetown's buzz."

Misstatements and unfounded predictions are to be expected from the author's organization, whose raison d'être is climate denial and support for the fossil fuel industry. Where to start?

The author misrepresents the ratio of wind and solar Georgetown uses. It is unlikely that the city will run out of both at the same time, even with high demand — especially if the city initiates its plans to expand rooftop solar.

I am tired of hearing that renewable energy will produce pollution to develop infrastructure. Did that ever stop the petroleum industry, which pollutes during and after construction? Is the petroleum industry not highly subsidized?

Improved renewable energy technology continues bring costs and pollution down while creating jobs. The solar industry is working closely with wildlife groups to minimize harm to birds and bats, while climate change continues to cause extinction.

MARTIN BYHOWER, GEORGETOWN

OTHERS SAY SERGIO TRISTAN

Special Contributor

MLS in Austin would open doors to children from all parts of city

There has been a lot of discussion about the finances involving the MLS soccer deal before the Austin City Council. Is it economically good for Austin? How much are Precourt and MLS paying to Austin? How much low-income housing space is being provided? Who is paying for transportation in and out of the stadium?

I have a question to our City Council: Do you know what has been lost in the discussion? How soccer can potentially positively impact our Hispanic community.

Before I am attacked as an outsider or worse, let me back up: I am born and raised in Austin. Not the Austin most of you readers know — but the Austin that spoke Spanish, lives east of Interstate 35, and has been playing soccer long before MLS came knocking. I went to school at Palm Elementary, Mendez Middle School, Kealing Jr. High, and the LBJ Science Academy. I graduated from the University of Texas before departing for the Army.

I began playing soccer at the YMCA and then moved into the club system, beginning with the Austin Flyers, Austin Chaps, and Austin Capitals. I am Austin, and I want MLS

here — but not for the reasons you think.

I believe that soccer can open doors for kids just like me. Soccer helped me cross from East Austin and South Austin to West Austin. It helped me see a different part of Austin that I had never experienced. What may seem "normal" to many of you was not to me — and is not now to many Hispanic kids. I never attended a UT football game as a kid. My father did not take me to alumni events on campus. My parents were not part of the Rotary or Lions clubs or the other organizations that shape West Austin. I experienced West Austin because I earned a youth soccer scholarship with a soccer club composed mostly of Westlake families.

Austin agreeing to a deal with MLS will open an area of Austin that is traditionally not open to kids from East Austin.

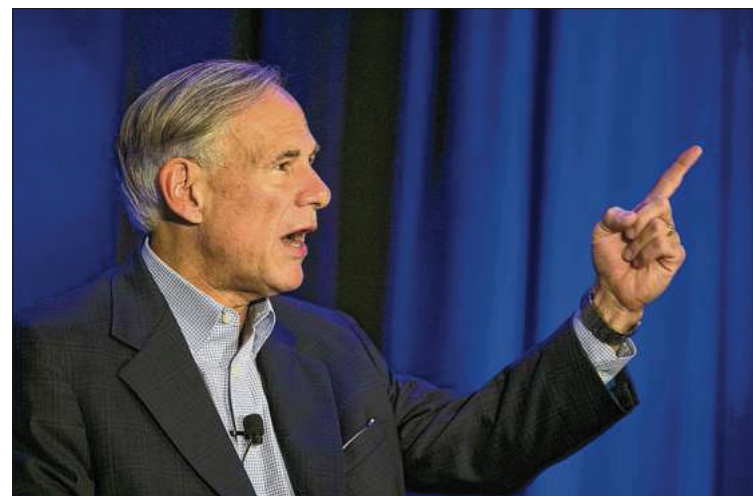
I am a resident of District 7. The district is only 22.4 percent Hispanic, according to 2010 census data. I am part of that percentage living in District 7 — and I disagree with my City Council member. I agree that affordable housing is important; green park space is important; and all the other concerns are valid. However,

for a city that continues to be very segregated — at a time in our country when the Hispanic and immigrant communities are continuously under attack — Austin has a great opportunity to create unity. MLS will draw people from all over Austin to a part of the city that has not traditionally been accessible to kids from East Austin.

It can inspire kids whose parents have been playing soccer in dirt fields long before Austin had an organized men's league. And parents who are not city employees or musicians who would qualify or understand how to apply for affordable housing. And parents whose jobs are cleaning homes, cutting grass and doing all the other jobs in Austin that have to get done but that few want to do.

