



Carmage Walls
Commentary Prize

2019 Entry Form

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What is the subject/title of the entry? Port Politics

Date(s) of publication? May 27, 2018; June 3, 2018; July 28, 2018; Aug. 26, 2018; Oct. 20, 2018; March 31, 2019

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

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

Dear Carmage Walls Commentary Prize judges,

Public officials regularly stomp on the Texas Open Meetings Act. Journalists fight this daily as best they can, but sometimes our watchdog role demands extraordinary efforts.

Victoria Advocate investigative reporter Jessica Priest discovered the Calhoun Port Authority violated the act by failing to notify the public in advance of hiring disgraced former Congressman Blake Farenthold as its lobbyist for \$160,000 a year. In response, the newspaper filed a lawsuit on behalf of the public to force the port board to go back and post the meeting properly.

To help the public understand this important law, the newspaper has published a series of editor columns and editorial board opinions about the lawsuit and about our subsequent investigative reporting on the port authority. This entry represents a selection of these opinions.

The Society of Professional Journalists' Legal Defense Fund has awarded the Advocate a small grant to help in its fight, but our family-owned newspaper has shouldered the bulk of the burden with the

important assistance of Victoria attorney John Griffin. The port has shown no sign of doing the right thing; instead, our subsequent reporting revealed the port has spent almost \$450,000 on the case's legal fees, appealing a lower-court ruling in favor of the newspaper.

The slow, expensive legal battle underscores the importance of a strong editorial voice. The results of the newspaper's work have been dramatic: The former congressman resigned his post in January amid the pressure, and four people – an unprecedented number -- filed to challenge the incumbent board chairman in the May election.

To right wrongs, newspapers often need the public's sustained outrage. For decades, the port board operated hidden from public view. Typically, this special district's elections were canceled because few knew about the board or even when the filing period was. The Calhoun Port Authority is no longer a secret.

Thank you for considering my entry and the newspaper's efforts for the Carmage Walls Commentary Prize.

Sincerely,

Chris Cobler

Editor and Publisher

EDITORIAL BOARD

Opinions published under "From Us" represent the views of the Victoria Advocate editorial board.

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FROM US

Bike lanes will complete trifecta to improve city's mobility

■ **Topic:** Better mobility
■ **Our View:** We like sidewalks, but don't forget bike lanes

For decades, the city of Victoria has not been known as a pedestrian-friendly city. But that will soon start to change. During the next five years, the city plans to build sidewalks in areas that greatly need them, especially along Leary Lane, where elementary school children now must walk in the grass or in the road to get to school. For the past few years, the city has rebuilt sidewalks as it rehabbed street, but beginning next year, it will take on sidewalk projects along Navarro and Rio Grande streets. The city will build new walkways, finish walkways that abruptly end for no apparent reason, and connect sidewalks that are separated by grassy lots. The time and money the city will spend on this project will be well worth the investment as more and more residents are walking, instead of driving, to work or play. The city will use capital improvement money, as well as grants from the Texas Department of Transportation, to help pay for the work. The work planned by the city is crucial to make it safer for all of our residents no matter where they live or travel. It also goes a long way to improve outdoor recreation- and pedestrian-friendliness, an important quality-of-life component business owners look at when looking for cities to locate their businesses. We are excited the city will focus on sidewalks in the coming years. As officials rehab streets and improve sidewalks, we ask they also add building bike lanes to these plans. For some, bicycles are their only means of transportation, while others like to ride for recreation and exercise. Adding bike lanes on the main streets will add another layer of safety for non-motorized traffic. As part of its capital improvement project, the city is planning to spend more than \$10 million to rebuild

crumbling streets across the city. The city recently missed its chance to add bike lanes to a newly improved part of Red River Street. As the city works on other sections of this east-west main thoroughfare, we ask that it add bike lanes to the plan. It's not too late to improve the city's course. The city recently approved a plan to rework Crestwood Drive to rebuild the road, while also adding wider sidewalks and a hike and-bike trail. This is an excellent example of how the city should be thinking and planning for the city's pedestrian future. We know these measures are on the city's radar as they are included in the Victoria's Plan 2035, adopted in 2016. One section of the plan discusses incorporating pedestrian, bicycle and motorized traffic to make complete street plans so everyone would have a safe avenue of transportation. Complete street plans is a growing movement across the country to make it safer, easier and more accessible for everyone to move around and in the process the cities are creating better communities, according to the plan. City officials have said adding such amenities is a fraction of the cost of rehabbing roads. One city official said recently that all the city needs to make bike lanes is a bucket of paint. It is, our friends, time to buy the paint. As more people are moving around the city without motorized vehicles, making that travel more accessible and safer will not only make the city more attractive to its residents but also to those looking to move here. It is easy to see where better streets, better sidewalks and bike lanes all add up to having a better community for all, which in the end is what we all want.

This opinion reflects the views of the Victoria Advocate's editorial board.

EVERYDAY HERO

To nominate your Everyday Hero, submit the person's full name, address and phone number, along with photo and reason for nomination as an Advocate Everyday Hero, in 150 words or less. Submit the information by email to letters@vicad.com, mail to P.O. Box 1518, Victoria 77902, or bring it by the Victoria Advocate at 311 E. Constitution St. Include your name, address and phone number so we may contact you to verify your information.

FIRST AMENDMENT

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

– First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution

YOUR POEM

Called by Name
She was blinded by tears.
She saw a blurred figure.
"Where have you laid him?"
The figure said but one word,
"Mary," and she knew.
Sr. Frances Cabrini Janvier, Victoria

WORDS

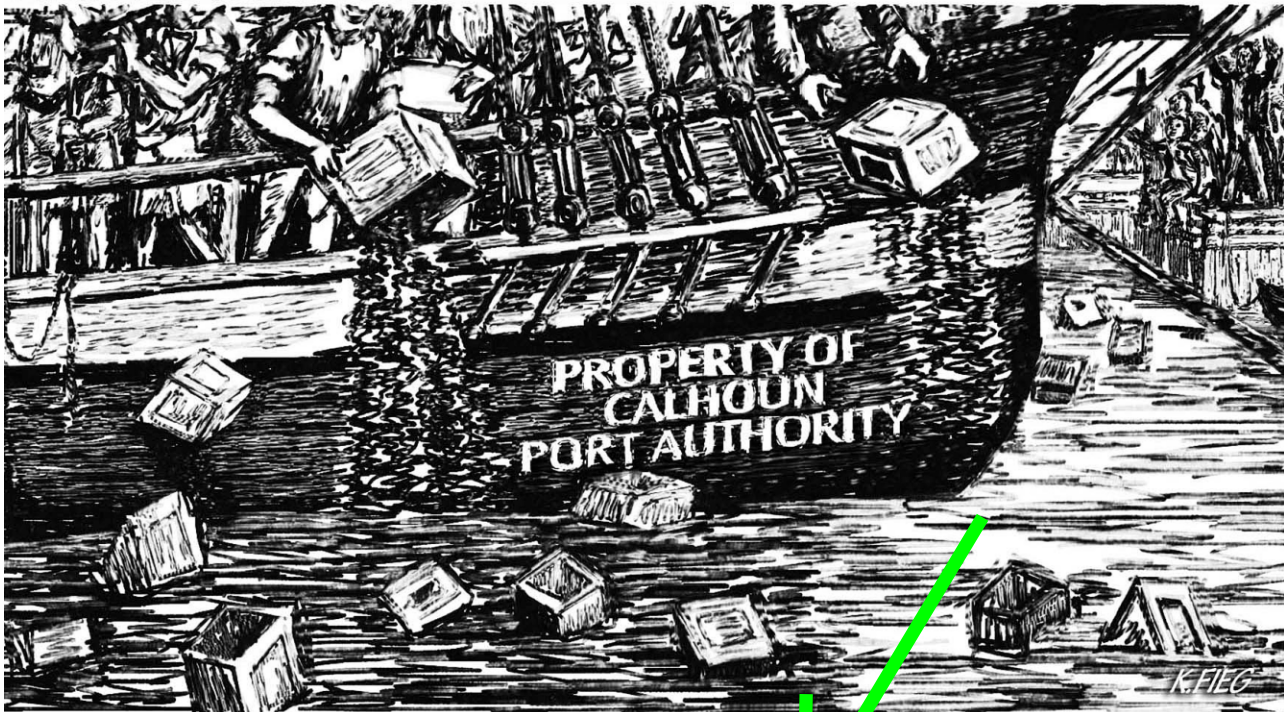
And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized? And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him.

