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- E-mail the entry form and **up to six opinion pieces, editorials or columns on a single subject** to SNPA at cindy@snpa.org. Entries must have been published – online or in print – by a daily or non-daily newspaper between May 1, 2018, and April 30, 2019. Deadline for entries is Friday, May 3, 2019.
- If possible, please submit your opinion pieces, editorials or columns as PDF files.
- Writers may submit multiple entries into this contest.
- If you have questions, call Cindy Durham in the SNPA office at (404) 256-0444 or e-mail cindy@snpa.org.

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What is the subject/title of the entry? "What are they hiding"

Date(s) of publication? Sept. 11, 2018; Oct. 20, 2018; Sept. 8, 2019; June 19, 2018; April 13, 2019.

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

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

These unflinching editorials take aim at Anderson County Sheriff Greg Taylor, his ongoing efforts to suppress information concerning the death of county jail prisoner Rhonda Newsome last year, and his closed-door policies on public access to the county jail.

Among other things, the editorials revealed, through Gerritt's independent reporting, the Sheriff's Office taped over the surveillance video from the day Newsome died. Through interviews with former county jail prisoners, also conducted by Gerritt, the editorials raised serious questions about the circumstances of Newsome's death, as well as the Sheriff's Office failure to comply with state jail standards, and the inability of the state to enforce standards.

One editorial, "Unlock jailhouse doors," exposed the sheriff's closed-door policies on the county jail — policies so restrictive they are practically unique, even in Texas. Taylor is probably Texas' only sheriff to ban any public, or media, access to the county jail, which he treated like his personal property.

Taylor also refused to release Newsome's jail medical records to her family, citing federal regulations protecting Newsome's privacy, a self-serving argument Gerritt's editorials thoroughly debunked.

Before Gerritt became editor of the Herald-Press in 2017, jail deaths were non-events, not reported by local media or the Sheriff's Office. "Jail deaths aren't news," Taylor told Gerritt, two weeks after he became PHP editor.

Taylor, the self-proclaimed "God of Anderson County," had intimidated the local media and his critics into silence. One call from Taylor would kill a radio or newspaper story. When Gerritt stood up to Taylor, the sheriff was stunned and furious, immediately placing an information embargo on the Herald-Press. That happened two weeks after Gerritt became editor. Gerritt didn't blink.

At first, his editorials on the Sheriff's Office offended many people in the community. Gradually, however, Taylor's credibility eroded (taping over the surveillance video of Newsome's death was a turning point). More and more readers began to question his tactics and policies. Early this year, Taylor saw the handwriting on the wall and quietly announced he would not seek a fifth four-year term.

Gerritt's editorials sparked a wrongful death lawsuit and a nascent federal investigation into the jail. Most importantly, they backed down an increasingly unpopular and discredited sheriff. The two people running to succeed him have also read the handwriting on the wall — and in the Herald-Press: They've made transparency in the county jail a campaign centerpiece.

Pulisher Jake Mienk

Palestine Herald-Press

A Newspaper Holdings Inc. Newspaper

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LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Too many deaths in county jail

We have heard of inmate deaths too many times. We as citizens need to address the conduct and misconduct of officers within our community.

We can all say we are Christians or really good people. But why would we stand still while someone's loved one dies in jail? She might have committed a crime, but did she deserve to die? Is not our justice system meant to find the guilt or innocence of any person arrested and charged? In this county, arrest could mean death before any court (proceedings).

Then the lawsuits impact citizens. They (law enforcement) get sued and you pay higher taxes. Not to mention the citizens we want to stay (are) moving away because of the climate this creates.

Together, we are one community that makes a strong America and a community worth living in. Like others, I have placed my property up for sale due to corruption and abuses of officers. Those responsible could care less, because citizens pay the bill.

Dolores McCarther
Palestine

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Reference to slavery misguided

Once again we have to get slavery into any article regarding African Americans. ("In Praise of black fathers," June 16) Dragging Jamestown 1619 into June 2018 is another cheap effort to allow people to disavow any responsibility for their situation in life. I never owned a slave and Mr. Watkins never picked cotton!

Mary. T. Mazzarella
Andover, Ma.

WORDS OF WISDOM

Fathers, do not exasperate your children, instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.

—Ephesians 6:4

The First Amendment

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

Give us a holler

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OUR OPINION

Unlock jailhouse doors

By banning the public from inside the Anderson County jail, Sheriff Greg Taylor continues to treat the local lockup as his personal property. It is not.

The jail belongs to the people of Anderson County. They paid nearly \$10 million in 2007 to build the 200-bed slammer, and they continue to pay \$2.6 million a year to operate it. They also pay Taylor's annual salary of more than \$68,000.

Taxpayers have a right to know what they're getting for their money. At minimum, prohibiting public access to the jail undermines the principles of open and transparent government.

Such a policy also arouses suspicions about the care and treatment of prisoners that might be entirely unwarranted. Speculations arising from the death Friday of a 50-year-old prisoner underscore the need for open access and communication.

Instead, Taylor has denied or ignored at least four requests by the Herald-Press to tour the jail.

Texas has nearly 250 county jails. A spokesman for the Sheriff's Association of Texas said he knows of



Taylor

no other jail in the state with a policy similar to Anderson County's.

Nationwide, the vast majority of jails allow public access. Many sheriffs permit juvenile justice agencies to bring young people into their jails to listen to cautionary tales from prisoners.

Approved visits by the media or public don't place an undue burden on jail staff. They are scheduled and limited to a reasonable number.

Taylor argues public access would open the county to lawsuits.