There are many places where the city can build affordable housing. There are plenty of open spaces that can be converted to parks and recreational areas. There is only one location suitable to Precourt for an MLS franchise stadium. Please approve the MLS partnership deal.

Tristan is an attorney and veteran in Austin.



Gov. Greg Abbott sees California, home to trillion-dollar Apple, as a leader in the race "toward socialism." JAY JANNER / AMERICAN-STATESMAN

BE A PART OF THE DISCUSSION

The Austin American-Statesman encourages feedback from readers. Please include a full name, address and daytime and evening phone numbers. We edit letters for brevity, grammar, style and clarity. Edited letters address a single idea and do not exceed 150 words. Anonymous letters will not be published. Letters become property of the Austin American-Statesman.

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WE SAY MLS TO AUSTIN

Game isn't over for Austin MLS deal

Many Austinites are understandably swept up in the euphoria of welcoming our first major league sports team to town. Like Mayor Steve Adler, we look forward to the day “we are all wearing the same jersey, celebrating the first (Major League Soccer) championship in Austin.”

The City Council's vote last week green-lighting a deal to bring the Columbus Crew SC to Austin is a milestone – but it's not the end of the process. City staffers and Precourt Sports Ventures reps still have considerable work ahead to address critical details, such as parking and drainage. And once city staffers and Precourt officials hammer out the final contract language, likely in the next 90 to 120 days, we urge both parties to agree to commit to making the signed document available to the public.

The McKalla Place tract where the stadium will be built remains the taxpayers' land. The public has a right to see all the terms in writing. Whether this deal is ultimately judged a success will hinge on whether staff nails down the key remaining provisions and provides full transparency.

Thanks to give and take on both sides, the package has improved considerably for taxpayers since

Precourt first approached Austin last fall. Precourt always said it would privately finance its stadium, certainly a better deal than the taxpayer-funded stadiums built in many other cities. But Precourt initially offered very little in exchange for long-term, property tax-free use of the 24-acre city tract on McKalla Place near the Domain.

That wasn't going to fly. Austinites called for better terms and tangible perks. Precourt officials rightly recognized they needed to budge if they wanted to play ball here. Under the package approved by council members, Precourt will:

- Pay the city \$8.25 million in rent over the 20-year lease. Even though the city will kick \$2.5 million of that back into a maintenance fund for the stadium, an expense we argued Precourt should have absorbed, the rent payment, is still substantially more than the \$1 a year initially offered.

- Provide \$640,000 up front in transit improvements, plus pay \$3 million over 15 years to Capital Metro, a significant provision championed by Council Member Delia Garza.

- Ensure a nonprofit group builds 130 affordable housing units on the site within four years of the



Columbus Crew owner Anthony Precourt (right) talks to fan Scot Krieger after the Austin City Council voted to approve a stadium deal Wednesday. JAY JANNER / AMERICAN-STATESMAN

stadium opening, under a measure pushed by Council Member Greg Casar.

- Cover the cost for off-site traffic control, emergency responders and litter pickup on game nights, as Council Member Kathie Tovo requested.

- Support youth soccer programs beyond the MLS-required development academy for boys. Precourt has pledged financial support to Lonestar Soccer Club's programs for elite young women, and at Tovo's request, Precourt will develop a plan to make sure its youth soccer clubs, camps and scholarships reach kids from low-income families, boys and girls alike.

Even with painstaking negotiations that stretched Precourt's deadline for bringing the team to Austin

for the 2019 season, some vital issues remain unresolved. To our profound disappointment, Precourt has yet to produce its plan for getting 20,000 fans to and from a stadium that will have only 1,000 on-site parking spaces, a problem that has plagued this project from the start.

The deal calls for Precourt and the city to “work together” on a traffic and parking plan, and holds Precourt responsible for identifying an undetermined amount of off-site parking and promoting a “vibrant shuttle process.” That's the right idea, but the commitments are still too vague. City staffers must ensure that adjacent neighborhoods are not inundated with cut-through traffic and on-street parking on game days.

City staffers also must ensure the project, which will sit at the headwaters of Little Walnut Creek, has enough stormwater detention ponds to prevent properties downstream from flooding. With Austin in the process of revising its stormwater standards based on new maps, staffers had recommended that Precourt design the site to handle a 500-year storm, going beyond the current 100-year storm requirement. However, the council simply asked Precourt to “consider” the stronger standard.

As we've previously noted, any project on city land also must include community benefits that consider the value of the property along with the windfall gained by a business using public land without paying taxes on it. Council Members Leslie Pool, Alison Alter, Ellen Troxclair and Ora Houston, who ultimately voted against the deal, deserve credit for helping make such comparisons possible by pressing for other developers to submit plans for the McKalla site.

