



Carmage Walls
Commentary Prize

2019 Entry Form

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What is the subject/title of the entry?

A year at risk

Date(s) of publication?

May 16, 2018 – editorial; June 20, 2018 – Ken Stickney column; July 5, 2018 – editorial; July 7, 2018 – editorial; Aug. 1, 2018 – Ken Stickney column; March 12, 2019 - editorial

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.)

Hurricane Harvey's ill effects from 60 inches of rain lasted long after the August 2017 storm. It left a population — mostly uninsured for flooding — imperiled, with 80 percent of structures here flooded and people reeling for available housing, out of cash, with nerves taut and desperate for help.

Homicides soared from 5 to 14, 2017 vs. 2018, people crammed into ill-suited housing situations and desperate people suffered the consequences.

The editorials and comments spoke to social disorder and their consequences in Port Arthur, a year of living at risk in a city always on the edge of despair.

In Our 120th Year
The News

Rich Macke
publisher

Ken Stickney
editor

EDITORIAL

Legg murder: Police need everyone's aid

Who knows what Michael Odell Legg was thinking as May 8 neared the embers of the evening. Few people start the day thinking it will be their last.

But for Legg — father, son, husband, brother, grandson, uncle, friend — it was.

The Port Arthur native's death — it occurred in what should have been a safe enough neighborhood late that day or early the next — ought to capture the notice of every Jefferson County resident who values his safety and that of his loved ones. The victim was only 40.

Murder is not the stuff of normal occurrences in Beauxart Gardens. Circumstances of the killing, revealed to police in the early morning hours of May 9, were arresting in themselves. Legg was apparently killed in the sanctity of his own home, outright heresy to those who believe home is the one place one ought to feel safe.

His murder likely occurred before 1:30 a.m. May 9, when a neighbor from safe distance saw footage that indicated suspicious people on his lawn. Police arrived, found no problems on that person's property, but saw open doors at Legg's address. They may have anticipated the worst.

The savage nature of Legg's death — he died from many wounds by a beating — testifies to the profound remorselessness of his attacker or attackers. It's not easy to beat someone to death — it requires intention and determination.

Legg was laid to rest Monday, but there should be no rest for those who took his life. Nederland police — the murder took place just outside the city limits — should be able to draw upon the resources of all local law enforcement agencies until the killer or killers are caught. If Legg could not be safe in his own residence, a single-family brick dwelling on a typical enough street — than none of us is safe.

Nederland has not investigated a murder since 2013 — it is by any standard a safe city — and that police department may need the acquired experience and polished skills of other, nearby law enforcement agencies that deal with murder more frequently. Now's the time to pull together.

Authorities have some footage, taken from a security system, that shows two "people of interest" in the area. Their presence does not prove their guilt but it gives investigators a start.

Footage shows two men, one wearing a crushable, beach hat with a flowered shirt of backpack, the other in a ballcap crawling beneath the camera. If the two on camera were innocent of murder, they ought to come forward to eliminate suspicion.

Neighbors and anyone else with even the smallest evidence about what happened ought to share their knowledge with police.

Michael Odell Legg didn't deserve to die like that.

No one does.

There is only one real deprivation... and that is not to be able to give one's gifts to those one loves most.

— May Sarton



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Editorial



COLUMN

Deaf and dumb: Lamar skirts the issue

The code of silence Lamar University is applying to its softball program's continuing imbroglio is akin to Kayo Dugan's in "On the Waterfront": deaf and dumb.

It explains nothing, teaches nothing, resolves nothing.

In short, Lamar has fired softball coach Holly Bruder but refused to say why. That can't satisfy anyone but the insiders, who want to style this developing scandal as a "personnel matter."

The backstory appears to be something of this sort, according to various Beaumont news media reports: Starting catcher Paige Holmes, a practicing Catholic, complained that a coach ordered her to eat meat on a Friday in Lent, over her protests, when the tuna she ordered didn't arrive at a restaurant. Holmes attempted later to speak with Bruder about what she believed to be an act of insensitivity toward the practice of her faith, and said Bruder wouldn't meet with her.

When Holmes complained to the athletic department,



KEN STICKNEY
Opinion

ment, according to print and broadcast reports, Bruder benched her for most of the rest of the season.

A handful of teammates say Holmes misrepresented what happened. The athletic department, after its own investigation, conceded a violation of an unnamed university policy. Holmes' depiction of events suggests coaches' retaliation against the player.

The coach and her defenders say it isn't so. In short, it's a mess.

Maybe some sharp lawyers told them all to shut up — legal action is imminent — and Lamar's athletic department,

prodded for more explanation, answered with a vanilla statement Tuesday that used 80 words to say almost nothing:

"We don't typically comment on personnel matters like this, but I can tell you that we conducted a thorough investigation regarding a violation of university policy pertaining to the softball program. Lamar University's primary mission is to educate our students. Any allegation that could affect the well-being and success of our students is taken very seriously. We are moving forward with the search for a new head coach. I'm sure we'll have more details on that in the coming weeks."

Got it?

Social media remains abuzz with this story. Softball fans, including some adults, have turned on Holmes, who is 20. Holmes' fellow Roman Catholics — Full disclosure: I am one — appreciate the severity of the offense if it happened as explained. If it has been explained, that explanation

didn't come from the university.

What Lamar University — I'm not talking about the athletic department, but the president's office — might have done is take a robust, full-throated stand in defense of religious freedom. That won't be coming, a campus spokesman said in the spirit of Kayo Dugan. By remaining deaf and dumb, Lamar as an institution looks weak, morally timid.

The university might have explained how precious our individual rights, afforded to us by the Constitution and its amendments, really are. Lamar might have explained that the First Amendment, which protects our freedom of worship, is not just a jumble of words on a cold page; it speaks to who we individuals are to our very core.

That might have educated students, which Lamar University insists is its primary mission. We heard that somewhere.

Ken Stickney is editor of The Port Arthur News.

COLUMN

'Reefer Madness' a threat to police dogs?

Years ago, a propaganda film entitled "Reefer Madness" depicted first-time cannabis smokers turning into instant maniacs, hallucinating, killing and raping after just a couple of puffs.

It has become known as a grand parody, though that was not the intent.

Please welcome to the same stage "The Illinois Histrionics Players," starring Macon County Sheriff Howard Buffett and his amiable sidekick, Chad Lerner, training director of the K-9 Training Academy in Decatur, Ill.