Acts 8:36-38

"Live your beliefs and you can turn the world around."
Henry David Thoreau (1817-62) American essayist, poet, philosopher, abolitionist, naturalist, tax resister, development critic, surveyor and historian

FROM US

ANOTHER TEA PARTY



YOUR ADVOCATE

US steeped in open government tradition

Every schoolchild knows the story of the Boston Tea Party. Colonists unhappy about "taxation without representation" tossed British tea into the harbor in a bold act of defiance. Against this backdrop, our founding fathers penned the First Amendment, the most beautiful 45 words in the English language. Channeling this spirit, the Victoria Advocate filed a lawsuit Monday against the Calhoun Port Authority for violating the Texas Open Meetings Act. The port's elected board of directors did this by hiring former Congressman Blake Farenthold to a \$160,000 lobbyist job without letting the public know in advance that this was even being considered. In terms our founding fathers would use, this amounted to taxation without representation. A taxing governmental body is required by law to conduct its business in public view. Fast forward about 200 years. The Texas Open Meetings Act and the Texas Public Information Act sprang from the Sharpstown scandal of 1971-72, when two dozen state officials were accused of bribery and fraud. In response, state legislators passed a series of reform measures, most notably opening most governmental records to citizen scrutiny and expanding the requirement for open meetings of governmental policy-making agencies. Basically, lawmakers said then, "We need to let the people police the people's business." The public's right to know in Texas has been dying a death by a thousand cuts since then. Legislators have carved out countless exemptions to the open government laws, often in response to government associations' lobbying efforts. Many elected officials prefer to keep the public in the dark. The Freedom of Information Foundation of Texas and a variety of media organizations fight this expanding shroud of secrecy. For the past 17 months, I've had the honor of serving as the elected president of the FOI Foundation of Texas board. From this view, I've heard many stories from across the state of the fight for public information. That's why our locally and family owned newspaper felt compelled to do our part in stopping this egregious violation of the state's open government laws. The lawsuit is not about whether our editorial board thinks the port's hiring of Farenthold is a good or bad idea. Rather, it's about supporting open government. A lawsuit is the remedy the law prescribes. Michael Cloud, who received the GOP nomination for Farenthold's District 27 seat, is running on a platform of breaking the Washington, D.C., "culture of corruption." Over a friendly cup of coffee recently, I told him the best way he can do this is to make open government his top priority in Congress. Open government is not at all a Republican or Democratic party issue. It is at the heart of our "great American experiment." It is how we get a government "of the people, by the people and for the people." I shared a similar message a few years ago when the Calhoun County Republican Club invited me to speak. There, I offered my favorite quote by



CHRIS COBLER

founding father Thomas Jefferson: "The basis of our governments being the opinion of the people, the very first object should be to keep that right; and were it left to me to decide whether we should have a government without newspapers or newspapers without a government, I should not hesitate a moment to prefer the latter. But I should mean that every man should receive those papers and be capable of reading them." Supposedly, we have advanced as a country since Jefferson wrote these words in 1787. However, the public's support for the First Amendment feels more tenuous than at any point in my lifetime. Still, many readers let us know last week that their support for the First Amendment remained rock solid. "Things like this need to be brought out to the public," longtime Advocate reader Kathy Allen, of Victoria, called to tell me, "and I find the newspaper is the only way to get it done." We appreciate this outpouring of reader support for our watchdog journalism. If you want it to continue, support not just your local newspaper but the Freedom of Information Foundation of Texas and all other efforts to strengthen open government laws. We must remain vigilant in ways large and small for our improbable experiment to succeed. Think of it as your way of being there when colonists dumped tea into the Boston Harbor. This time, though, the murky body of water is the Calhoun port.

Chris Cobler is the editor of the Victoria Advocate. He may be reached at ccobler@vicad.com or 361-574-1271.

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VICTORIA COUNTY COMMISSIONERS COURT
■ **County Judge Ben Zeller:** 101 N. Bridge St. Victoria 77901, 361-575-4558 (general number for the commissioners court)

FROM YOU

Appreciation expressed for help in making parade a success

Editor, the Advocate:
Torres Elementary would like to thank everyone who helped make our parade a huge success on May 24. We couldn't have done it without Brother Gary Moses, with his gift of gab, and our master of sound, Ralph Salazar. The fire trucks – both red and pink – were awesome. We were honored to present G.R.E.A.T. program Deputy Kenneth Wells as well as representatives from the Victoria Police Department. We will miss both our Masters of Ceremonies Jaclyn Hartl and Dr. Robert Jaklich, superintendent of VISD. Thanks to the parents and students for making it a last day of school to remember. Have a fantastic summer!

Jamie Sims, Victoria

WE WANT YOUR LETTERS

To submit a letter to the editor, include **your name, home address and daytime telephone or cellphone number** so we may contact you to verify you want your opinion published. Our letter lengths are **200 words for thank-yous, 250 words for election-related letters and 400 words for all others.** We ask letter writers submit one letter per 30-day period. Letters may be delivered at the **Victoria Advocate, 311 E. Constitution St.; mailed to P.O. Box 1518, Victoria, TX 77902; faxed to 361-574-1220; or emailed to letters@vicad.com.**

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FROM US

Let’s stop revolving door in D.C.

■ Topic: Culture of corruption ■ Our View: Ban congressmen from working as lobbyists

Victoria’s own Michael Cloud crushed a well-qualified opponent in the Republican primary runoff to get the nomination for the Congressional District 27 seat.

Cloud’s fresh face and good-guy sincerity captured voters’ imaginations. He pledged to be different and to fight the “culture of corruption” that permeates the halls of Congress.

“The most common profession among current members of Congress is career politician,” Cloud wrote in a Victoria Advocate guest column. “Most defeated incumbents quickly find well-paid employment at lobbying firms

and head straight back to Capitol Hill to cut deals on behalf of special interest groups.”

Cloud wrote this as news was breaking about the district’s previous congressman, Blake Farenthold, being hired illegally by the Calhoun Port Authority to work as a lobbyist for \$160,000 a year. Under the current climate of corruption, even a congressman dumped to the curb because of ethics violations can get a high-paying job as a lobbyist.

A fix already has been proposed. Unfortunately, it involves Congress actually doing the right thing. Bi-partisan legislation would bar ex-members of Con-

gress from ever working as lobbyists after they leave office. The bill is going nowhere fast.

The Center for Responsive Politics, a nonpartisan group supporting the legislation, reports that more than 51 percent of former members of the 113th Congress (2013-2014) became lobbyists.

Undoubtedly, that percentage is even higher when considering the full career of a congressman after leaving office.

Cloud already has publicly endorsed term limits for Congress, but that’s meaningless if the representatives just move down the hall to work for special interest groups. If Cloud truly

wants to drain the swamp, then he should wholeheartedly back legislation to stop getting elected to Congress from being a ticket to lobby for special interest groups.


Along with that, Cloud needs to strongly support Freedom of Information and campaign reform legislation. Back-room deals lead to bad government and public distrust. Only sunshine can create a government of, by and for the people, as Cloud wrote that he wants to restore.

This is a David vs. Goliath fight, and Cloud might not even have a stone in his arsenal. During his runoff campaign, he saw just how powerful the political machine is. A super Political


Action Committee, Club for Growth Action, spent about a half million dollars bombarding the district with attack ads against opponent Bech Bruun. Shady super PACs skirt campaign donation limits by not coordinating with the candidates they support.

Cloud is about the most sincere, good-hearted congressional candidate since Jimmy Stewart’s Mr. Smith went to Washington. Negative campaigning is not his style.

He’s a small business owner, a family man and a devout Christian. Yet, the D.C. machine wasted no time in soiling his runoff campaign. He could have won without the ugly assist.



Cloud



Farenthold

In a Republican-dominated district, Cloud is almost a lock to win the Nov. 6 general election.

Much less certain is whether he can crack the powerful padlock special interest groups have placed on Washington.

This opinion reflects the views of the Victoria Advocate’s editorial board.

FROM OTHERS



FROM YOU

Gratitude expressed to newspaper for exposing closed meeting

Editor, the Advocate:

Yes, yes! The Victoria Advocate deserves our thanks and gratitude for their article exposing the closed meeting hiring of ex-congressman Blake Farenthold, who squandered the taxpayers’ money, then didn’t follow through on his promise to pay them back.