Nonsense. Sheriffs with similar concerns simply require visitors to sign liability waivers.

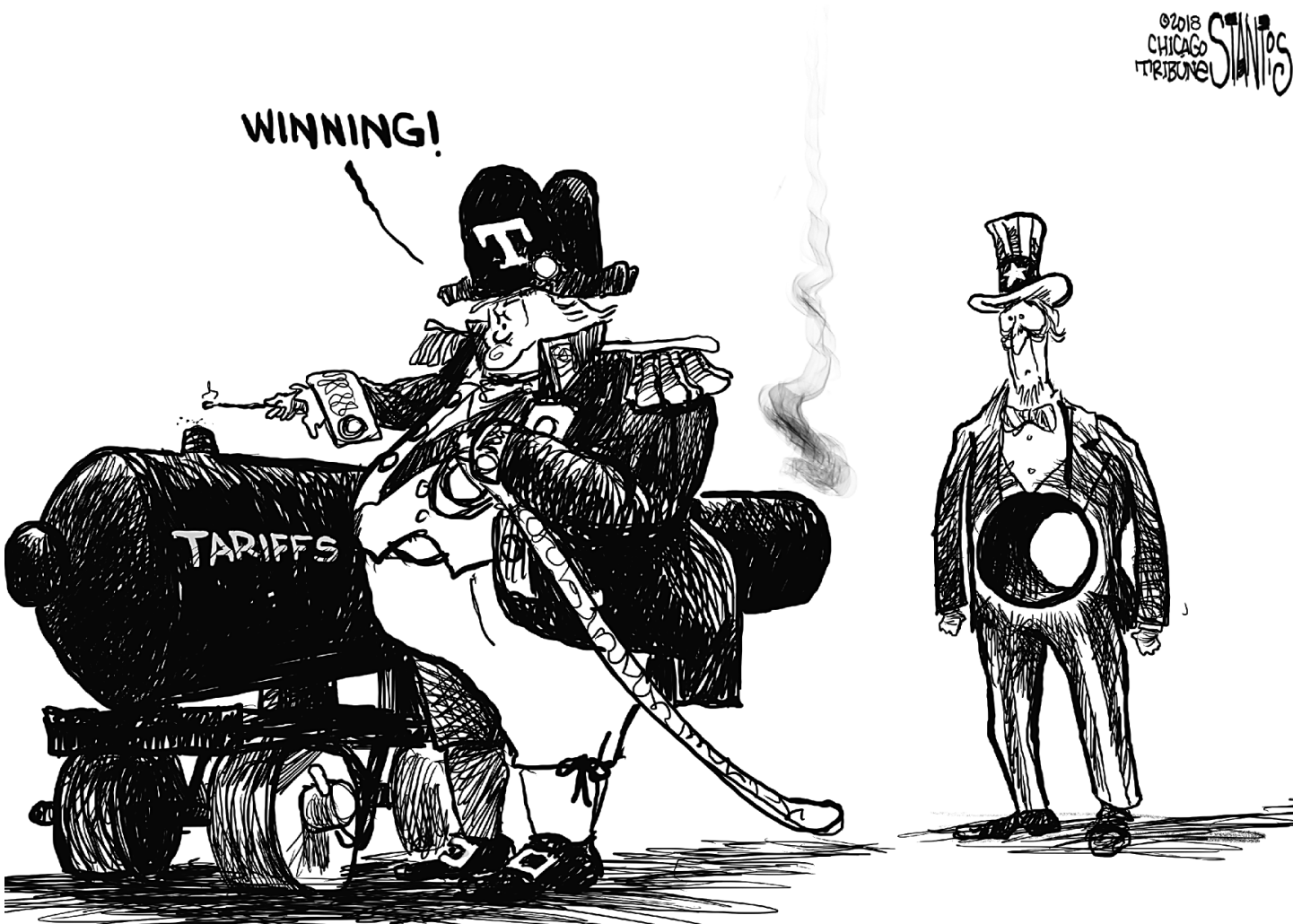
Anyone with some influence over Taylor, including county commissioners and County Judge Robert D. Johnston, should urge the sheriff to change this boneheaded policy.

Outside scrutiny is especially important to correctional facilities, whose inner workings are largely shielded from the public eye. It's also worth noting prisoners awaiting trial in county jails – sometimes for months, even years – have not been convicted. They are legally innocent, until proven otherwise in court.

At issue is open government, not the law. No state or federal law compels Texas sheriffs to open their jails to the public.

It would take a protracted and costly lawsuit to challenge Taylor's policy on the grounds that it violates the U.S. Constitution. The Texas Legislature could also pass a law requiring reasonable public access to county jails.

There's an easier way: Taylor should take a cue from his fellow sheriffs and open the jailhouse doors.



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BIBLE VERSE

We proclaim him [Jesus], admon-
ishing and teaching everyone with all
wisdom, so that we present everyone
perfect in Christ.

—Colossians 1:28

The First Amendment

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gion, or prohibiting the free exer-
cise thereof; or abridging the free-
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OUR OPINION

State created jail standards – now enforce them

Two years after Sandra Bland
hanged herself with a plastic trash
bag in the Waller County jail, Gov.
Greg Abbott signed legislation raising
standards for the custody and treat-
ment of jailhouse prisoners.

Commentators and activists called
the Sandra Bland Act of 2017 a mile-
stone for Texas, and the 1 million peo-
ple a year who cycle through its near-
ly 250 jails. Among other things, the
act established training and sorely
needed protocols for identifying and
treating mentally ill prisoners.