When asked about possible effects of legalizing marijuana in Illinois, the players went into full "Reefer Madness" mode, saying it would make the dogs useless and a threat to society, requiring them to give their dogs the "Old Yeller" treatment.

While Lerner did not specifically say how he would kill "a number" of his 275 narcotics-sniffing dogs, he made it clear he is prepared to sacrifice their lives on the altar of marijuana phobia.

He told Pantagraph reporter Ryan Voyles, "Because many K-9s are trained not to be social so their work won't be affected, a number of dogs would likely have to be euthanized."

Voyles then talked with police in two other Illinois towns who told him what



GRAHAM WEST
Opinion

many of you already know, which is that retired K-9 dogs typically live with their handlers. They don't slaughter the dogs.

Do you think for a minute that if any Macon County dogs are butchered, it's not because Lerner just plain wants to do it?

Another less brutal, "Reefer Madness" moment is when Macon County Sheriff Howard Buffett tells Voyles, "The biggest thing for law enforcement is, you're going to have to replace all of your dogs. So to me, it's a giant step forward for drug dealers, and it's a giant step backwards for law enforcement and the residents of the community."

I made a call to the police department in Seattle, Washington, where their K-9 units have somehow continued to live and do their jobs protecting law-abiding citizens, including those who legally use cannabis.

The official with whom I

spoke asked not to be identified. The K-9 unit apparently doesn't want to be dragged into this nonsense.

When I mentioned the Illinois officer who said that dogs would have to be euthanized upon the passage of legalizing marijuana, he laughed and then sighed.

He also confirmed no dogs in his jurisdiction had been euthanized due to the legalization. These canine professionals are trained to detect multiple drugs and many have additional talents.

He laughed again and reiterated that he was not going to go on the record.

On the record, Jay Casillas of the Denver Police Department told me, "Since marijuana was legalized, we have not been forced to retire or euthanize our K-9s."

"We do not euthanize our K-9s... Our K-9s are still working, and they continue to be trained on four odors [MJ, cocaine, methamphetamine, and heroin]," Casillas said. "Since the legalization of marijuana, we have slightly changed the training with regard to sniffing marijuana. We now train our dogs to detect larger amounts (10 pounds or more) of marijuana because we still have to address the black market for MJ."

"We retire the dogs when it is necessary and they usually stay with their police

handler as their family pet," Casillas added. "When a K9 is retired, we purchase a new one to take their spot."

What about that less dramatic and equally ignorant statement in which Macon County Sheriff Buffett said all the dogs would have to be replaced?

Why? Because they could no longer detect cocaine, heroin and other drugs now that marijuana is legal?

Don't the Illinois trainers know how to train their dogs to detect the large amounts of marijuana still deemed illegal?

Maybe it's the Illinois officials that need to be replaced or trained by the Seattle and Denver K-9 officers.

Meanwhile, the Illinois dogs would serve the Prairie State well by adding another aroma to their repertoire.

They could add any amount of Buffett's and Lerner's "B.S."

The problem with that is the canines within earshot of those two would be too preoccupied to get any real drug sniffing work done.

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City of Port Arthur

- 444 Fourth St.
- City hall — 983-8100
- Public works — 983-8511
- Municipal court — 983-8686
- Health department — 983-8864

City of Nederland

- 207 N. 12th St.
- City hall — 723-1503
- Public works — 723-1541
- Municipal court — 723-1526
- Animal control — 723-1541
- Water department — 723-1512

- Solid waste department — 723-1541
- Building permits & inspections — 723-1502

City of Groves

- 3947 Lincoln Ave.
- City hall — 962-4471
- Public works — 960-5700
- Municipal court — 960-5748

City of Port Neches

- 1005 Merriman St.
- City hall — 727-2182
- Public works — 727-2181
- Municipal court — 722-1438

- Animal control — 722-1438 or 960-5719

Port Arthur ISD

- 4801 Ninth Ave.
- 989-6100

Port Neches-Groves ISD

- 620 Avenue C, Port Neches
- 722-4244

Nederland ISD

- 220 17th St.
- 724-2391

In Our 120th Year
The News

Rich Macke
publisher

Ken Stickney
editor

EDITORIAL

Grasping genius
in our own hands

Imagine yourself “gone,” erased from your very existence, not instantly like in sudden death but by mere degrees, a little gone today, a little more tomorrow, until what was you no longer remains.

Sharon McConnell-Dickerson, a native New Englander but now a Mississippi sculptor, experienced that over short years, beginning in 1989. Back then, she was a young flight attendant on private jets, until uveitis left her blind. In an interview, she said while battling her condition — she took so many treatments she feared becoming a “professional patient” — she used to see only her silhouette in the mirror, but it faded, faded until, one day, she looked in the mirror and saw nothing.

“I was gone,” she recalled.

These days, McConnell-Dickerson’s existence centers not on her sight but on her vision — a vision she’s been fulfilling for the past 18 years. She developed a talent for sculpture after her blindness became a fact. She trained in places like the Louvre and other great museums where, after hours, she would walk the halls and galleries in the company of docents and her guide dog.

She would lay her hands on sculptural wonders, like Venus de Milo in the Louvre, and imagine how she herself would shape clay or other materials into something both beautiful and memorable.

McConnell-Dickerson’s genius for sculpture met a happy intersection with her appreciation for music. A blues aficionado, she was encouraged to try making “life masks,” capturing in resin the distinctive features of creative geniuses. She’s done some 60 life masks — 15 life masks of blues artists, including pioneering greats, which are on display at the Museum of the Gulf Coast in downtown Port Arthur. They include the likes of Bo Diddley and Koko Taylor and Bobby “Blue” Bland, as well as Othar Turner and Jessie Mae Hemphill, both of whom hailed from Como, which has become McConnell-Dickerson’s adopted hometown.

Her appreciation for the forerunners of the blues is part of what drives the exhibition, which will remain on display until Aug. 11. Curator Sarah Bellian said, “That’s what this exhibition is about. We wouldn’t have Johnny Winter or Janis Joplin without these people.”

In fact, McConnell-Dickerson has also cast Winter’s hands and maintained a friendship with Winter, of Beaumont, whose eyesight was long impaired, in his last years.