Calhoun Port Authority board members hired this politician? And then held another meeting so they could correct a misdeed for not following the Open Meetings Act. Half of the Calhoun Port Authority board still voted to hire this person, who used \$87,000 to pay off a sexual harassment

claim, then quit his elected position and is now causing you and me, the taxpayers, the cost of a special election. Those board members need to wake up! How long are the taxpayers going to put up with this waste?

Joe Kovar, veteran and taxpayer, Victoria

CONTACT YOUR LAWMAKERS

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CITY OF VICTORIA

■ **City Manager Charmelle Garrett:** 105 W. Juan Linn St., Victoria 77901, 361-485-3030

GUEST COLUMN

‘I am the Dead’ – poem about Santa Fe school shooting

In honor of the Santa Fe students and teachers who were recently lost to us. Dedicated to Dakota Schrader, Santa Fe High School, Class of 2020.

I am the Dead.
And you need to listen.
You’re alive.
I’m not.
And I’m not coming back.
I am dead and I can’t believe it. CANNOT BELIEVE IT!
I have always been so young, so alive, so ready for what’s coming.
So amped, and yet...
Here I am, body-bagged in a mobile morgue in the parking lot of my high school in Santa Fe, Texas.
What? Not a dream? This is for real?
Unbelievable.
I am 17; maybe 18; maybe 14. I’m a girl. I’m a boy. I’m black, I’m white, I’m Mexican, I’m Pakistani... but mainly, I’m a teenager.
And you’re not.
You’re not a teenager, or dead. I’m both.
I don’t need your prayers. I don’t need your round-table discussions. I don’t need you to talk about the same things you alive people have been talking about since before I was born. Columbine was 1999. It’s 2018, and now I’m dead, too!

Santa Fe is the worst shooting rampage since February. FEBRUARY! It’s the 22nd school shooting this year. 22!

I call complete utter BS on every politician, every policymaker, everybody/ anybody who exploits this endless, asinine gun control debate.

What, you think I can’t speak my mind?

You have no idea how intelligent I am. How fluent I was going to be.

You don’t care. You think your guns are worth more than me. Don’t you?

What if I was your daughter? How important does that gun in your hands feel now?

I just got shot in the face. By this unfinished, unhinged blob of testosterone who wants his story told.

Come on, Dimi. Are you serious? No one is going to remember you.

Or me.

Stop. Wait... what are you doing?

Who in the world gets shot in a high school art class? During first period? On Friday?

Are you kidding me?

What am I supposed to do? I was just learning how to be me. And now I’m dead.

I learned in government class that the 2nd Amend-

ment was created to authorize gun ownership for state’s militias. In 1776. The United States was fighting for its life by any means necessary.

For Christ’s sake, it’s 2018. We’ve got to do something. Over my dead body.

As far as I’m concerned, every single person in the United States has forfeited the right to bear arms.

Don’t argue with me. I’m dead.

Mr. Terminator trench-coat rolls into my classroom and shoots us dead. Big gaping holes; crazy blood and bone and SCREAMING! SCREAMING! And mocks the ones who are hiding.

This is not happening.

Dude, this is NOT Play-Station. You just blasted steel shotgun pellets through my face.

One second I’m breathing, smiling, thumbing through my graphic novel, and now... I’m dead.

What in the hell are you doing with your dad’s shotgun? Why are you shooting us? You’re one of us.

What are you thinking



CHARLES ALCORN



METRO CREATIVE

when you pull a real trigger, and shoot real bullets, that rip me and my classmates into jagged pieces of skin and cartilage and blood vessels that bleed real blood? And now it’s done.

I need answers.

I was learning so much. Every day. And now ... nothing, it’s over.

All I can see is this long, dark something; not even a tunnel ... I’m not ready.

I have faith. I believe; don’t worry about it. That’s

my business; not yours.

I can see you running around like crazy, crying. Glad to be alive; hysterical with questions.

Wait, what just happened? I can hear you. You guys with the microphones and the keystrokes. Always so sincere.

Look, it’s disgusting. Chanting my name like a rosary...

But never saying, or doing, anything. Nothing.

You pray. And that’s not

enough.

You are alive.

I am the Dead.

Charles Alcorn was born and raised in Victoria. He is a graduate of the Creative Writing Program at the University of Houston and former managing editor of the American Book Review. Alcorn, his wife and his two sons live in Houston, just up the road from Santa Fe.

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– First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution

YOUR POEM

Cristo Rey
Christ the King
Rules greatly,
Reigns kindly,
Loves bravely,
Triumphs over death.
Sr. Frances Cabrini
Janvier, Victoria

WORDS

And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest, And desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem.

Acts 9:1-2

“Though beauty gives you a weird

WE WANT YOUR LETTERS

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VIEWPOINTS

Editorial page coordinator: Kathleen Grones, 361-574-1222, kgrones@vicad.com

FROM US

Judge sinks Calhoun port's legal arguments

Topic: Blake Farenthold hiring n Our View: Critical questions raised during pretrial hearing

The Calhoun Port Authority's \$400-an-hour lawyer claimed in court that he didn't know what public notice was lacking before former Congressman Blake Farenthold was hired May 9.

Thankfully, District Judge Bobby Bell took a no-nonsense approach to the circular arguments presented by the port's specially hired Austin lawyer, Bill Cobb. The comments came during a pretrial hearing regarding the Victoria Advocate's lawsuit against the port. The suit contends the board violated the Texas Open Meetings Act by failing to provide a proper public notice of an action of high public interest.

During the hearing, Cobb contended he didn't know what the newspaper, which sued on behalf of the public, wanted. Judge Bell asked the newspaper's Victoria attorney, John Griffin, this question for Cobb.

Griffin replied by repeating what the newspaper has said

from the outset — do what the law requires. Texas law requires public bodies to provide specific public notice before spending public money on matters of special interest.

In this case, Griffin said, the board should have listed on its May 9 agenda that it planned to hire Farenthold for a salary of \$160,000 to work as a lobbyist. The public should have had an opportunity to comment on the hiring before its elected representatives on the port board took action. Public bodies can't hide behind the catch-all posting of "personnel matters."

"There you go, Mr. Cox, now you know what he wants," Bell said.

The name of the port's lawyer was the only thing Bell got wrong in his comments during the July 18 hearing. The judge's mistake was understandable. Cox is the name of the Texas Supreme Court's 1986 ruling that stands as the precedent for public notice.

In that ruling, the Supreme Court held the Austin school

district could not secretly hire a superintendent. This is exactly what the Calhoun Port Authority did when it hired Farenthold without any notice or discussion of the action during a public meeting.

Also during the hearing, Cobb offered a strange test for deciding public interest in a hiring. He said the standard was the position had to set public policy or be "public-facing" to require a public notice of the hiring.

Judge Bell saw the standard quite a bit differently.

"If someone has appropriated public funds for private interest," Bell said, "would that be something that the public would be entitled to know because they have a special interest in seeing that all employees who are hired or voted in do not take public funds for private use? Wouldn't that be something that would be not only of special interest but of hyper-interest?"

Hyper-interest. Exactly.

Cobb responded to the judge, "That's not how the system

works."

Sorry, counselor, that's exactly how the system is supposed to work.

Based on the hearing, Judge Bell ruled Monday that Farenthold, Port Director Charles Hausmann and Board Chairman Randy Boyd must testify about the May 9 secret hiring. He denied all of the port's motions to quash their testimony. They will have to answer why a disgraced former congressman would be an effective lobbyist. This huge question raises so many more that Judge Bell referred to it as "the 800-pound gorilla" during the hearing.

The judge also ordered the port to produce a copy of the certified agenda from the May 9 closed meeting. The open meetings act requires all public bodies to either keep an audio recording or a certified agenda – detailed notes of what was discussed – for all closed meetings.

This is required so that a judge may review the recording or

notes to be sure the public body adhered to the open meetings act. It's highly unlikely the port board kept these detailed notes, as the law requires.