Today, however, a year after the
Bland Act took effect, custody stan-
dards remain unenforced and often
violated. Prisoner deaths continue to
rise.

The Texas Commission on Jail
Standards deploys just four inspec-
tors to cover the state – that's 250
jails, 65,000 prisoners, and nearly
270,000 square miles.

Annual TCJS inspections appear
professional and thorough, but count-
less day-to-day complaints by staff,
prisoners, and families go unexam-
ined, unless they trigger a costly law-
suit.

Inexperienced jailers render the
need for enforcing standards even
more compelling. Low pay means
high turnover. As civil rights attorney
Micah Belden of Sherman said:
“Guards can leave and make more at
Walmart.”

Enforcing standards will require
the state to take a more active role in
overseeing county jails, including hir-
ing sufficient inspectors, creating an
office charged with oversight, and
facilitating adequate and competitive
pay for jailers.

Legislators should also consider
bold and broader measures, including
making county jailers state employ-
ees, with training and pay compara-
ble to state corrections officers.

Reporting nearly 100 jail deaths a
year, Texas accounts for more than 10
percent of U.S. jail deaths, with sui-
cides making up 25 percent of them.
This year, the state is on track to
exceed 100 jail deaths, roughly 15
percent more than previous years.

‘They look right through you’

Jail inspection reports for 2018 cite
dozens of building and maintenance
violations, including leaky roofs, bro-
ken showers and intercoms, damaged
lights, cracked floors, hazardous
wiring, dirty cells and maintenance
areas, decaying walls, cell tempera-
tures as low as 54 degrees, and a lack
of mattresses.

Equally troubling are reports of
insufficient training, failing to inform
magistrates of mentally ill prisoners,
jailer logs that cover up improper
observations, and exceeding pre-



COURTESY PHOTO | KLTN

A corrections officer patrols the cell block at the Smith County Jail.

scribed jailer-to-prisoner staffing lev-
els of one to 48.

Prisoners say jail staff often fail to
make checks at prescribed intervals,
deliver needed prescriptions, provide
timely access to medical staff, and rec-
ognize and treat the mentally ill.

Underpinning Texas jail standards
are hourly face-to-face observations –
and checks every 30 minutes for
inmates with histories of assaults, sui-
cidal behavior, mental illness, or
bizarre behavior.

“That doesn't happen,” said
Barbara Nixon, 41, who spent 30 days
in the Anderson County jail in April
and May. “You see (jailers) maybe
twice a day, at the beginning of their
shift and the end.

Nixon also said the jailhouse male
nurse chewed and spat tobacco while
treating her.

Across-the-board, newly released
jail prisoners, in eight interviews
with the Herald-Press editorial page,
cited indifferent and unresponsive
jailers and staff.

“They treat you like you're noth-
ing,” said a 36-year-old recently
released Harris County prisoner.
“They look right through you.”

Sheriff Taylor didn't return
numerous phone calls. He also
declined to discuss two recent in-cus-
tody deaths: Edward Brown, 31, on
April 17, 2017; and Rhonda
Newsome, 50, on May 15.

Inspectors, however, rated the

Anderson County jail compliant with
state standards.

The price of negligence

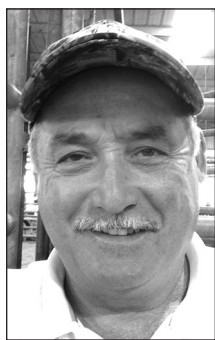
Federal courts have ruled prison-
ers have a constitutional right to
adequate health care. Three out of
four Texas jail prisoners are pre-trial
detainees, most of whom could not
afford bail. They haven't been con-
victed and, therefore, are legally not
guilty.

When negligence contributes to
their deaths, local governments pay
a steep price. Bland's death, for
instance, cost Waller County a near-
ly \$2-million out-of-court settlement.
The state's laxity in overseeing
jails contrasts with the intense
scrutiny it gives nursing homes,
which often receive dozens of on-site
visits a year by state inspectors.
Even most jail deaths are not, rou-
tinely, investigated on-site by the
commission. Instead, inspectors rely
on video and documents.

No doubt, prisoners often enter jail
in poor health. Not all in-custody
deaths are preventable. Still, a high-
ly trained and committed staff, act-
ing in full accord with state jail stan-
dards, would have saved many lives,
including 28-year-old Sandra
Bland's.

Texas can't resurrect those lives,
but it can save others by finally
enforcing its exemplary jail stan-
dards.

Feeling no pain



Michael Thomason

Near As I Can Tell

them it's ok. I suppose it's a sort of
macho reaction. Pain tolerance is
equated with manhood and stoic
toughness. As such, I admire those
who are able to endure the pain
without opiates.

Me, I'm a little different; I'm no
sissy but I'm no Superman either.
My physical therapist as well as
doctors tell me that I should take
painkillers, especially right before
therapy, so that they can stretch
my limbs more than I would other-
wise be able to endure. In that
respect, it seems counterproductive
to disregard doctor's instructions.
Nobody wants to be worse off than
they were before surgery, surgery
meant to correct lack of mobility, in
hips and knees and shoulders for
instance. So I follow doctor's
instructions to the tee.

However, I am well aware of the
dangers of drug addiction. I once
found a container of hydrocodone
and a fifth of whiskey behind the
seat of a friend's pickup. He was
swallowing three or four at a time
and washing it down with alcohol. I
cannot imagine how he managed to
walk, much less drive. And given
the side effects of the small doses of
opiates I have taken, I have great
sympathy for anyone trying to get
them out of their system.