McConnell-Dickerson’s work is captivating, revealing the physical details of these musicians, some globally known, some less so. She captured those images in resin so admirers could hold the life masks in their own hands, trace the details and feel the inspiration or pain with which these musicians performed. They can do this just as McConnell-Dickerson did in creating the masks, something she calls “human recordings.”

They can do it so until Aug. 11, then their opportunities will slip away.

Many a trip continues long
after movement in time and
space have ceased.
— John Steinbeck



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COLUMN

A lonely end for another human being

The unhappy discovery of a dead woman on Pleasure Island last week reconnected me with my cub reporting roots. It’s a memory I’d rather have buried.

In the heat of a Mississippi summer, long years back, a troubled New Orleans teenager drove his car north on U.S. Interstate 55 and, likely under the cover of darkness, left the interstate in our southern Mississippi county for some back roads. There, he drove his car into a wooded area, climbed in the back seat and, pulling the trigger with his toe, shot himself with a rifle, investigators said. The body was found days later.

It being Mississippi, I had free rein on the scene and, being friendly with the deputies, I saw more than I ever cared to see. An investigator’s camera jammed; being the only other human on site with a camera, I was pressed into action on the deputies’ behalf. I complied as a friend.

Fortune and the officers on the scene kept us far away — perhaps a quarter-mile — from last week’s scene on Pleasure Island. A friendly Port Arthur officer met us on the other side of the road and explained as best as he could, with occasional traffic speeding past, what he and other investigators were dealing with down the makeshift dirt road that veered off Texas 82 to where the body was found. The road was blocked to us, but in long years of doing this work, I’ve seen all the corpses I care to see.

I stood by with other news people and waited for what information could be passed along. This was Day No. 1 of what might be a long investigation, and there wasn’t much to say. In the distance I saw the Golden Pass tanks; behind us, on the Intercoastal Waterway, vessels passed us by. It was evening, but there was lots of sun left in



KEN STICKNEY
Opinion

the day.

Two days later, unable to clearly describe to co-worker Mary Meaux where the body was uncovered, I drove her to the scene, no longer under police control. She was assigned to follow up the story and she needed to know more.

We negotiated a wretched road not meant for Toyota Corollas and drove a quarter-mile past the Highway 82 pavement, evading deep ruts and spying an occasional pile of trash. It was a miserable place to travel in the late morning heat and a worse place to breathe your last.

That was something to ponder, long and thoughtfully, because no matter what your last story was or your next story will be, there’s something grim and unforgettable about a homicide. The victim was as human as we are, although we knew nothing more than she was a white woman of undetermined age and identity. That’s all.

She was someone’s daughter and maybe someone’s sister and likely someone’s friend. You don’t need her name to know she was a

living, breathing person — God’s child, some would say — and walked through life with hopes for an outcome better than this. We all hope that.

My mother died in her sleep. An uncle died in a posh restaurant. I like to think they had peace or pleasure when their hearts stopped, in the company of people they loved.

Our “Jane Doe” on Pleasure Island might have died in the company of the worst person she ever knew, perhaps in a place she did not recognize, under circumstances unbearable. She deserved our sympathy and respect; she was something more than just another person in another news story.

Over the levee people fished; high overhead the sun bore down on us. I turned the car around, thankful we could leave and return to the pavement. In my mind, I heard Diana Krall sing “East of the Sun, West of the Moon” and I was grateful for all things beautiful.

Ken Stickney is editor of The Port Arthur News.

COLUMN

Canada is actually the bully on tariffs

It’s amusing to see liberal Americans “virtue signaling” the world by “apologizing” for Trump for “attacking” Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau.

According to these patriotic citizens, Trump is a boor, an insult-machine, crass and nasty. And he forced poor, traumatized Trudeau to courageously stand behind a podium with armed guards nearby squeaking, “We will not be bullied.”

All this went down after Trump had signed off on the G-7 agreement in which the United States and six of our allies, including Canada, all agreed to work together for peace, a clean environment, fair taxes and singing “kumbaya.”

Let’s you and I do something here that the Mika and Joe Scarboroughs of the world simply cannot bring themselves to do: look at the trade wars from the perspective of the people most affected by years of ongoing battles.

Canada actually dictates (Trudeau the Dictator?!) how much milk, eggs and various dairy and poultry products farmers are allowed to produce, and at what price they may sell such products.

This was “put in place” by the benevolent bosses of the Canadian government to compensate for surplus production in the 1950’s and 1960’s.

To keep supply as stable



RICK JENSEN
Opinion

that imports of Canadian softwood lumber are being unfairly subsidized and “dumped” in the United States.

This is no small problem for American timber businesses.

Imagine being in this business and then having to compete with Canadian companies whose government subsidizes about five and a half billion dollars worth of lumber so their companies can undercut yours.

The Commerce Department’s report said exporters from Canada have sold softwood lumber in the U.S. market at nearly 9 percent less than fair value.

9 percent. That’s yuuuuge!

Add to that Canada is providing unfair subsidies at rates up to 18 percent.

So, when mean old Mr. Trump slapped tariffs of up to 24 percent on imported Canadian softwood lumber, Trudeau squealed like a squirrel chain-sawed out of his home.

The Press-Herald reported: “What we’ve desired all this time is a level playing field, and news like this gives us confidence,” said Jason Brochu, co-president of Pleasant River Lumber, which employs 300 people at (Maine) sawmills in Dover-Foxcroft, Jackman, Hancock and Sanford. “With a strong presence from the government and such an emphasis on trade and jobs,

it is timed perfectly for us to expand our operation and increase employment, which is exactly what we are going to do.”

(Note to Bobby DeNiro:-Maine is in the United States)

U.S.-owned lumber companies have pushed for our government to counter these duties for years through the U.S. Lumber Coalition, which also has claimed Canada is dumping softwood lumber on the U.S. market below cost.

So, if you’re one of the Americans writing to Canadian news outlets to “apologize” for Trump, remember he’s keeping his promise to fight Trudeau’s Canadian tariff “bullies.”

All I ask is please don’t screw it up by suggesting Trudeau impose huge price increases for their delicious 7-year Canadian cheddar cheese.

It’s the best thing we get from Canada besides a well-manicured victim for American self-aggrandizing virtue signaling.