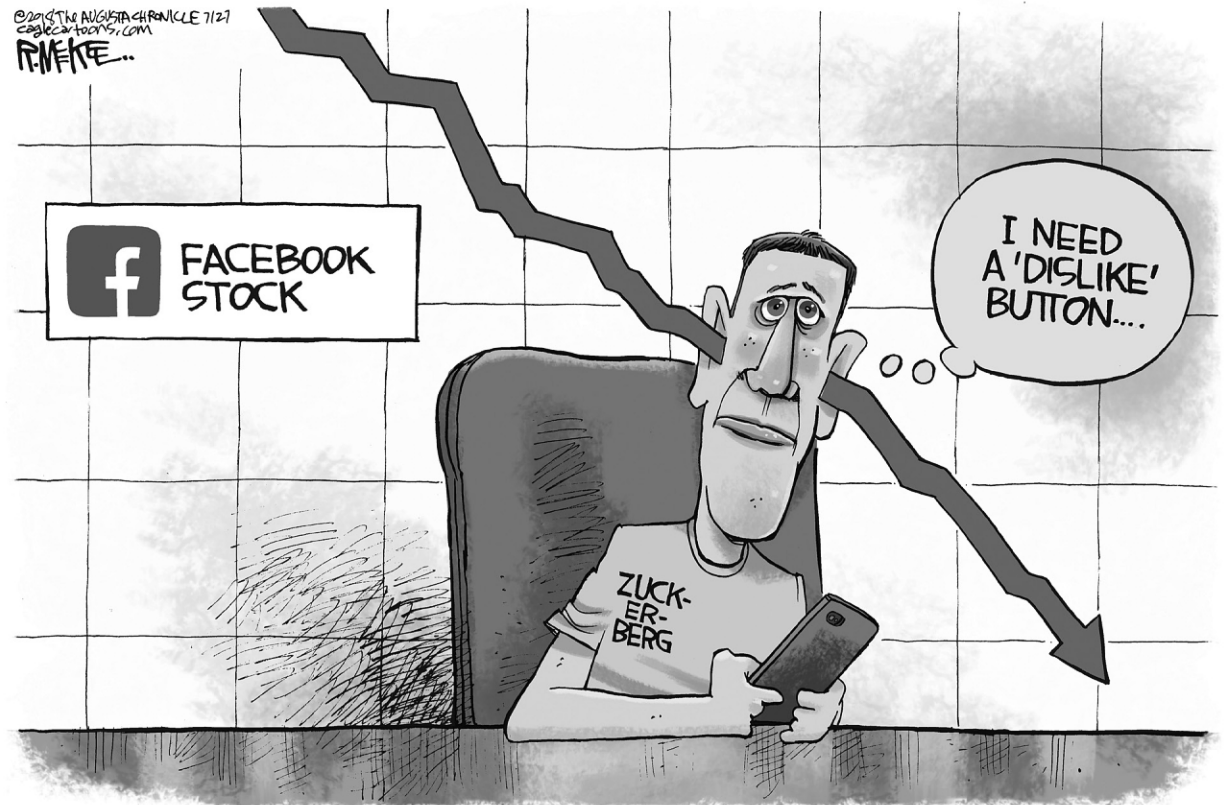
These rulings move the case full steam ahead toward a trial date in either September or October.

The justice system can get incredibly twisted by legal gymnastics. Fortunately, Judge Bell, longtime district attorney in Jackson County before taking the bench, saw through the contortions of the port's attorney. During the hearing, the judge offered a simple assessment that went to the core of the case, saying, "If someone took public funds for private use, as an old DA, that's stealing, so it seems like Calhoun would have an interest if someone stole."

Yes, indeed, the public has an interest in someone stealing public funds.

This opinion reflects the views of the Victoria Advocate's editorial board.

FROM OTHERS



YOUR VOICES

Online comments on 'Kolache Festival Queen/King contest showcases best bakers in county' from July 25

"Our German-Czech festival brings hundreds of people to Hallettsville who support our local nonprofit

organizations and get the opportunity to experience the culture that our town is so richly made of."

This is a beautifully worded sentence. Our usual fare is "our town is so proud of..." Nothing wrong with that sentiment, except that it has become ho-hum.

Thank you, Hallettsville Chamber of Commerce. Huzzah for kolache!

Brass

FROM US

Your Advocate helps build healthy community

Close your eyes and picture someone in your life affected by a stroke or heart disease.

I thought of my older sister, Sharen, who had a minor heart attack related to her diabetes, but has recovered fully. Then I thought about my friend Chris Rivera, who is still working to regain full movement after suffering a massive stroke. He remains as upbeat as ever.

Brittany Sandbach of the American Heart Association had a group of us do this exercise last week at a planning committee for the Crossroads Heat and Stroke Walk. Victoria hasn't organized a heart walk for a decade, but new DeTar Healthcare CEO Gary Ma-laeer wants to change that.

DeTar is a presenting sponsor of the walk, planned for Feb. 2 on the Victoria College campus. The goal for the first year is to raise \$30,000, and DeTar already has pledged \$10,000.

DeTar invited a group of community leaders to help get the walk in motion. Since adding publisher to my title at the Victoria Advocate, I've received a number of such opportunities and am grateful for that.

The best part of working at a community newspaper is being so close to your neighbors and being able to directly interact with and help them. The journalism we do is immediate and tangible, whether we're reporting on the Calhoun Port Authority having an illegal meeting or a Victoria businesswoman writing a cookbook full of love from around the world. Our readers and neighbors let us know what they think. We know our work matters deeply to them.

At a national level, people rail against the evil media, whatever that expansive term means to them. But they see their local paper differently.

The same Victoria family has owned the 172-year-old Advocate for three generations.



CHRIS COBLER

TO GET INVOLVED

If you want to be a sponsor of the Crossroads Heart and Stroke Walk on Feb. 2, contact Brittany Sandbach of the American Heart Association at 361-445-3190 or Brittany.Sandbach@heart.org.

The second generation of Kay McHaney and her brother, John Roberts, care deeply for their community and have instilled that in everyone who works at their newspaper.

I'm honored and humbled to carry that tradition forward as the first non-family publisher at the Advocate. I feel a tremendous obligation to live up to their example.

I'm happy to serve on the heart walk committee, the Formosa community advisory board, the Victoria Independent School District Foundation board, the Victoria Film Society board and every other group I can squeeze into my schedule. We still have a paper to get out every day, so the only limit is time.

Fortunately, we have the strongest newsroom in my 11 years as Advocate editor. Managing editor Becky Cooper has worked here 33 years and knows her job backward and forward. She allows me the freedom to do more.

Equally strong are copy desk chief J.R. Ortega, city editor Tony Balandran, digital editor Thomas Martinez, sports editor Mike Forman, assistant sports editor Rey Castillo, features editor Laura Garcia and chief photographer Angela Piazza. When I am busy at a community reception, they are working tirelessly to make sure the news gets covered.

These editors and the rest of the staff keep my stress at a manageable level. You, our readers, make my job deeply rewarding.

We will work to get you the news, advertising and information you need to be more informed and engaged in your community. Together, we can make our community a better and healthier place to live.

Chris Cobler is the editor and publisher of the Victoria Advocate. He may be reached at 361-574-1271 or ccobler@vicad.com.

FIRST AMENDMENT

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

– First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution

YOUR POEM

Build Up the Kingdom

Listen to the whis-pers.

Be sure it's the Spirit.

Repent and forgive.

Let go and move on.

The kingdom grows.

Sr. Frances Cabrini Janvier, Victoria

WORDS

But Peter put them all forth, and kneeled down, and prayed; and turning him to the body said, Tabitha, arise. And she opened her eyes: and when she saw Peter, she sat up. And he gave her his hand, and lifted her up, and when he had called the saints and widows, presented her alive.

Acts 9:40-41

"Anything that is worth teaching can be presented in many different ways. These multiple ways can make use of our multiple intelligences." Howard Gardner (b. 1943) American developmental psychologist and the John H. and Elisabeth A. Hobbs Professor of Cognition and Education at the Harvard Graduate School of Education at Harvard University

WE WANT YOUR LETTERS

To submit a letter to the editor, include **your name, home address and daytime telephone or cellphone number** so we may contact you to verify you want your opinion published.

Our letter lengths are **200 words for thank-yous, 250 words for election-related letters and 400 words for all others**. We ask letter writers submit one letter per 30-day period. Letters may be delivered at the **Victoria Advocate, 311 E. Constitution St.; mailed to P.O. Box 1518, Victoria, TX 77902; faxed to 361-574-1220; or emailed to letters@vicad.com**.