Here are some symptoms I have

experienced in the weeks after
surgery: I get what I call 'sinking
spells' now and again. They usually
last about an hour. All I want to do
is lie down and not be bothered. I
feel slightly nauseous, completely
listless, and quite irritable in a non
specific way. I also have panic
attacks and feelings of claustropho-
bia if I am restricted physically in
any way. This can include sitting at
tables with little leg room or bed
sheets that are too tight. Judy just
read this and said it was mighty
hard to tell if all this was before or
after my surgery. She then went off
laughing. She thinks she is funny.

In my innocent ignorance, I
thought opiate painkillers were
keeping these symptoms at bay.
The reality was they were the
source, a side effect.

As the pain of surgery fades, so
too should the use of opiates. This
is easier said than done. I put the
Hydrocodone away after two weeks
of use. It was way more powerful
than I imagined. For about three
days, I thought I would have to die
to feel normal. My doctor switched
me over to Tramadol which is an
artificial opiate and way less power-
ful than true opiates like morphine
or codeine. Tramadol stays in the
system 24/7. I tried to quit it cold
turkey last week, but the turkey
won. I almost went insane from the
withdrawal symptoms, one of which
consisted of feverishly counting the
remaining pills over and over like
some kind of mad mathematician,
figuring the exact time remaining
until the next dose. I am currently
tapering off and managing the tran-
sition but I would not recommend
aggravating me even on the most
insignificant subject, at least for the
next two weeks. I should be fairly
normal afterwards. Near as I can
tell, anyhow.

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WORDS OF WISDOM

[The Lord says,] "Even to your old age and gray hairs, I am he, I am he who will sustain you. I have made you and I will carry you; I will sustain you and I will rescue you.

—Isaiah 46:4

The First Amendment

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OUR OPINION

What are they hiding?

Anderson County Sheriff Greg Taylor is either hiding something about the death of prisoner Rhonda Newsome, or fanning flames of suspicion that may be entirely unwarranted.

Either way, he's doing the public a disservice and should immediately authorize the release of the jail surveillance video from June 15, the day Newsome died.

The sheriff's office recklessly taped over the surveillance video. Then it asked the Texas Commission on Jail Standards to withhold the commission's copy from the Herald-Press.

On Monday, the state jail commission denied the Herald Press access to the video, after telling the newspaper the previous Friday a reporter and editor could view it at the commission's office in Austin, 175 miles away.

Equally disturbing, the commission said Thursday the surveillance video was damaged and not digitally transferable.

State law should prohibit any county sheriff's office from erasing, or taping over, surveillance video relevant to a prisoner's death. If the Anderson County Sheriff's Office hadn't done so, the public would have had a clean, undamaged copy of the video.

The Texas Commission on Jail Standards cited state statutes permitting public officials to withhold information during an investigation. The commission, however, has already completed its review of Newsome's death.

Even so, under the state's anemic public information laws, the commission can now wait another 45 days, while the Texas Attorney General reviews the public information request.

Newsome, 50, died in jail June 15,

three months after she was locked up on charges of aggravated assault. The charges stem from a family fight.

Several former prisoners told the Herald-Press that Newsome, swollen on her left side and bleeding from the mouth, requested hospital treatment for at least 12 hours before she died.

In light of those allegations, the Herald-Press did what any newspaper should do: Request the surveillance video and dig deeper.

Anderson County residents and taxpayers should know about any negligence in a prisoner's death, which can trigger costly litigation. They won't get that information from a closed and unaccountable sheriff's office.

Jail prisoner deaths plague the state, with nearly 100 a year reported in Texas. This state accounts for more than 10 percent of all U.S. jail deaths.

No one should assume, without evidence, negligence contributed to Newsome's death.

Still, fighting public information requests inevitably raises doubts.

Taylor has refused to speak to the Herald-Press – except to advance his interests – since Jeffery Gerritt became editor in May of last year.

That means Anderson County residents, who pay Taylor's annual salary of more than \$68,000, often go without, among other things, information on crime in their neighborhoods.

Taping over surveillance video that would shed light on Rhonda Newsome's death might be just another in-your-face response by a public official who can't separate personal beefs from professional obligations.

Or, maybe, Taylor really is hiding something.



TAYLOR



NEWSOME

Tattoo parlor welcome downtown

The Palestine Area Chamber of Commerce is committed to enhancing the community by promoting business and commerce, supporting sustainable economic growth, and advocating for our city's economic and social interests.

For this reason, I would like to clarify a statement I made Friday to Palestine's Planning and Zoning Committee. I regret that some people took my statements out of context.

Neither I nor the Chamber oppose a tattoo parlor in downtown Palestine. When done well, such a business can bring a great vibe to our city.

The issue before the Planning and Zoning Committee meeting was not



Michelle Merryman Bell

whether to bring such a business downtown but, rather, where that business should locate.

Several adjacent businesses opposed locating the tattoo parlor on a

historic corner. As Chamber director, I am responsible for bringing any objections by the business community to the planning committee.

In no way, however, did I mean to disparage the tattoo parlor, or its place in a vital and welcome diversity of downtown businesses.

I am a professional, entrepreneur and small-business owner. Most of all, I am passionate about our city's growth.

We, the Palestine Area Chamber of Commerce, will continue to do what we do best: Support the business community and help make Palestine a great place to live and do business.

Michele Merryman Bell

Repair broken windows, remedy blight, homelessness

In 1982, James Q. Wilson and his Harvard colleague George Kelling offered a simple idea that had a profound effect on policing: "If a window in a building is broken and is left unrepaired, all the rest of the windows will soon be broken." And that is not simply a blight for the neighbors but a clear message that the neighborhood is dangerous, which in turn makes it more dangerous.