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In Our 120th Year

The News

Rich Macke
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Ken Stickney
editor

EDITORIAL

Honor the dead
by stepping forth

Nine dead by homicide on Port Arthur streets this year doesn't make this city the most dangerous in America or even in Texas. Nor is it necessarily the most dangerous city in Jefferson County.

But it makes things seem more dangerous than they were last year.

The nine were killed in the first six months of 2018; in all of 2017, there were but five homicides in Port Arthur.

A spate of January deaths — four in two days — skewed the Port Arthur homicide rate near the year's start. There was no discernable reason for that to happen, but given the rapid succession of violent deaths — three shootings and a stabbing — it cast a short-term pall over our city, suggesting gang warfare or some sort of organized crime. But it wasn't so.

Time proved that Port Arthur was the victim of four unrelated acts of violence that rattled our sense of public safety and security. No suspects have been arrested in connection with one of the four deaths — Kevin Tran, 24, was shot on his porch in daylight in the 1300 block of Trinity Avenue. The grand jury did not take action in the death of Ervin Michael Jefferson, 37, stabbed on Sixth Street after a dispute with a second man. Two suspects were charged with the death of Jose Pompas Leal, 27, and a single suspect was arrested and indicted in connection with the death in Sabine Pass of Jonah Rivera.

Deputy Chief Martin "Bubba" Blitch said there were no patterns: "We hope we don't have another but if it happens we will do everything to get justice. I pray we don't have another one.

"If we do, that's another life lost, another family affected and the community affected."

It's important to remember the community itself is affected — its sense of well being, its sense of security — by the loss of one of its members.

"No man is an island entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main," is what English poet John Donne wrote.

And later, "any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind."

Not all victims are the same. Some lead lives more grand or worthy than the rest of us. Others among us are less renowned, but most people are missed by family and friends nonetheless.

Blitch said crimes are often solved with the help of reliable witnesses who recognize their links to the rest of humanity and step forward to provide police and the courts with truthful information. This city and its safety would be much blessed by the brave and responsible actions of more people like them.

Those are people who live like Texans: bold, unafraid. Their witness honors the dead.

What then is freedom? The power to live as one wishes.
— Marcus Tullius Cicero



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COLUMN

Journalists not so different from readers

If you stay in the news business long enough, you're inevitably going to run into a reader who has a grievance - sometimes legitimate, sometimes not - against their hometown newspaper.

Sometimes it's because they feel they've been portrayed unfairly in a story. Or they feel like a reporter or editor did not give a sufficient enough airing of their views. Or sometimes it's because they don't like the font of the baseball box scores.

I have been on the receiving end of those complaints. And it can occasionally be profoundly unpleasant.

But these aggrieved readers rarely, if ever, march into a newsroom and open fire on the people with whom they have that disagreement.

Until now.

Last week, Jared Ramos, 38, was arrested and charged with killing five journalists, and wounding two more people, at The Capital-Gazette of Annapolis, Md. Published reports indicated that he had a long-standing grievance with the newspaper, one that he took to a murderous extreme.

As a matter of full disclosure, I'll note that, years ago, I interviewed for a job at The Capital-Gazette. It ended up not being the right fit. But I remember the staff and editors there as kind-hearted and dedicated professionals,



JOHN MICEK
Opinion

is like. And hopefully, if we do it right, and we're smart about it, that perspective will inform our journalism.

Local papers are funny. People are invested in them. They feel a sense of ownership, even in a time when a local paper's actual ownership may be many hundreds of miles away in the headquarters of some journalism conglomerate (or hedge fund).

Local news outlets are a reflection of their community - the entire community, irrespective of skin color, political beliefs or creeds. It can be difficult to capture and reflect that myriad of voices sometimes. But we keep trying anyway.

It helps that the journalists who work at local news outlets live in their communities; they shop at the same grocery stores, attend the same churches and send their kids to the same schools.

Like our readers, we sweat paying the same bills, save for the same rainy days and try to sock away a little extra cash for that week at the beach in the summer.

We get our hands dirty cutting the grass. We turn up the radio when a good song comes on. And we get angry when our favorite team loses (don't even get me started on the Orioles right now).

But there is a sense right

now that journalists are somehow the other. And some of that is our fault. And I have given serious thought to the consequences of my words.

And some of it is the product of external forces.

And sometimes that is a fair criticism. And sometimes it is not.

But on a day like this, when five families aren't going to have their loved ones coming home to them, none of what's different about us matters.

If you try hard enough, you can find a way to disagree with almost anyone about anything. Finding the common ground becomes a rarer and rarer thing.

It now just feels like one of those times when there's way more to bring us together than to set us apart. We can get back to arguing tomorrow, if that's your thing.

Maybe, right now, we all just take a breath.

Copyright 2018 John L. Micek, distributed by Cagle Cartoons newspaper syndicate. An award-winning political journalist, Micek is the Opinion Editor and Political Columnist for PennLive/The Patriot-News in Harrisburg, Pa. Readers may follow him on Twitter @ByJohnLMicek and email him at jmicek@pennlive.com.

COLUMN

Hey, Democrats: It's the Supreme Court, stupid

My advice to Democrats - which I've offered for free since the dawn of this century - is that they pound this mantra into their thick skulls: "It's the Supreme Court, stupid."

But it's probably too late for Democrats to acknowledge the obvious. One titanic reason why Trump-allied Republicans are now on the cusp of crafting a right-wing court for the next 40 years is because they always prioritize the court as a campaign issue and rallying cry. Democrats never do. Now they'll suffer the consequences.

I'm frankly at pains to explain why most blue voters (especially blue-leaning voters who stay home) don't seem to understand that the person in the White House has the power to shape the bench that has the final say on virtually every hot-button issue in American life. Or maybe most blue voters understand this perfectly well, but prefer to assess their candidates in terms of purity - thereby deciding that flawed Hillary Clinton was really no better than the GOP's grifter.

My question for them - after last week's string of pro-gerrymandering, pro-Muslim ban, and anti-labor rulings; and in the wake of Anthony Kennedy's retirement announcement - is simply this: Happy now?

Trump's voters were far more ginned up about the future of the court. By contrast, Clinton's voters (and



DICK POLMAN
Opinion

failures because he was their best hope for a post-Scalia conservative bench.