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FROM US

Public asset shouldn't be used for private gain

■ Topic: Calhoun port ■ Our View: Newspaper investigation reveals serious conflicts of interest

The Calhoun port is a tremendous public asset for the Crossroads. The waterway in Point Comfort is a “gateway to world markets” for the region, as the port’s website proclaims. Through the Matagorda Ship Channel and the Gulf Intracoastal Waterway, about 420 ships and 1,000 barges enter the Calhoun port annually, supporting the petrochemical plants that are the backbone of the Crossroads’ economy. Against this backdrop, the Victoria Advocate’s special investigation Aug. 19 into the port’s operation is particularly alarming. The port is far too important of a public good to be used for private gain. The newspaper’s investigation revealed: ■ Calhoun Port Chairman Randy Boyd contributed to Blake Farenthold’s campaign after the congressman arranged a meeting for him with the Army Corps of Engineers. The meeting concerned getting business for Boyd’s dredging company. ■ Experts say this meeting was ethically questionable and a dredger should not serve on a port authority board. ■ It was Boyd’s idea to hire Farenthold as the port’s lobbyist after the congressman resigned amid an ethics investigation. All of this raises serious questions of whether the port board is operating in the public’s best interests. These questions came to light after Boyd instructed the port’s executive director to hire Farenthold at a May 9 meeting without any notice to the public. The lack of notice is at the heart of the newspaper’s Texas Open Meetings Act lawsuit against the port. After the startling revelation that the port had hired Farenthold for an unprecedented position of full-time lobbyist at an annual salary of \$160,000, people immediately asked, “Why?” Why would the port hire a disgraced congressman who was openly feuding with Republican Party leadership? Why would anyone think Farenthold could help the port get any congressional action to occur? After the Advocate exposed

the illegal meeting, the public bombarded the port, expressing outrage at Farenthold’s hiring. They wanted to understand why the port would hire a congressman who had reneged on his promise to pay back the taxpayers \$84,000 used to settle a former staffer’s sexual harassment case against him. They wanted to know why the port would throw more taxpayer money at a former congressman who already owed the public. The logical conclusion to be drawn from the newspaper’s investigation is Boyd hired Farenthold out of self-interest for his dredging business, RLB Contracting Inc. What’s clear is Boyd has a tremendous conflict of interest in operating a business that does extensive work in and around the port while serving as chairman of the port board. The conflict is far beyond what any port or body of elected officials would normally allow. Only a special district like the port board, accustomed to operating outside the public view, would even have the audacity to try to get away with such an arrangement. In the Advocate’s story, Victoria City Councilman Tom Halepaska expressed well the generally accepted standard for business owners serving in an elected capacity. As the owner of Halepaska’s Bakery in Victoria, he said he wouldn’t even sell pastries to the city to avoid the appearance of a conflict of interest. This isn’t about partisan politics. This is about open government. This is about government of the people, by the people and for the people. “You might be a Democrat, you might be a Republican, but everybody votes their pocketbook,” Halepaska said. “Put yourself in that situation. Something that would affect your income, you’d be hard-put not to be thinking about it.” Boyd has many millions of reasons to be thinking about his business when making decisions as chairman of the port board. After the public outcry, he came up with a questionable reason for hiring Farenthold. He said the former congressman could somehow get Congress to pass legislation that would save the

port from paying its required share of repairs to long-defective jetties. The port has been trying to get these jetties repaired for almost 20 years. Nonetheless, this is a project vital to the economic well-being of the region. If Congress, which is in recess now, ever moves on this issue, it will be in spite of Farenthold, not because of him. The public must keep the pressure on the port’s board to operate properly. A recall election is not possible because of the quirks of the state legislation that created the port board. Board members are elected every four years, but they can’t be recalled. The good news is three board members’ seats, including Boyd’s, are up in May. In years past, the port has canceled elections because no one runs against the members of the little-known and secretive board. That’s unlikely to be the case this time. *This opinion reflects the views of the Victoria Advocate’s editorial board.*

FROM US

Your Advocate is the real thing – and cheaper than a can of Coke

What is most valuable to you? A) A candy bar B) A cup of coffee C) A can of Coke D) Your brain In our company’s vending machines, a Snickers bar and a 12-ounce can of Coke each cost \$1.25. The average price of a cup of coffee – as hard as this is to believe – is \$2.70. By comparison, you can feed your brain about all that’s happening in the Crossroads for only 54 cents a day, the price of a seven-day print and digital subscription. Along with the most comprehensive local news, sports and features in our region, your Advocate brings you extensive Texas news and a bonus USA Today section providing national and international news. We also bring you advertising deals and information from the businesses where you shop. For only 54 cents, you may read your Advocate on whatever platform you prefer – print, desktop, mobile or tablet. We prepare your newspaper to work well in all these formats. We invested earlier this year in a new computer system to make the digital experience even better. To support our ability to keep doing this, we will begin charging for digital access starting Monday. Print readers don’t need to worry – digital access comes included in the price of your subscription. This change affects only those who prefer reading the Advocate online only. Starting Monday, you will see a notice telling you to sign up for a subscription to continue reading VictoriaAdvocate.com. We will allow a limited number of page views before you reach a final notice saying you need to subscribe to read any more stories. Most newspaper companies in the country have adopted this approach. Like everything else, the cost of producing high-quality journalism continues to rise, so we can no longer afford to allow people to read for free. We hope you agree our content has value. Longtime sports editor Mike Forman covers Crossroads sports like no one else. Investigative reporter Jessica Priest exposes why the Calhoun Port Authority would hire a former congressman. Our journalists also are at city council and school board meetings, at fundraising events that benefit the community, at high school volleyball and football games — basically, we’re everywhere that matters to our community. No one else is doing this work that is so essential to our community and our country. We’re not perfect, by any means, but we’re from here and for here. Our family owners’ roots in Texas go back five generations. For us to keep the Crossroads informed and connected, we need your support. We recognize every penny is tight and appreciate deeply your support. To tell our story better, newspapers need the marketing wizards behind Co-



CHRIS COBLER

ALREADY A SUBSCRIBER? If you already are a Victoria Advocate subscriber, you will receive full access to VictoriaAdvocate.com and our digital replica edition. Be sure the email address associated with your subscription is the same one you use to log in to our site. If you have any questions or need to update your email address, please call customer care at 361-574-1200.

ca-Cola. Etched in my brain is the Coke TV commercial of my youth that equated drinking carbonated soda water that’s bad for me with – of all things – world peace. Eleven-year-old me believed drinking Coke was somehow for a greater good. “I’d like to teach the world to sing in perfect harmony,” the song went. That sentiment, plus the sugar and caffeine, were enough to hook me. Newspapers may not teach the world to sing, but we catalog the chorus of our communities. As I wrote on my LinkedIn profile, “A newspaper should be that close friend who cheers your successes, cries over your losses and prods you to be better than you ever thought possible.” We’re the real thing. And we really need your support, now more than ever.

Chris Cobler is the editor and publisher of the Victoria Advocate. He may be reached at ccobler@vicad.com or 361-574-1271.

FROM OTHERS



FROM YOU

Community asked to support the work of the public library

Editor, the Advocate: The Victoria Public Library suffered significant damage to the Bronte Room as a result of Hurricane Harvey. This room is very important for the many activities that the library provides to the community. Library activities are supported by the Friends of the Library book sales. The Quilt Guild of Greater Victoria has adopted the VPL as one of our 2018 community service projects. Quilts will be offered by silent auction in conjunction with the September book sale. Please join us in supporting the great work of the Victoria Public Library during the week of Sept. 10 through Sept. 15. **Anna deLeon Harrison,** community service chairman, Quilt Guild of Greater Victoria, Victoria

Large percent of property tax paid goes toward education

Editor, the Advocate: This past week, I decided to look at my property tax appraisal statement just to see exactly what I pay to Victoria ISD. Each year, 66 percent of my property tax bill goes to VISD. If I add what is allotted to Victoria College, which is another 12 percent, I am paying 78 percent of my tax bill to state education. I am shocked at this imbalance of tax dollars being funneled to institutions that I don’t even use. I urge each property owner to visit victoriacad.org and really take a look at how much of your money is being sent to VISD – and state education overall. **Carol Davis,** Inez

EVERYDAY HERO

To nominate your Everyday Hero, submit the person’s full name, address and phone number, along with photo and reason for nomination as an Advocate Everyday Hero, in 150 words or less. Submit the information by email to letters@vicad.com, mail to P.O. Box 1518, Victoria 77902, or bring it by the Victoria Advocate at 311 E. Constitution St. Include your name, address and phone number so we may contact you to verify your information.