When police maintain order and civility, there is less crime. People aren't afraid to walk to the corner, which makes the street safer. Hoodlums look around and see trouble, not opportunity.

Shortly after writing the article, Kelling organized a group of police chiefs along with a few academics whose work focused on crime (mine was on sexual assault) to discuss the implementation of their theory.

Almost every big-city police chief participated. The attorney general came regularly. There was money on the table to try it, and a new generation of chiefs like Bill Bratton, who at the time was chief of the transit police in New York and then became a widely praised commissioner in New York and chief in Los Angeles, were ready to try.

The challenge, then and now, was to maintain the public order that makes neighborhoods safer in a non-racist way. The sad correlation between race and crime, which is the real problem, persists. What many people tend to forget is that the victims of crime look very much like the perpetrators in terms of race, the only difference being that more of them are women.

The idea of community policing was that police, instead of being seen as an external force implementing whatever policies they wanted, need to be part of the community, and deciding how to enforce order and civility is something that the commu-



Susan Estrich

nity needs to be part of. Police responsiveness tends to be measured by response time: how long between the 911 call and the police arrival on the scene. But every expert agrees that in most cases, it doesn't matter, because the crime has already been committed and the criminal has already fled before the first call is made. Once the guy escapes, it doesn't matter whether the police arrive five minutes later or 15. But in the 1970s, when police brutality was a huge issue in the courts, police officers were overwhelmingly white, and relations between the police and the high-crime neighborhoods they patrolled had soured, police got in their cars and drove around waiting for calls where their immediate presence did not matter at all: The car was gone; the drug dealer had moved on from the corner; the burglary was over who knows when; and all the windows were already broken.

The new theory was to get the police out of their cars and into the community, to build bonds so that the overwhelming majority of law-abiding citizens feels safer, not "policed." Fear of crime exacts costs that can be greater than the crimes themselves. And fear is a self-fulfilling prophecy. The more afraid people are, the more they avoid going out at night or taking the subway or the bus, the more likely it is that hoodlums start breaking all the windows to remind people

that they are right to be afraid because hoodlums are in control.

Which brings me to last week's opinion by the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals that homeless people have a right to sleep on the street unless there is a shelter bed waiting for them.

Now, we have a homelessness problem in America, and a major one in my city, Los Angeles. But let's not kid ourselves. When walking on the boardwalk in Venice, which is a neighborhood in LA that faces a growing homelessness problem, I did not see a single family of hardworking parents in a tent with nowhere for their children to sleep. They are sleeping in one room at the relatives', trying to make enough for their own place. We should help them. We should help veterans and seniors. We need more facilities to take care of the mentally ill. What I saw, and what neighborhood leaders have found, is a slew of young white druggies who are not from Venice but came here for the beach, complete with public showers and public toilets that they often don't bother to use. It's not that they can't get jobs. At one restaurant down the street from the beach, just one, there were 11 job postings, everything from dishwashers to busboys to baristas to hostesses. There are plenty of young people on the beach who could fill them. They don't want to. Why work? Why go to a shelter, like the "transitional" tent city (complete with health care and job training and, of course, a major police presence) the mayor is proposing and neighbors from every walk of life are opposing, when you can live freely and steal bikes and do drugs right on the beach?

A constitutional right to sleep on the streets is not the answer to anything. And that is as true in 2018 as it was when the chiefs got together in the 1980s.

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Jake Mienk, Publisher
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Purple popsicle pedal pusher

I watched a pretty young girl go sauntering by out on the sidewalk, eating a popsicle. She looked to be maybe fifteen or so and had on white pedal pushers, flip-flops, and a tee shirt with sparkly designs. Her expression was flat, like she was home on the couch with no one watching. She absently bit at the purple popsicle without seeming to enjoy, relish, or acknowledge the activity. I wish I could explain that look better. Sometimes people get lost in thought and don't see or react to the world around them. You can see this look sometimes on people driving by in a car. They just stare ahead and have no expression or seemingly, reaction. I'm sure we all look kind of dumb when we're in that zoned out frame of mind.

The girl finished the popsicle as she passed my truck, parked and people watching while Judy ran in to pick up an order from the department store. She let the paper popsicle wrapping drop from her grasp without effort or aim. She just kind of absently fluttered her fingers and discarded it. I watched the purple-stained paper tumble off across a grassy area and stick to a fire hydrant. Somebody, someday, was going to have to pick that wrapper up, along with any other nearby litter. That aggravated me a little, that this teenager would so casually clutter up the landscape without thought or care. If I were to admonish her behavior, it would do no good and I would probably be perceived as a busybody jerk, or worse; some kind of pervert for watching a girl instead of minding my own business. I sighed and shook my head.

The girl licked at her fingers as she ambled on. I think she must not have had a care in the world for the shuffling way she headed for the mall entry doors. I noticed she had a phone in her other, non-purple hand and was holding a conversation with somebody as she passed. At least I think there was a conversation going on. She wasn't saying anything that I could tell. She just had the phone up to her ear, idly listening. I have seen this behavior before, people listening to other people breath on the phone. I always thought a phone was a device for transmitting important information from a distance. Many today seem to simply connect, then spend half an hour breathing now and again and saying things like: "Uh huh." You can see them at stores everywhere, 'uh huhing' into cellphones while the cashier has to ask twice or three times to get their attention. There are even little signs at some places that say things like: "We will be happy to serve you when you get off the phone," which people like the girl generally ignore and simply stare back and dump a wadded up five on the counter and go back to breathing and saying: "Uh, huh." This is the type of oblivious person who lets the door close on the next person behind them and makes you wish you had a convenient lizard you could drop down their collar.