Evangelical Christians, in particular, decided that it didn't matter in the scheme of things that Trump was a detestable person. Mike Pence, one of their own, persuaded them to look at the big picture. They responded by voting for Trump in a landslide, 81 percent to 16 percent - the widest margin of any 2016 voting constituency.

And that's how the Republican establishment fell in line. John Boehner, the ex-House speaker, said during the campaign that Trump's behavior "disgusted" him. Nevertheless, "The only thing that really matters over the next four years or eight years is who is going to appoint the next Supreme Court nominees ... The biggest impact any president can have on American society and on the American economy is who's on that court."

We also need to remember what happened in the 2014 midterms. Thanks to the usual anemic Democratic turnout - minorities and Millennials typically skip the midterms - Republicans seized control of the U.S. Senate. That's what empowered McConnell to deny Garland a nomination hearing in 2016, and that's what will empower him to confirm Kennedy's right-wing successor this autumn, before voters have a chance

to weigh in on the Senate's 2019 composition. Everything is connected.

I still have the notes from a 1999 conversation with William Kristol, the conservative activist-commentator, who told me: "The biggest impact the next president will have on domestic policy will be in the realm of (high) court appointments. There are so many big things facing the court in the next few years - school choice, affirmative action, church-state issues, abortion."

And now conservatives - via their legal groups, which have long been nurturing a farm team of court players - are poised to give Trump a reliable nominee who's likely to become the fifth vote to overturn Roe v. Wade and re-criminalize abortion. This will be Trump's court now; this is one promise he has kept.

So, for the umpteenth time: It's the Supreme Court, stupid. And elections have consequences.

One of these decades, the Democratic party and its most apathetic voters might conceivably learn those lessons.

Copyright 2018 Dick Polman, distributed exclusively by Cagle Cartoons newspaper syndicate. Polman is the national political columnist at WHYY in Philadelphia and a "Writer in Residence" at the University of Pennsylvania. Email him at dickpolman7@gmail.com.

In Our 120th Year
The News

Rich Macke
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editor

EDITORIAL

From a fire's embers, we should seek hope

A Wednesday morning downpour at Arthur Square Apartments seemed appropriate, given the night's events. Three children — 12, 6 and 2 — perished in their apartment there shortly after midnight when a fire of undetermined origin broke out. First-responders tried mightily to breathe life into their young bodies to no avail; they died at the hospital.

The loss of young lives is always unbearable. Wednesday morning's deluge, anguished and relentless, seemed to signal as much, as if God himself were voicing displeasure.

The misery extended beyond the charred second-floor apartments and into carports below. There, Red Cross emergency workers, establishing a makeshift center of operations, tended to forlorn castoffs from other, nearby apartments. The entire unit was without power, their homes unlivable. Perhaps as many as a dozen families had lost their shelter to heavy smoke, to spreading flames, to the drenched aftermath of brave firefighters' battle against fire in the night.

Neighbors stood solemnly in line, some in nightclothes, waiting to speak with the disaster-response crew. The fire alarm came at barely midnight; few had slept. A few feet away, rain pounded onto the pavement and taunted their feet, some covered only by slippers.

There were promises of short-term shelter, food, some clothing. The Red Cross almost always delivers in dark times.

But no one ever walks away from a fire whole. There are issues of insurance; few renters buy it. There are losses of possessions: Work clothes and cellphones and personal treasures. There is a need to know what's next. Tragedies like these demand a new life plan.

For these victims, the misery had only started. This was day No. 1. But they had life. That's a lot.

For the young victims' families, there is unending loss. Photos of the children shared publicly lent proof these youngsters were loved and their lives held value. That loss will be shared by extended families, by classmates and friends.

Waiting in line, neighbors exchanged what information they possessed. The family was new to the complex, one woman said. Word was the mother had gone to the hospital that night with another child. The 30 or so people huddled under the carport shared their small universe of uncertainty, but despite their own misfortunes, they maintained first in their minds a respect and affinity for the children — Jayden Pollard, Brayden Handy and Brooklyn McCray — now gone.

There are few guarantees in life; we have no sure grasp on success or wealth or happiness. Some of us hold some hope that, at the end, a heavenly Father might draw us into his arms, heal our wounds, raise us up. We should ask that for Jayden and Brayden and Brooklyn.

We should hug our own children every night, too, and pray morning will smile on them always.

Laws are like sausages, it is better not to see them being made.

— Otto von Bismarck



Letters welcome

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Editorial



COLUMN

Politics poisonous to independent court

Democrats are in a full-on panic over the prospects of another Trump appointee to the U.S. Supreme Court, even before they know who the nominee will be. Republicans who held their noses while voting for Trump because they didn't want Hillary Clinton appointing federal judges are celebrating their own good sense, even though they despair over Trump's behavior.

Once there is a nominee there will be Judiciary Committee hearings at which senators from both parties will make long speeches, ask a few loaded questions and vote on a strictly partisan basis. The Senate will then vote, again as partisans except for the few whose re-election might be at risk if they stick with their party.

Such is the state of federal judicial selection. Politics are everything because judges have come to be viewed as political arbiters — and not without reason. Over the just concluded term of the Supreme Court there were 13 decisions in which the five conservatives (counting Justice Anthony Kennedy) were in the majority and the four liberals were in the minority.

There were also 19 unanimous rulings and 25 cases in which the court was divided with a mix of conservatives and liberals in the majority and minority. But the justices' positions in the cases the public cares about (i.e. union dues, the travel ban, the free speech of bakers) were all too predictable even before the briefs were filed



JAMES HUFFMAN
Opinion

and oral arguments held.

For their part the justices explain their differences in terms of interpretive theory — the liberal wing embracing the idea of a living constitution to be adapted by judges to changing times and values, and the conservatives insisting that the rule of law requires adherence to original language and intent. But neither side is reliably consistent in its interpretive approach, with politics and personal values too often the most plausible explanations for deviations from claimed interpretive theory.

It is not difficult to understand the challenge judges face in maintaining strict objectivity in the application of their interpretive approach. They wield awesome powers over the lives of those whose disputes they resolve, often in the context of compelling human dramas.

When adherence to the letter of the law allows the implementation of policies with which the judge disagrees or burdens people for whom a judge has special sympathies, it has to be tempting to bend or even ignore the law. But that is not

the role of unelected judges in a democratic republic in which the separation of powers is a basic protection of individual freedom.