FROM YOU

Balloons are deadly to animals, both land, sea

Editor, the Advocate: Dolphins, whales, turtles and many other marine species, as well as terrestrial animals, such as cows, dogs, sheep, tortoises, birds and other animals, have all been hurt or killed by balloons. The animal

is usually killed from the balloon blocking its digestive tract, leaving them unable to take in any more nutrients. It slowly starves to death. The animals can also become entangled in the balloon and its ribbon, making the animal unable to move or eat. Balloons can take years to break down, even the so-called “biode-

gradable” latex ones. This gives plenty of time for it to travel and encounter many animals that may mistake it for a tasty snack or accidentally get entangled in it. Sea turtles are particularly at risk because they naturally prey on jellies, which balloons can easily be mistaken for, even with human eyes. Some states and countries have

enacted laws regarding the release of balloons. The Balloon Council, and other balloon industry entities, spend millions of dollars lobbying to keep balloon releases legal. This multibillion-dollar industry encourages consumers to litter with their product. Releasing balloons should be included in already existing litter

laws; after all, it’s simply littering. There are so many other ways to honor a loved one. Plant a plant, float flower petals down stream, have a commemorative bench in their honor. There are many environmentally friendly ways. Do not take lives to honor lives. **Jessica Stone,** Victoria

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YOUR POEM

Amazing
It’s an amazing sunset.
It’s an amazing magic trick.
It’s amazing how that priest brings people to God.
It’s an amazing rocket launch.
It’s an amazing story.
Sr. Frances Cabrini Janvier, Victoria

WORDS

And there came a voice to him, Rise, Peter; kill, and eat. But Peter said, Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean. And the voice spake unto him again the second time, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common. Acts 10:13-15
“Like a welcome summer rain, humor may suddenly cleanse and cool the earth, the air and you.”
Langston Hughes (1901-67) American poet, social activist, novelist, playwright and columnist from Joplin, Missouri; moved to New York City as a young man, where he made his career

WE WANT YOUR LETTERS

To submit a letter to the editor, include your name, home address and daytime telephone or cellphone number so we may contact you to verify you want your opinion published. Our letter lengths are 200 words for thank-yous, 250 words for election-related letters and 400 words for all others. We ask letter writers submit one letter per 30-day period. Letters may be delivered at the Victoria Advocate, 311 E. Constitution St.; mailed to P.O. Box 1518, Victoria, TX 77902; faxed to 361-574-1220; or emailed to letters@vicad.com.

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Becky Cooper, Managing Editor
Catherine R. McHaney, Secretary-Treasurer

VIEWPOINTS

Editorial page coordinator: Sandy Turner, 361-574-1222, sturner@vicad.com

FROM US

Sunshine required to expose shadow government

Topic: Calhoun Port Authority Our View: Legislators must reform special districts

There’s a fungus among us, and it’s no joke. It’s a shadow government that operates without any public knowledge or accountability. This isn’t the stuff of black helicopters or John Grisham novels. Rather, this happens in banal board meetings designed in every way to do the public’s business out of the public’s view.

A special Victoria Advocate investigation laid bare the improper spending by the Calhoun Port Authority board of directors. The report revealed the board has been giving itself a one-of-a-kind retirement plan. No other port board surveyed gives itself this sort of outrageous perk.

Retirement plans are for full-time employees, not people elected to be stewards of a public trust like a port authority or school board. Calhoun’s six board members attend about a meeting a month – hardly enough work to qualify for the public to be paying for their retirement.

All the port board members have full-time jobs, which presumably offer a retirement plan. They have zero justification for double-dipping at the public’s expense.

The Advocate’s report also revealed board members have paid themselves \$630,000 during the past decade and given themselves almost \$300,000 in travel

MAKE YOUR VOICE HEARD

Legislators won’t act if they don’t hear from you. To promote reform for special districts such as the Calhoun Port Authority, contact the Crossroads’ lawmakers. Send this editorial with your comments to:

■ State Sen. Lois Kolkhorst, R-Brenham, Attention Victoria District Office, 5606 N. Navarro St. No. 300X, Victoria, TX 77904, or call 361-573-7300, or email lois.kolkhorst@senate.texas.

■ State Rep. Geanie Morrison, R-Victoria, Attention District Office, 1908 N. Laurent St., Suite 500, P.O. Box 4642, Victoria, TX 77903, or call 361-572-0196, or email Geanie.Morrison@house.texas.gov.

We also welcome letters to the editor. Send those to letters@vicad.com.

expenses during the same time.

One dinner receipt showed port director Charles Hausmann charged \$425.50 for a meal last year at the Pelican Club Restaurant Bar and Grill in New Orleans. The receipt listed dinner items that included lobster, escargot and filet mignon.

“It sounds like the board is in the position to feather its own nest with little to no accountability,” said Craig McDonald, director of Texans for Public Justice, a nonprofit that started in Austin in 1997 to take on political corruption.

Examples of unethical practices and corruption abound among the more than 3,300 special purpose districts, which includes the Calhoun port authority, across Texas. Few know these districts even exist, let alone how they are run.

The Legislature started to pay attention to this glaring gap in governance during its last session. Then, the Crossroads’

state senator, Lois Kolkhorst, R-Brenham, passed a bill requiring special purpose districts to provide financial information, records and tax rates to the state comptroller’s office to be hosted on a publicly available database.

However, only about half of the state’s special districts have done so, and the information there is woefully lacking. The Kolkhorst bill is only a start, and our senator told the Advocate she would work to enhance the database during the upcoming session.

“Sunlight is often the best disinfectant,” she wrote in a statement, paraphrasing a famous quote by former Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis about the need for open government.

A comprehensive, updated database, though, is just a starting point for needed reform. The port board directors should not be allowed to set their own compensation without any oversight.

They don’t even have oversight from the public the Legislature

supposedly set up to elect them. That’s because these special districts make it virtually impossible for regular citizens to know when the filing period for candidates even is. Thus, the board cancels most elections because the board members almost always run unopposed.

One step to correct this would be the idea behind a bill proposed by conservative state Sen. Paul Bettencourt. The Republican from Houston wants a uniform election date in November for all property tax rate elections.

In announcing the legislation, Bettencourt noted how some local governmental entities attempt to get tax increases passed during elections that attract the lowest possible turnout. The Calhoun port board takes the same approach by scheduling its elections, if they happen at all, in May.

“If you have elections that few people know about, it’s like you’re trying to avoid the voters,” state Rep. Mike Schofield, R-Katy, said in a report by Empower Texans, a nonprofit trying to lift the weight of government on the economy.

Charles Blain, who wrote an article titled “Special Districts Run Amok,” told the Advocate he would like to see the budgets of special districts such as the port approved by the county commissioner or city council where the entities exist. This arrangement

already is common across Texas, where county commissioners approve the budgets of the sheriff offices, county clerks and district attorneys.

This provides an added layer of fiscal responsibility and oversight. These special districts badly need that because their proliferation has created what the Texas Public Policy Foundation describes as an “invisible government.”



Some of the foundation’s proposed reforms would be to:

- Require special districts to adhere to basic financial transparency standards, such as the public posting of budgets, financial statements and a check register online.
- Create a comprehensive review process for special districts to undergo a periodic assessment of their roles and responsibilities.

These special districts flourish in the darkness like poisonous mushrooms. The only way to root them out is by shining sunlight directly on them.

The state Legislature created the Calhoun port authority decades ago and then forgot about it. Only legislators can fix it. And they will act only if the public demands it.

This opinion reflects the views of the Victoria Advocate’s editorial board.