The girl wiped her fingers on her pants leg. Somewhere, sometime, somebody was going to have to wash those clothes, somebody like a mother or aunt whose day was long enough without the added burden of purple stain removal from a pair of white pants somebody had to work long hours to pay for. I sighed again.

As the girl passed me from left to right, I saw she was headed for a long bank of glass doors to the big department store. Still on the phone, nodding her head from time to time, still licking and wiping at the purple, she walked full on into a glass panel, thinking it was a door. It was not. It was a window. She was knocked completely backwards and fell down in the most random, arms and legs akimbo way you could imagine or wish for. You could see the glass flex and rattle from the impact. The cell phone went flying and her designer tee shirt came up her back far enough to show anybody interested that she was wearing a thong. From the impact, I imagined there was a sticky purple smear shaped like a pretty girl left on the glass. I smiled. Life is good sometimes, in the smallest of ways.

BIBLE VERSE

Wait for the Lord; be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord.

—Psalm 27:14



Michael Thomason
Near As I Can Tell

Over the last two months, Anderson County Sheriff Greg Taylor has throttled every information source within reach that could shed light on prisoner Rhonda Newsome's death.

Now, by withholding Newsome's medical records from her family, Taylor is not only stretching the limits of state public information laws to stiff the Herald-Press, but also ignoring federal regulations on the security of health information. He is becoming a law unto himself.

On Oct. 4, Anderson County rejected a legally sound request from Newsome's son, Regan Kimbrough, for his mother's medical records during the three months she was incarcerated. Newsome, 50, died in the county jail on June 15.

Anderson County attorney Robert Davis cited federal regulations under the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA), protecting Newsome's medical privacy. Despite the county's touching concern for Newsome's privacy, Davis ignored Kimbrough's right,

as the administrator of his mother's estate, to obtain those records under the same regulations.

In contrast, Palestine Regional Medical Center recognized Kimbrough's authority to secure his mother's medical records and released them.

Anderson County also invoked the Texas Public Information Act, which permits law enforcement, under certain circumstances, to withhold public records during an investigation.

Texas public information laws, however, apply to public information only. They have nothing to say about private medical records.

Newsome died four months ago. Anderson County's purported ongoing investigation into her death also raises questions. It seems unlikely the Sheriff's Office would erase video surveillance of a death it continues to investigate.

In an Aug. 23 email to the Herald-Press, under the sheriff's official letterhead, records administrator Jeanette Kimball stated she checked with the jail captain and the video "had already been record-

ed over...so we no longer have this surveillance."

Former prisoners told the Herald-Press Newsome, bleeding from the mouth, had pleaded to go to the hospital for several days before she died. They also said the entire left side of her body was swollen.

Aside from testimony from former inmates, no evidence to date shows the jail was negligent in Newsome's death, or even in violation of state standards. In fact, a state standards commission investigation found no violations.

Taylor should play it cool and release the information. At minimum, he ought to immediately release the medical records requested by Newsome's son. He's entitled to know more about how and why his mother died.

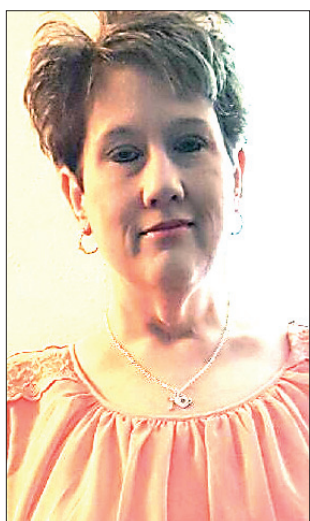
Eventually, the information will get out, anyway. Withholding it now only fuels outsized suspicions.

Continuing to suppress public information on every front makes the sheriff look bad.

Withholding Newsome's medical records from her family makes him look even worse.



TAYLOR



NEWSOME



Facebook feedback to 'Heat killing prisoners, advocates say'

Donna Young Capell – What happened to loose all rights when you go to prison ? Need to bring the rock pile back

Patty Jo Miller – Donna Young Capell um you don't lose all your rights in prison. Get an education.

Donna Young Capell – Patty Jo Miller in the old days you did
Crystal Wilcher – Now days the inmates have more rights than the officer that work there. That is what is sad.

Laura Burgamy Griffith – I would rather see the elderly taken care of first. Many of them have no a/c.

John Crawford – Who cares. Why make it comfortable for criminals? Do the crime do the time.

Jason McEntire – Take care of our vets before inmates.

Richard N Jennifer Dowgill – Don't do the crime and you won't be in prison.

Theresa Grant Lankford – I agree whole heartedly Jason McEntire!!

Devin M. Jackson – I really hate this; hate it's cooler now for the sweet, "I'm innocent" felons Good enough for our servicemen, good enough for them

Amanda Link – I feel that if you are in prison then you shouldn't get so many accommodations!! If they made it bad for inmates then maybe they wouldn't come back. We shouldn't have to worry about being sued by inmates for offending them all the time!! The prisons here are more worried about inmates rights more than the officers rights!
Christy Lynch – If our soldiers can stand the heat. So can a person

who broke the law. I don't feel bad for any of them. They get to much as it is that we have to pay for. I don't get free gym membership, free cable, free food and so on.

R Brian Sekol – If you start working in the heat early each morning you'll acclimatize to it, a little water and a lot of sweat will cool anyone.