In an ideal world it would not matter whether a Republican or a Democrat appointed judges and justices because all judges would do their best to apply the law to the facts at hand objectively. Of course there would be disagreements about what the law requires, including in politically sensitive cases, but those disagreements would not consistently reflect the pre-appointment politics of the judges.

In the just completed term of the Supreme Court we would not have 13 cases in which the two sides look to the public more like representatives of political parties than judges intent on the rule of law.

There is no easy or obvious fix for this politicization of our federal courts. It would help if the editorial pages of our leading newspapers devoted their critiques to the legal reasoning rather than the policy implications of judicial rulings. It would also help if Congress reasserted its constitutional law-making authority by giving the courts more explicit direction and by rebuking the courts when they overstep their constitutional boundaries. And it would help if the judges themselves refused to let outcomes usurp the rule of law.

But as the Founders of our Constitution understood, there is no avoiding that judges, like every oth-

er government official, will be tempted to side with the interests of one faction or another. To the extent the framer's constitutional constraints no longer work or have been weakened or abandoned, surrendering to temptation is all the more likely.

For now, sadly, it's all politics, as it was with the nominations of Merrick Garland and Neil Gorsuch. Sen. Chuck Schumer's call for a hold on the coming nomination until after the midterm elections is as disingenuous as was Sen. Mitch McConnell's refusing to act on the Garland nomination so the voters could have a say in the presidential election. There is no real principle on either side.

Had Schumer been the majority leader facing a Republican president's nomination, he would have done exactly as McConnell did. And McConnell would today be insisting that the voters should have a say in the midterm elections. As it stands the Republicans hold all the cards and, unless they are unable to hold their majority, whomever Trump nominates from his carefully curated list will be confirmed.

We may get some good judges, but their selection and confirmation is all politics, and that's not good for the courts.

James Huffman is dean emeritus at Lewis & Clark Law School in Portland, Ore. He wrote this for Inside-Sources.com.

COLUMN

There goes the neighborhoods in America

I was never a fan of the children's show "Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood" when I was a kid. My eyes were usually focused on the town of Bedrock. There was a lot more going on there than in the sleepy place where Mr. Rogers lived. If I wasn't hanging out with "The Flintstones," I might be found immersed in the hyperkinetic world of Warner Brothers' "Looney Toons."

Mr. Rogers' hometown was slow and boring. But "Won't You Be My Neighbor?" a new documentary about his show, now in theaters nationwide, has caused me to re-evaluate my opinion.

Television in the 1950's and 1960's was (especially when it came to children's programming) often inane and consumer-centric, pitching foods that were high in sugar and low in substance, household products we didn't necessarily need, and toys like Barbie that defined feminine beauty. There were also the toys that not-so-subtly hinted at what it meant to be a man, like G.I. Joe action figures, which promoted the sale of plastic weapons of war.

I didn't have the patience for someone as dull as Mr. Rogers. I couldn't appreciate his subtle, nuanced message extolling the specialness in all of us. Tackling issues like race relations, death, divorce, love, loneliness, anxiety, hatred, and violence was clearly over my head back



BLAIR BESS
Opinion

then. Even though I and many other kids were forced to confront them in our own lives.

Fred Rogers was an ordained minister with training in child psychology; a man who wrote, composed and played music, designed, produced, and performed nearly everything viewers saw and heard on his show. He was also the pre-eminent spokesperson for both children's programming and the value of public broadcasting.

Funding for public television was then, as now, a target of conservative leaders in Washington. Some considered it a ridiculous waste of taxpayer money at a time when President Richard Nixon was demanding increased funding for the Vietnam War. Despite this, the soft-spoken Rogers managed to convince Rhode Island Sen. John Pastore, the gruff tight-fisted Democratic Chairman of the U.S. Senate Subcommittee on Communications at the time, of the value of programming that spoke to the need for the social and emotional educa-

tion of children that public broadcasting provided.

After listening to him, a visibly moved Pastore said Rogers' words gave him "goose bumps." His gentle advocacy helped convince the committee to more than double public television's budget the following year. Rogers' appearance before Pastore's committee, in 1969, is a stark contrast to the overwhelming number of congressional hearings currently gracing our television screens today, and a testament to those who still believe that differences in political and fiscal ideologies, as well as the truth, need not reek of partisanship and hostility.

Not everyone, however, subscribed to Rogers' philosophy. After his death from cancer, in 2003, a Fox News commentator took to the air stating "this man, this evil, evil man ruined a generation of kids." She was followed up by another member of the panel who said that Rogers' message that everyone is special filled kids with a "with a sense of entitlement."

That idea was also floated several years back by The Wall Street Journal, whose editorial staff (not its reporters) often acts as though they're publishing the house organ of the Republican Party rather than a newspaper. It was re-iterated in a Journal column by Jeffrey Zaslow this past week. He quotes Don Chance, a Lou-

isiana State University finance professor, who arrived at the highly original conclusion just last spring that Mr. Rogers is, indeed, to blame for the sense of entitlement displayed by many young people today.

Conservative finger-pointing is often obtuse and extreme. I think most parents would agree that their children are, in some way, special. Whether they're kids in cages or the progeny of those who espouse hate and anger. Being special is not about entitlement, it's about what makes us unique individuals and valued members of society. Just as being at opposite ends of the political spectrum makes us unique, though not always valued.

This is a nation of neighborhoods, though it often seems we've drifted far afield from the "kinder, gentler" one former President George H.W. Bush spoke of nearly three decades ago; the kind espoused by Fred Rogers. Too bad. The neighborhood where he once resided seems like a pretty darn good place to live.

Maybe we can all buy a home there someday.

Copyright 2018 Blair Bess distributed exclusively by Cagle Cartoons newspaper syndicate. Bess is a Los Angeles-based television writer, producer, and columnist. He edits the online blog Soaggragated.com, and can be reached at BBess.soaggragated@gmail.com.

EDITORIAL

Bruce Lietzke: Casual
champion, life winner

Bruce Lietzke was as well known for his relaxed golf habits as he was for a highly successful professional career.

A “laid-back winner,” The New York Times called him in its weekend obituary. “Fun-loving PGA Tour winner,” ABC News said, in announcing his death. Reuters news agency sent notice of his death around the world. And yet, as casual as he was about his sport, he was accomplished enough at the highest levels of the game that his death merited notice around the globe.