ELECTION 2018				
CANDIDATE PROFILES				
<i>Editor's note: To help voters learn more about the candidates, the Advocate is printing profiles provided by the League of Women Voters in contested races in the Nov. 6 election.</i>		■ Background: What training, experience, and background qualify you for this position? ■ Agriculture: How do you propose to promote Texas agriculture at the state, national and international levels? ■ Health: What can be done to protect consumers and promote healthy lifestyle in Texas' communities and schools? ■ Other Issues: What are your highest priorities, and how do you intend to accomplish them?		
COMMISSIONER OF AGRICULTURE – 4-YEAR TERM				
Sid Miller (R)  Miller ag teacher, FFA adviser, six-term Texas legislator, Chair: House Committees on Agriculture and Homeland Security and Public Safety.	■ Agriculture: Promoting Texas Agriculture and marketing Texas food and fiber across our state, our nation, and the world has been, and will remain, one of my top priorities as Agriculture Commissioner. During my first term, my team and I have made marketing trips to every continent on the globe with the exception of Antarctica. We have expanded and improved TDA's successful "GO TEXAN" marketing program and have initiated special programs to promote Texas' growing wine, craft beer and specialty crop industries.	■ Health: Before I took office, our school lunch program was failing in its mission to help keep kids healthy. That's why I launched our Farm Fresh program to connect Texas farmers and ranchers, schools, child care providers and local communities with tools and resources available through the Texas Department of Agriculture. The goal of Farm Fresh is to increase awareness of the vital role agriculture plays in our lives as agriculture is the key to improving the wellness of our children and communities.	■ Other Issues: I want to further expand our TDA "Go Texan" marketing program marketing Texas agriculture products around the globe. Continue our program of making Texas school lunches great again. We've already made great progress by repealing all the burdensome TDA mandates and rules on our Texas schools. Strengthen TDA's consumer protection division and ensure that Texans are not ripped off by unscrupulous businesses or organized criminals using credit card skimmers and other tools to steal your identities.	■ Contact: millerfortexas.com; (265) 968-3535; facebook.com/MillerForTexas; @millerfortexas; millerfortexas@gmail.com; youtube.com/v/UA6HJ38yQWc
Kim Olson (D)  Olson in agriculture and military service, provide the skills and experience needed to succeed in the role of Texas Commissioner of Agriculture.	■ Agriculture: My specific plans for marketing Texas ag products locally include infrastructure support, such as processing or distribution facilities; expanding local food purchasing among school and institutional foodservice, restaurant, and retailers; and updating the GO TEXAN program. Infrastructure and state-led marketing will also serve farmers in accessing national markets. I will support Texas farmers as a strong advocate, ensuring that their interests are represented in trade deals and negotiations.	■ Health: I will promote nutritious school lunches with training, education and Farm to School and will encourage participation in after-school and summer meal programs. My administration will promote local food access initiatives, such as workplace wellness, farmers' markets, and retail incentive programs. And, we will address food safety standards by ensuring that our farmers meet the requirements while educating consumers on their role in handling and preparing safe, healthy foods.	■ Other Issues: A top priority is the economic viability of Texas agriculture with marketing, infrastructure and education initiatives. Also, we must return respectability and professionalism to the office, to ensure the credibility of TDA in the Texas legislature and among state, national and international partners. Next priority – two words: broadband internet. We will pursue funding and partnerships to ensure high-speed internet access in rural areas for education, economic development and health care. ■ Contact: votekimolson.org; 903-245-4233; facebook.com/KimOlson4TexasAg; @kimolson4txag; info@votekimolson.org; youtube.com/v/TEL_TJIA9fM	Richard Carpenter (L) ■ No response to questions ■ Contact: facebook.com/carpenterfortexas

FROM OTHERS

Midterm elections decide the direction, future of our nation

Editor, the Advocate:

Americans should realize the importance of the 2018 midterm elections as it will decide the direction/future of our nation.

Although voters have the right to vote for any candidate, they should exercise due diligence in their selection process.

Unfortunately, many vote without the vaguest idea of a candidate’s qualifications, political ideology or agenda. Many blindly accept data input from politically biased unverified sources. Other flawed factors in voting patterns involve race, gender, bias, straight-line voting, greed, religion, etc.

Most true Americans do not want

our nation to embrace socialism. They realize if Republicans lose control of the House and/or Senate, the next two years will be a political nightmare, causing Congressional gridlock and severely restricting President Trump’s ability to achieve his goals and agenda.

Other voters favor a socialist-type government even though such has failed in most nations worldwide. If one compares President Obama’s failed socialist eight-year record to President’s Trump’s less than two-year achievements, it will become obvious that socialism has been exposed as a failed system.

The Democratic/Socialist Party and its radical socialist leadership are now in a state of disarray and panic. Socialists realize they can’t compete with capitalism openly, directly, so they use subterfuge to promote socialism. Their nefarious actions are causing utter chaos, racial unrest and national divide.

Lastly, in the Texas U.S. Senate race, voters should be made aware that Beto O’Rourke’s political agenda/ideology is based on radical socialist ideology while Ted Cruz supports capitalism, our Constitution and American values and beliefs.

Allen J. Novosad, Edna

CONTACT YOUR LAWMAKERS

VICTORIA COUNTY COMMISSIONERS COURT ■ County Judge Ben Zeller: 101 N. Bridge St. Victoria 77901, 361-575-4558 (general number for the commissioners court) ■ Danny Garcia, Precinct 1 at DaCosta 77905, 361-575-8711 ■ Kevin M. Janak, Precinct 2 at Nursery Drive 77976, 361-575-4558 ■ Gary Burns, Precinct 3 at Goliad Highway 77905, 361-578-8212 ■ Clint Ives, Precinct 4 at Foster Field 77904, 361-575-5221	CITY OF VICTORIA ■ City Manager Charmelle Garrett: 105 W. Juan Linn St., Victoria 77901, 361-485-3030
VICTORIA COUNTY SHERIFF ■ Sheriff T. Michael O’Connor: 101 N. Glass St., Victoria 77901; 361-575-0651	CITY COUNCIL ■ Mayor Paul Polasek: 105 W. Juan Linn St., Victoria 77901, 361-485-3030 ■ Rafael DeLaGarza III, District 1 ■ Josephine Soliz, District 2 ■ Jeff Bauknight, District 3 ■ Jan Scott, District 4 ■ Andrew Young, Super District 5 ■ Tom Halepaska, Super District 6, Mayor Pro Tem

FIRST AMENDMENT

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– First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution

YOUR POEM

Flights
Right on time.
Delayed because of a connecting flight.
We’re circling the airport.
Permission to land.
We’ll be at the gate and will deplane in 20 minutes.
Sr. Frances Cabrini Janvier, Victoria

WORDS

And the apostles and brethren that were in Judaea heard that the Gentiles had also received the word of God. And when Peter was come up to Jerusalem, they that were of the circumcision contended with him, Saying, Thou wentest in to men uncircumcised, and didst eat with them.

Acts 11:1-3

A key to strengthening spiritual muscles and enduring hardship is finding strength in the word of God.

Walter Martin (1928-89) an American Baptist Christian minister and author who founded the Christian Research Institute in 1960 as a para-church ministry specializing as a clearing-house of information in both general Christian apologetics and in countercult apologetics

WE WANT YOUR LETTERS

To submit a letter to the editor, include **your name, home address and daytime telephone or cellphone number** so we may contact you to verify you want your opinion published.

Our letter lengths are **200 words for thank-yous, 250 words for election-related letters and 400 words for all others.** We ask letter writers submit one letter per 30-day period. Letters may be delivered at the **Victoria Advocate, 311 E. Constitution St.; mailed to P.O. Box 1518, Victoria, TX 77902; faxed to 361-574-1220; or emailed to letters@vicad.com.**

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Opinions published under "From Us" represent the views of the Victoria Advocate editorial board.

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FROM US

Port puts on show at public's expense

Topic: Texas Open Meetings Act Our View: Board members need to change their act

The Port Lavaca Main Street Theatre is a delightful place to see a children's show.

Across town, a much-less-pleasant show went on last week. At a specially called meeting Monday, the Calhoun Port Authority staged a big production of pretending to be interested in the public's best interests.

Alas, the show had an all-too-predictable ending: In a carefully scripted three minutes, the port board voted to keep fighting the Texas Open Meetings Act lawsuit the Victoria Advocate filed last May on the public's behalf.

For those who missed the first act, the newspaper filed the lawsuit, as prescribed by the open government law, because the port board failed to properly notify the public of its intent to hire disgraced former Congressman Blake Farenthold. The newspaper

asked then – and still does – that the board acknowledge its legal requirement to do the public's business in public.

The port board could have settled this case almost immediately by simply posting the meeting properly and voting to hire Farenthold. That never happened.

Instead, the port board has opted to drive up attorney fees by appealing a district court ruling in the newspaper's favor. The case remains pending on appeal.

The newspaper gets zero financial benefit from the case. The Advocate filed it only to protect the public's right to know. This is no new position, no matter how the port tries to rewrite the script.

Port chairman Randy Boyd made a big show of pretending the Advocate had offered something new in calling this special meeting. First, he made a farce of a Port Lavaca Rotary Club meeting

MAY 4 ELECTION

The four candidates opposing Randy Boyd on the May 4 ballot are Alvin Bland, Luis De La Garza, Paul Lauterbach and Roger Hochgraber.

Also facing opposition is District 2 incumbent Dell Weathersby, who has strongly supported Boyd throughout the Blake Farenthold debacle. He faces challenger Jasper "Jay" Cuellar.

by badgering Advocate Editor and Publisher Chris Cobler. Rotary member Skip Sockell had invited Cobler to speak on the subject of engaging the community.