Shawn Bishop – Don't go to prison. Problem solved

Jimmy Pryor – I always love these posts, get to hear all the great ideas from people that have no clue what they are talking about !!!

Christopher Smith – Don't go to jail. How's that??

Jimmy Pryor – You're correct, that is the best way for them to avoid the extreme heat !

Carolyn J Burton Holcombe – We are Praying for You both, Father God, We do Pray for All Your People is in need for Your help. Father God, we do ask

"Forgiveness" for Our Sins. Open Our Eyes To "Your Holy Truth". Peace and Health in Our Bodies.

Carolyn J Burton Holcombe – Hallelujah, Hallelujah AnyWay! Amen

Ken Alford – They need to be out in the fields hoeing vegetables, not sitting on their butts inside.

Vicki Taylor – Ken Alford right. If they want to eat, they should grow, raise and process their own food..

Vicki Taylor – Ummm, they aren't there for vacation...

Tracey Givens – I agree, they have no clue. They're on the outside looking in.

Jerry N Misty Holliday – That's cause we abide by the law. It's not rocket science, nor is it difficult. Christopher Smith – Don't go to jail.

Mary Lawson Estrada – All I will say is if you don't like the heat don't get locked up. 2 Summer's in Dawson State Jail taught me a lesson.

Rebecca Ellis Horton – Wah Wah-cry me a river!!

Kerri Warren Bell – Vets before crooks!!!

Rusty Thompson – Obey the law and you won't have to suffer why are we take care of them first and not our elders and vets ?

Felicia Wesley Holcomb – I guess they don't realize correctional officers WORK in the same exact conditions???

Jimmy Pryor – Exactly !!

Nancy Pick – It is not a country club and you're not in prison for going to church on Sunday. Do the crime—Do the time

Amanda Louella Scoggin – This is the dumbest thing I have ever heard!

Andrew Matthews – All of y'all saying they have too many "accommodations", screw you. I've been down twice myself because of "outdated" thinking. Before you start to rant I'm the child of two Prison guards and my stepmother is as well.

Andrew Matthews – Oh, and just for knowledge's sake, ex guard myself. It gets in the lower 120's in the dorms during the day. Our guards are in that as well.

The First Amendment

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Give us a holler

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Great expectations

One of the most difficult tasks in life is to try to live up to someone else's expectations. We all want to encourage and support our children, but not dominate to the point they cannot express themselves. I recall a single mother who fretted, for good reasons, I am sure, that her son would become a bum like his father if she did not keep him on the straight and narrow.

This well-meaning mother almost suffocated the boy, thinking she was protecting him. She punished the father by keeping the boy from him. In doing so, she was also punishing the child. She kept him from any contact with his father or his family. She criticized almost everything the child did, and in the most arbitrary way kept him in a strait jacket lifestyle.

She judged and corrected his every word and deed from the time he could walk. As an unrelated observer, I felt the child's pain but it was not my place to interfere. His mother had the best of intentions. She was not going to let the boy grow up to be irresponsible like his father who never supported or claimed the child.

She did everything physical to raise her son; took him to school, made sure he did his lessons, clothed him properly and kept him away from junk food. She took him to church every Sunday. In her determined effort to raise the perfect child, she left out the one thing he child needed most, acceptance, not acceptance as a burden or in obedience to some commandment from the King James Bible she carried with her day and night, but simple acceptance for who he was as a person.

He didn't know his father, and his mother seemed constantly upset at him. How lonesome that feeling is; to feel rejected by the one, resented by the other, loved by neither; at least in the innocent eyes of a little boy. He probably wondered what he had done wrong to make everyone so unhappy with him.

We are not bound to repeat the sins of our fathers, or mothers, or anyone else. The mother, well intentioned as she was, was molding a personality into that child that was hers, not his.

We are taught that a child cannot think for themselves until they reach the age of accountability. In that respect, parents and guardians are the moral, and legal, protectors of their children. A minor is just that, and does require dedication on the part of his or her guardians to see them through childhood to adulthood.

But what is gained if the child can never live up to a parent's expectations? Is he or she a failure? This is a difficult question. Eventually, all children grow up and become who they will be, guided by their free will. If we smother our children too much or criticize them constantly, we risk creating the very adult behavior we tried to prevent. What is missing is warmth, and love. Love cannot be manufactured or trained or taught or bought in a bottle. You cannot replace love with guilt and call all accounts square.

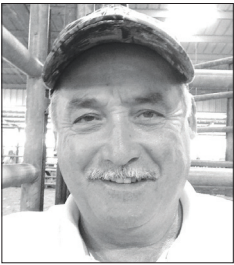
And then there is the opposite, the cod-dling of our children. The admissions scandal rocking the academic world just now is a good example of parents who go too far the other way in a misguided attempt to guarantee their child's success. These 'helicopter' parents want to insulate their children from all the bumps in the road, smoothing the pathway for them. This is not the Wizard of Oz. Children are not made smart or successful by the presentation of a degree, as if the magic is in the paper itself. The work the child put in to get the degree is the real prize.

Let us always seek the best for our children. But let us also allow them to be who they are. In the case of the little boy I spoke of, he has grown up into a fine young man who will do well in life, and from a distance, I am relieved. I never spoke to his mother about how she was making his little life miserable. Maybe she was right in how she raised him, or maybe he thrived in spite of it.

Once, when he was only five or so, I caught him in a private moment and kneeling to tie his shoelace, said in a quiet voice: "It's going to be ok. Your mom loves you." He gave me the most serious look I've ever seen. Then he grinned and ran off without a comment. Maybe I helped a little, too.