We're disappointed the developers' creative pitches didn't generate more interest or discussion among the full council. But we urge the city to continue talks with those developers, par-

ticularly those committed to providing a significant amount of affordable housing, to see if their concepts might fit well on other vacant city tracts.

It's true the soccer stadium will not produce property tax revenue, whereas other developments could have produced valuable tax revenue for the city, Austin schools, Travis County, Austin Community College and the hospital district. We recognize, however, that profitability isn't the only measure of a public space.

The World's Game won't dissolve the racial and economic divides in Austin. But a soccer stadium can provide common ground where fans from across the city can gather, especially with the hundreds of free and reduced-price tickets Precourt has pledged for each game. The team can become a source of civic pride, not simply by posting a winning record, but by providing a range of opportunities: soccer camps, clinics and scholarships for kids. Business for local vendors. Part-time stadium jobs for residents who may have struggled to find other employment.

It's game time. Precourt must make this deal a win not only for the team, but for the city.

YOU SAY LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Thank you to those who are speaking out

Thanks, and congratulations, to retired admiral William H. McRaven and the other National Security officials who have spoken out about the decisions being made by the current administration.

They, along with some journalists, business leaders, and a few members of Congress, are finally calling to task the current president for decisions that are destroying our democracy. It is time for concerned Americans to stand up, speak out and vote out the people who are making and going along with the ruination of our Democratic principles and America's worldwide reputation.

Everyone must do whatever possible to return our nation to caring and concern for others.
JUDY O'NEILL, AUSTIN

Scooter riders need to wear helmets

The last few times I've been downtown, I've seen dozens of motorized scooters being driven on sidewalks and occasionally in the street.

My main concern is that the riders of these scooters are traveling as fast as 15 mph, and I have yet to see a rider with a helmet on. Our society encourages all people to wear helmets while biking to prevent injury. These scooters need to come with some sort of helmet when you rent them.

Also, I have seen a lot of children around the age of 10 riding the scooters. I am aware that when you rent the scooter it says there is an 18-and-older restriction, but clearly this rule is not being upheld and needs better enforcement.

These scooters are a danger to the riders and others on the streets.
BENNETT MITCHELL, AUSTIN

Rather quote proves 'fake news' point

Re: Aug. 16 editorial,

“Journalists are watchdog neighbors, not enemy of the people.”

Got to love it when the American-Statesman prints an opinion piece criticizing President Trump for his criticism of the news media's “fake news” and then quotes Dan Rather to defend its position.

Great move using Rather, who was fired for broadcasting fake news about President Bush. Can the media get any more absurd?

GARY MOHEL, TAYLOR

Journalists play role in our free society

Re: Aug. 16 commentary, “Journalists are watchdog neighbors, not enemy of the people.”

Great job setting out the very important role that reputable news organizations such as the Statesman – and investigative reporters in particular – have in our free society. Please keep reporting the facts and uncovering the truth. Stay the course.
DAVID MOSSMAN, AUSTIN

Statesman articles slant left politically

In my 40-plus years that I've been receiving the American-Statesman, your columnists' articles slant far left politically.

I once quit the Statesman because your articles were so disgusting they made me sick. My opinion is that your political columnists do not print the whole truth and all the facts. This is especially true when it comes to President Donald Trump.

My opinion is that Trump has and is doing more good for the United States than the last three presidents. There is nothing fair and balanced in your newspaper with respect to political articles.
PATRICK CALLAN, AUSTIN

We need verifiable facts from free press

Re: Aug. 16 commentary, “Journalists are

watchdog neighbors, not enemy of the people.”

I read with pleasure and pride your fine editorial on Aug. 16 about the importance of a free press and its imperative checking of facts.

The founders wisely enshrined freedom of the press in our Constitution to give us facts, not opinions or exaggerations or “alternate facts.” I don't need politicians of whatever stripe, to figure out where I stand on any given issue. However, I do need verifiable facts from a free, unintimidated American press.

Thank you, American-Statesman, for giving us the “nonfake news” every day.
ANNE SPACHT, AUSTIN

It won't stop with removal of statues

First it was Confederate monuments, either removed and hidden or destroyed by protesters, without a thought as to ownership. A statue removed from Travis Park in San Antonio was designed by Virginia Montgomery. In a commentary for the San Antonio Express-News, Thomas J. Crane wrote, “It was said at the time that she was the first woman to ever design a monument.” Do you think anyone took that into consideration?