After Cobler presented his speech, Boyd dominated the audience floor so much that acting Rotary President Jan Regan ordered Boyd to stop. Afterward, Regan and many other Rotarians apologized to Cobler for Boyd's conduct.

As events unfolded a week later, it became clear Boyd's attempt to

hijack the Rotary Club meeting was just part of a ruse to try to gain more votes in the May 4 election. Since the newspaper's ongoing investigation has revealed Boyd's serious conflicts of interest with owning a dredging company and serving on the port board, four people have filed to challenge him for his seat.

The other five current port board members are either unwitting or willing actors in what has become a tragedy at the public's expense. The port's special Austin attorney on the case, Bill Cobb, has billed the public about \$400,000 and counting to keep fighting the lawsuit. At last week's meeting, Cobb did all he could to keep the money train rolling in his direction, telling board members they had "absolutely not" violated the Texas Open Meetings Act, but had a 70 percent chance of winning should the case go to trial.

It takes considerable suspension of disbelief to equate "absolutely" to "70 percent." Even if board members accepted Cobb's questionable calculation of winning the case, they should realize by now that they are throwing good money after bad in keeping this doomed production afloat.

All the public's money should be going toward improving the port, not playing politics. The other port board members have the power to draw the curtain on this sad show.

Perhaps they can get inspiration from the Port Lavaca Main Street Theatre, where rehearsals for "Charlotte's Web" also went on last week. It's not too late for the port to untangle itself from the trap it has woven.

This opinion reflects the views of the Victoria Advocate's editorial board.

FROM OTHERS



SYNDICATED COLUMN

More university corruption

Last week's column discussed the highly publicized university corruption scheme wherein wealthy parents bought admission at prestigious universities for their children. That is dishonest and gives an unfair advantage to those young people but won't destroy the missions of the universities. There is little or no attention given by the mainstream media to the true cancer eating away at most of our institutions of higher learning.

Philip Carl Salzman, emeritus professor of anthropology at McGill University, explains that cancer in a Minding the Campus article, titled "What Your Sons and Daughters Will Learn at University."

Professor Salzman argues that for most of the 20th century, universities were dedicated to the advancement of knowledge. There was open exchange and competition in the marketplace of ideas. Different opinions were argued and respected. Most notably in the social sciences, social work, the humanities, education and law, this is no longer the case. Leftist political ideology has emerged. The most important thing to today's university communities is diversity of race, ethnicity, sex and economic class, on which they have spent billions of dollars. Conspicuously absent is diversity of ideology.

Students are taught that all cultural values are morally equivalent. That's ludicrous. Here are a few questions for those who make such a claim. Is forcible female genital mutilation, as practiced in nearly 30 sub-Saharan African and Middle Eastern countries, a morally equivalent cultural value? Slavery is currently practiced in Mauritania, Mali, Niger, Chad and Sudan; is it morally equivalent? In most of the Middle East, there are numerous limitations placed on women, such as prohibitions on driving, employment and education. Under Islamic law in some countries, female adulterers face death by stoning. Thieves face the punishment of having their hands severed. Homosexuality is a crime punishable by death in some countries. Are these cultural values morally equivalent, superior or inferior to Western values?

Social justice theory holds the vision that the world is divided between oppressors and victims. The theory holds that by their toxic masculinity, heterosexual white males are oppressors. Among their victims are females, people of color and male and female homosexuals. The world's Christians and Jews are oppressors, and Muslims are victims.

Increasingly, the classics of

Western civilization are being ignored. Why? Because they represent the work, almost exclusively, of "dead white men." Only works of females, people of color and non-Western authors are seen as virtuous. The same is true with political history. The U.S. Constitution should be less respected because its writers were white slaveholders. The academics who teach this nonsense to students are grossly ignorant of the struggle over the slavery issue at our 1787 Constitutional Convention.

Professor Salzman concludes his article with the observation that "Marxist social justice offers all the answers anyone needs, so no inquiry or serious research is required. Be confident that at university your children will learn 'the right side' to be on, if little else."

As a result of leftist indoctrination, many college students graduate illiterate, innumerate and resistant to understanding. A survey of employers showed that over 70 percent found college graduates were not well-prepared in skills such as "written communication," "working with numbers/statistics," "critical/analytical thinking" and second-language proficiency.

The American Council of Trustees and Alumni publishes occasional reports on what college students know. One report found that nearly 10 percent of the college graduates surveyed thought Judith Sheindlin, TV's Judge Judy, is a member of the U.S. Supreme Court.

Less than 20 percent of the college graduates knew the effect of the Emancipation Proclamation. More than a quarter of the college graduates did not know Franklin D. Roosevelt was president during World War II; one-third did not know he was the president who spearheaded the New Deal. Such ignorance might explain why these young people are the supporters of today's presidential candidates calling for America to become a socialist nation.

By the way, one need not be a Westerner to hold Western values. One just has to accept the sanctity of the individual above all else.



WALTER WILLIAMS

FROM YOU

We need to educate ourselves on Constitution, hold representatives accountable

Editor, the Advocate:

My last letter mentioned types of Socialism and a primary purpose of socialism is ownership or control of private property. Another plank Karl Marx espoused is a graduated income tax. The sixteenth amendment states this tax will not regard any census or enumeration. This is contrary to Article 9 Section 4 of the Constitution, "No Capitation, or other, direct tax shall be laid, (unless in Proportion to the Census or enumeration herein before directed to be taken).

This appears to me to be an unconstitutional amendment and some say it was not properly ratified. This amendment was passed in 1913, which is a

watershed year for socialist activity in this nation. The Federal Reserve was also created that year. Which brings in the plank of centralization of credit in the hands of the state by means of a national bank.

Article I Section 8 Clause 5: Congress shall coin money and regulate the value thereof. Section restricts the states to using gold or silver to pay debts. Also in 1913 the Senate would now be popularly elected with passage of the seventeenth amendment. Article I Section 3 states that Senators would be chosen by the respective state legislature, this was a check built into the Constitution to limit federal or central government powers.

Two other planks of communism/socialism are; the abolition of rights of inheritance and central government control of education. Not much more needs to be mentioned, because it is obvious that government is controlling education from preschool to the university level. It will only take a little more time before leaving something behind for those you love will be a wistful desire.

There are some that want to call a constitutional convention to propose amendments. Would it be better to educate ourselves on the Constitution and hold our representatives to abide by their oath to support and defend the Constitution?

Anthony Corte, Victoria

YOUR VOICES

Online comments on 'After seven decades, MIA Korean War veteran's remains to be buried at home' from March 28

According to 2018 statistics 7,700 Americans remain MIA from the Korean War. Some remain in North Korea while others have been interned in the Punchbowl Cemetery in Hawaii and identified by records research and DNA testing.

I have been a history geek since childhood and have learned over the years while wars seem to play a huge part in the world or nations history it always is distilled down to the individuals involved in

combat and in support. Each KIA/MIA is a part of a families loss. History tells us the outcome may be considered win, loss or tie.

Except when that flag draped coffin returns home. As a nation we honor Veterans on Veterans Day and those that gave their lives on Memorial Day. The point I would like to leave with each of us there are those flags are being folded 13 times and handed to a grieving loved one frequently and often passes unnoticed.

We must never forget. God bless the United States of America and Veterans that served with honor and those that gave that final measure of

devotion.

Daniel Martin

Online comments on 'Friday is National Vietnam War Veterans Day' from March 28

Vietnam Veterans, you deserve this day of recognition and so much more. Enjoy this day as best you can as I know it may dredge up some painful memories. I hope this day also reminds you of how grateful we are as a nation for your sacrifice of service. You answered the call to arms and for that we honor you this day and forever more.

And finally, Welcome Home; we love you!

Vanessa Hicks-Callaway

FIRST AMENDMENT

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

– First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution

YOUR POEM

Ghosts in the Parlor

The north wind came in.
In the parlor ghosts visit.
"Oooh," says one.
"Ahh," answers the other.
Close the door so that their noise is muffled.
Sr. Frances Cabrini Janvier, Victoria

WORDS

And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord: and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed. And the word of the Lord was published throughout all the region.
Acts 13:48-49

"True love is eternal, infinite, and always like itself. It is equal and pure, without violent demonstrations: it is seen with white hairs and is always young in the heart."

Honoré de Balzac (1799-1850) was a French novelist and playwright; the novel sequence La Comédie humaine, which presents a panorama of post-Napoleonic French life, is generally viewed as his magnum opus

WE WANT YOUR LETTERS

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