Not bad for a Forest Park High graduate who left Beaumont for golf at the University of Houston, a premier school for the sport.

His roommate there was Bill Rogers, who later won the British Open. Rogers and other close friends, including U.S. Open winner Jerry Pate (Lietzke’s brother in law) and Master’s winner Ben Crenshaw, accompanied him for treatments and surgery for a rare form of brain cancer, which claimed Lietzke’s life Saturday.

For his part, Lietzke shunned the U.S. Open and British Open during much of his career, instead taking long summer breaks for vacations with his wife and children. Nonetheless, he won 13 times on the PGA Tour, including playoff wins over Gene Littler, Tom Watson, Raymond Floyd and Corey Pavin. He won the U.S. Senior Open in 2003, ahead of Watson.

He never played more than 25 tournaments a year, never more than 20 after 1988. His focus was on his wife of 38 years, Rose, and his two children, his ranch in Athens, classic cars and junior golf. Among those he influenced: current PGA Tour pro Chris Stroud of Groves, who, playing at the Canadian Open last weekend, sought ways to honor Lietzke. Lietzke won the Canadian Open twice.

Lietzke as a young golfer also benefited from the attention of Beaumont pro Henry Homberg, who mentored him as a junior golfer, and Liezke’s older brother Duane, a club pro in Oklahoma, who introduced him to golf at age 5.

He never earned entry into the golf halls of fame, but he never sought such accolades.

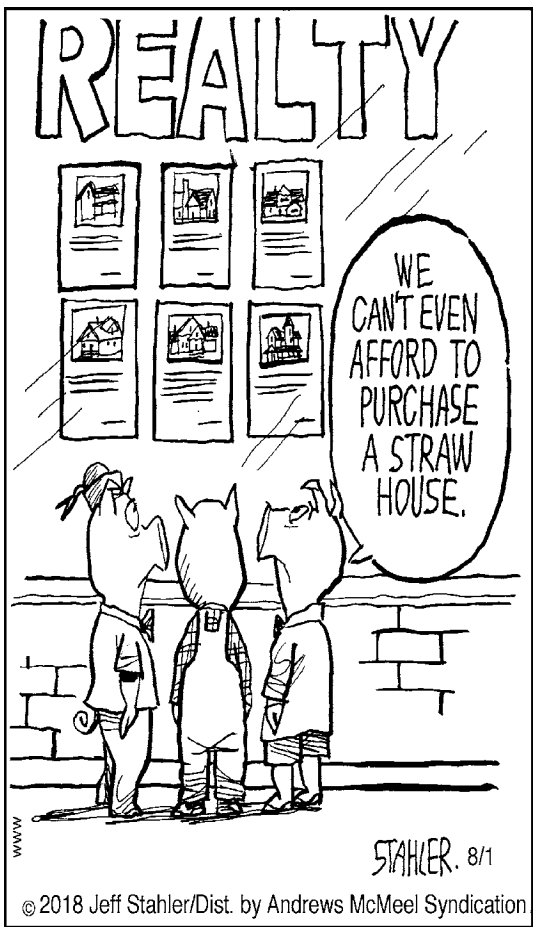
Golf Channel columnist Tim Rosaforte quoted a remarkable story from sports psychologist Kapil Gupta:

“I read the transcript of an interview with Mr. Lietzke in which I came across one of the most interesting statements I have ever heard from a professional athlete,” Gupta wrote. “He said, ‘It’s human nature to want to be better. I don’t want to be better. I want to be exactly like I was yesterday.’ “

He earned entry into the Sports Hall of Fame at The Museum of the Gulf Coast, a member of the first class in July 1994, treasured by the people in his home county.

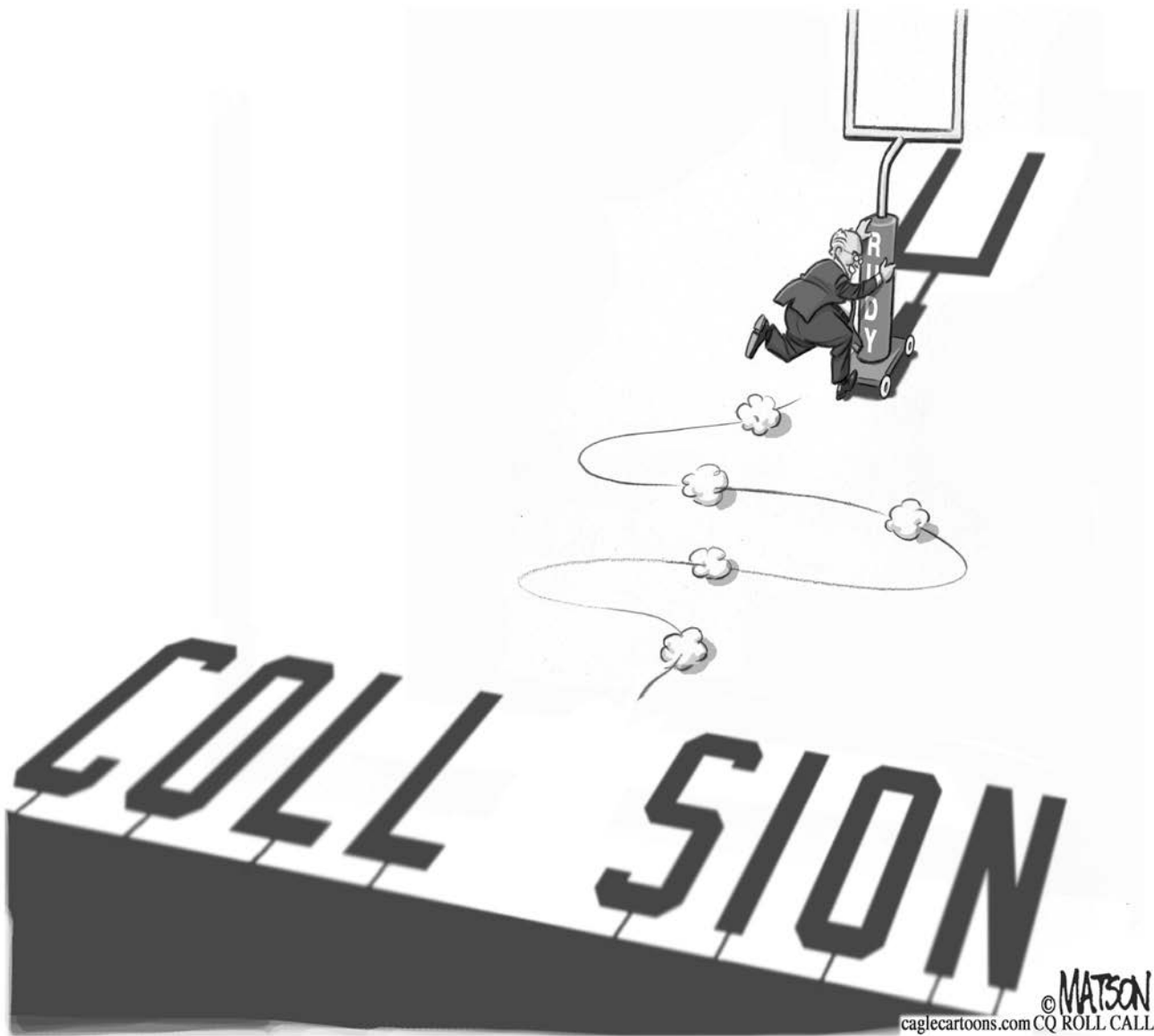
For his remarkable life, he will be missed and remembered.