Next came renaming schools. Then, the probability of renaming the capital of this great state.

They're demanding removal of a 1959 plaque in the Texas Capitol containing a pledge from the children of Confederate veterans honoring their ancestors.

What do you suppose these people are going to do when these things aren't enough to assuage their anger and hurt? Go into the cemeteries and dig up our Confederate dead? Will they come looking for the Confederates' descendants?

And at the end, history will remain.
JUDY WARDLOW, COPPERAS COVE

OTHERS SAY CLARA HERRERA

Special Contributor

Why I handed out dresses on journey to Kilimanjaro

I took my son Jay's dresses to Africa.

These pink, polka-dotted girlie garments stuffed in trash bags in our garage were waiting to be donated to someone, somewhere. They sat there almost a year.

Jay had cleaned out his room, dresser and closet, getting rid of things that made him sad. Jay says “sad” is not a strong enough word. “The dresses made me feel invalid, miserable, anguished and heavy-hearted,” he told me.

The dresses don't fit anymore. I don't mean that just in the literal sense.

My Jay is transgender. I don't really care what that means to you. To me, it means I have a brave child who is true to himself.

So, this summer, on my quest to climb Kilimanjaro and help Water To Thrive – a charity that builds wells in rural Africa – I gave away those dresses.

They were a reminder that no one saw Jay as he saw himself. I saw these dresses differently.

I was graced with three healthy children. Jay, 14, is my baby.

I remember the dress with red apples he wore for the first day of kindergarten, the pink Sleeping Beauty Halloween play dress, the white First Communion gown and others. All these are captured in snapshots.

When packing for my climb, I cried sorting through the clothes, not because of loss, but because I hadn't fathomed how challenging a transgender life was – and is – for my son.

My heart ripped because I failed to notice my son's silent screams that grew louder over time. Over a two-year period, my consistent A-plus student began not turning in schoolwork and failing.

School nurse visits turned into doctor visits and eventually became hospital stays. I thought Jay's depression was the result of my divorcing his dad.

I was so wrong. I must atone for that.

Our lives have changed. We are now stronger and truer to ourselves. Jay was the first transgender kid to play on his middle school football team – and use the boy's bathroom. No court cases were involved, just caring people – Austin school district teachers, counselors and administrators – who realize small things to adults are huge to those wonderful beings we are growing into adults.

I am thankful for them. Jay attended an international summer camp as a male last year. The camp changed rules for him.

He wasn't the only transgender youth at camp this year. Among international flags greeting campers was a rainbow one. Jay says that flag wasn't there before.

“Mom, no one knew!” he told me happily about completely passing as male.

It's daunting when a child is braver than the parent. It's been challenging with weekly hormone shots, explaining Jay's coming out to family, and reminding them to say “him,” “son” and “boy” after almost 15 years of saying “her.”

But it will never be as challenging as it is for Jay.

He is shouting with the loudest voice I have ever known. Jay is extraordinary. So, I had to think of something to do with his dresses to do him justice.

I took those dresses on my journey to Kilimanjaro. I climbed. I prayed.

I breathed. I thought this mountain isn't as high as the one Jay must climb.

My mind wandered to

other kids who must make the same climb as Jay, with or without support. I wish I could hoist them all up the mountain, providing the dignity and love they deserve.

I hope they are true to themselves and know they are loved, respected and honored.

Foundations build in small, slow ways. Me, a Hispanic, Catholic, divorced mama who grew up in rural Texas, where “transgender” wasn't even a word, marched with Jay in the Austin Pride parade last weekend.

And, I gave away those dresses. I carried some in my backpack. I'd gaze around surveying if one of the dresses might fit a child. If I didn't see any one, through Swahili interpreters, I'd ask if villagers had young daughters.

When I could find an internet connection, I texted Jay about them:

- A hotel clerk in Arusha with a 4-year-old, got three, including Sleeping Beauty.

- A baker in Boma got a paisley dress for his 7-year-old.
- I gave dresses to Maa-sai tribal girls by a dry riverbed near Kiteto.

Before ascending the mountain, I left the last one, a toddler's navy sailor dress, on the bus seat, sure it would find a home. “One of these men must have a daughter,” I told the guide.

No one knew the meaning of these gestures.

But I did. Jay would never see these dresses again. They were on another continent. There would be no reminders of what was.

I am not letting go of a daughter. I am embracing a son.

Herrera is a teacher in the Austin Independent School District.

Be a part of the discussion

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