BIBLE VERSE

Hate evil, love good; maintain justice in the courts. Perhaps the LORD God Almighty will have mercy on the remnant of Joseph.
—Amos 5:15



Michael Thomason
Near As I Can Tell

Permit clergy in execution chamber

Whatever Texans think of the death penalty – and most vigorously support it – we've never questioned the right of condemned prisoners to have a clergy member in the execution chamber.

Never, until last week, when the Texas Department of Criminal Justice started an unnecessary, constitutionally shaky, and mean-spirited policy that bans all clergy from the chamber.

The change in execution policies followed a 7-2 vote by the U.S. Supreme Court to stay the execution of Texas Death Row prisoner Patrick Murphy, 57. Murphy, who became a Buddhist almost a decade ago on Death Row, was scheduled to die by lethal injection at the state penitentiary in Huntsville.

Texas had denied Murphy's request to have a Buddhist clergy member next to him at the moment of execution. Before, TDCJ allowed its own chaplains in the execution chamber. The department, however, employs only Christian and Muslim clergy, raising the constitutional issue of religious discrimination.

To side-step the discrimination issue, the department won't allow clergy of any faith in the execution chamber. The new policy will affect mostly Christians, who make up the vast majority of Texas' nearly 150,000 prisoners.

Courts will determine whether the department's new policy conforms to the constitution, or unlawfully restricts religious freedom. Either way, Texas made a short-sighted decision. It could have easily resolved this case by hiring a Buddhist chaplain, or spiritual advisor, to perform last rites at Murphy's execution.

Doing so would have enabled the state to move forward, without delay, with Murphy's execution. Now, the state will have to wait until the appellate courts hear Murphy's appeal.

A one-time contract with a Buddhist chaplain probably would cost the state nothing. Ken Goldberg, chaplain of the Buddhist



COURTESY PHOTO | Texas Department of Criminal Justice
Texas' execution chamber in Huntsville.

Center of Dallas, told the Herald-Press editorial page he would perform the service without charge. He already attends to dying hospital patients.

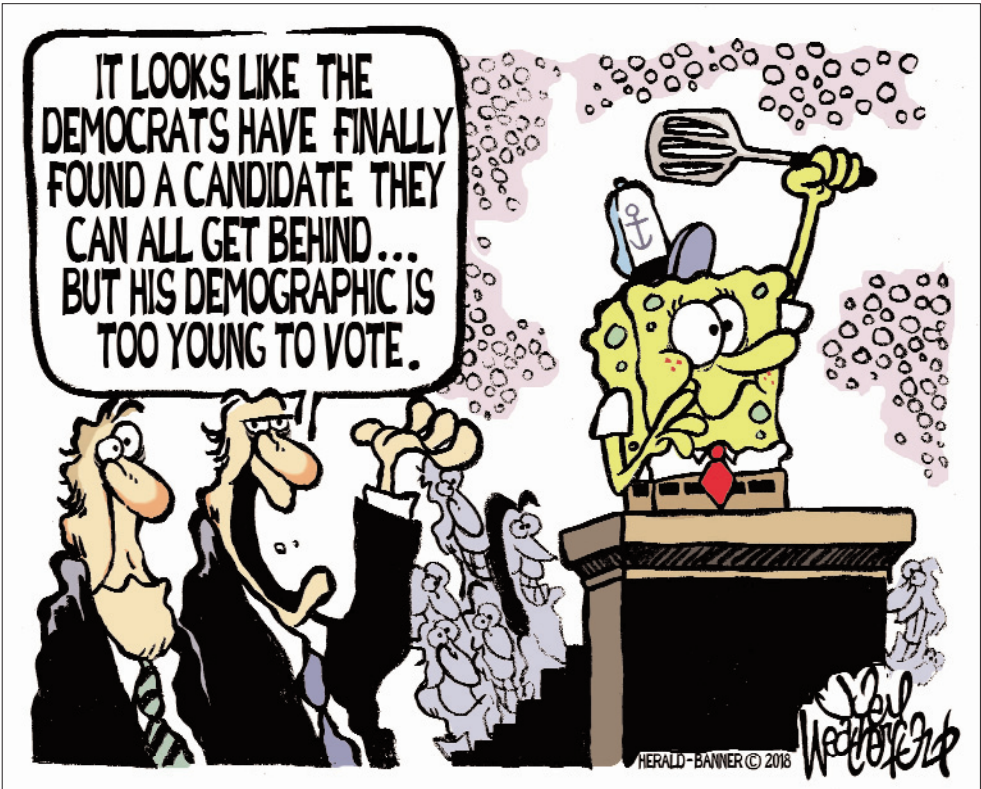
TDCJ could apply the same rigorous accreditation standards and background checks to a contract with Goldberg, or another Buddhist chaplain, that it does for its own clergy.

Instead of resolving the problem in a simple and humane way, the state decided to, in effect, stand the Equal Protection Clause of the 14th amendment on its head.

Murphy will elicit little public sympathy. After breaking out of a maximum-security prison in 2000, he and six other escapees, known as the "Texas 7," robbed a sporting goods store. During the robbery, a police officer was shot and killed. Murphy, who acted as a lookout in the getaway vehicle, was convicted of capital murder and sentenced to death.

But this isn't about Murphy. It's about the constitutional protection of religious freedom and rights for everyone, even condemned prisoners.

For Christian inmates, the presence of a clergy in their final moment recognizes the state of Texas has rendered its judgment — now, another judgment awaits them. That's a moment the state should relinquish to a higher power, and the U.S. constitution.



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