I fell that there is nothing
more truly artistic than to love
people.
— Vincent Van Gogh



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Editorial



COLUMN

Warding off social decline, close to home

Social decline does not rest in the big stuff that so many people lament — Hollywood or social media.

Social decline rests in the everyday actions of my apartment neighbor, who parks his pick-up truck in a no-parking zone, blocking the curb cut for wheelchairs. He does it casually, sometimes blocking a portion of the curb cut, sometimes all of it. He just doesn’t care.

Social decline does not rest in the big stuff that so many people lament — abortion or Donald Trump’s tweets.

Social decline rests in the kids who play on the Nederland football field at night, shouting profanities as young girls and elderly couples and families walk the track in the dark. They don’t look for who is nearby, for who might be offended, they do it without thought or concern. They just don’t care.

Social decline does not rest in the big stuff that so many people lament —marriage decline or racial conflict.

Social decline rests in litter that lines Port Arthur’s streets, the old tires dumped by the roadsides, the ramshackle housing that the city is trying to control. They are the results of countless individual actions, most of them results of a lack of consideration for other people. They are acts of people who don’t care about the impacts of what they do or how they affect the people around them.

Weeks back, I reread tenets of the “broken windows” theory, popular in the 1980s. At its heart is this idea: Social disorder invites more social disorder. A broken window that remains unfixed breeds additional disorder and vandalism and maybe much worse.

Is it happenstance that some residents in my complex now compete for the



KEN STICKNEY
Opinion

availability of that forbidden parking space? That silver pick-up truck is sometimes replaced by other vehicles, as some residents now see the forbidden space as fair game.

Or that at the Nederland track, I sometimes see empty water bottles cast on the ground mere feet from trash barrels? Or that Port Arthur work crews have picked up thousands of dumped tires this summer in an effort to keep the city clean? Disorder breeds disorder. Inconsideration breeds the same.

When I moved to the Gulf Coast states more than 40 years ago, most people had easy manners. They smiled and said hello as they passed one another. They held doors for one another. It seemed to extend across every demographic. You didn’t need to be wealthy to be polite.

Back then, drivers allowed one another into traffic and the recipient of such small mercies responded with a wave of acknowledgement. How often do people acknowledge small acts of kindness now?

Years ago, when my son and I took a college visit to Texas A&M, I was impressed that a sense of neighborliness seemed ingrained in the students, who walked on the sidewalks, not across the grass; who acknowledged others (not always with “Howdy,” but at least with a smile); who kept their campus pristine. Some of that reflected tradition but repetition of good manners seemed to breed good manners and consideration for the world at large. In my mind, A&M seemed a special place.

For most individuals, there is little they can do to address the world’s larger ills or societal breakdowns. But their individual actions can improve the world around them.

We can respect curb cuts for wheelchairs. We can drop our trash in receptacles. We can think of ourselves as small — but valuable — cogs in a better, more respectful world. We can do that today, Donald Trump’s tweets notwithstanding.

Ken Stickney is editor of The Port Arthur News.

COLUMN

Dolphins and fireworks and Toto – Oh My!

Welcome to another installment of ‘Things you should do before the highlight of your week is lime Jell-O Thursday!’

This year, in my family’s ongoing quest to turn ourselves into an enormous package of extra-salty beef jerky, we decided to take a family road trip to South Padre Island, Texas, for the third summer in a row.

Because I have a wife and three daughters, preparing for such a trip is like mounting a major military campaign to the Middle East. Unable to cram all of our luggage into our Ford Expedition without triggering the air bags, I resorted to using the dreaded roof-mounted luggage container, which my daughters fondly refer to as ‘the turtle.’Unfortunately, ‘the turtle’ is getting older and occasionally suffers from shell-closure dysfunction. As a result, I found myself periodically thrusting my head out of the window like a drooling Labrador retriever to see if the Gorilla Tape and bungee cords were keeping ‘the turtle’ from scattering my underwear all over US 77.

Another harrowing aspect of our trip was the lack of service stations on the remote highway to South Padre Island. Near the town of Riviera, we saw a sign indicating that there wouldn’t be another service station (complete with squalid restrooms) for 60 miles. Despite having already taken approximately 37 potty-breaks, I warned everyone that they should go now, or risk choosing between a large grove of roadside prickly-pear cacti and a Sonic cup.

Once we finally arrived on the golden shores of South Padre Island, we spent several days enjoying typical beach activities, like being paranoid about flesh-eating bacteria, fighting off plagues of Cheezit-crazed seagulls, and asphyxiating ourselves with spray-on sunscreen fumes. But the highlight of the trip was a relaxing dolphin, sunset, fireworks, and overpriced beverages cruise on our last evening.

Because we wanted a genuine experience, we booked with a company called ‘The Original Dolphin Watch.’(We weren’t about to stand for some imitation cruise featuring off-brand dolphins imported from Taiwan.) Our



BY JASON GRAVES
Opinion

boat had two decks, so when we boarded, my daughters immediately proceeded to the top level - for maximum UV ray exposure. Once I was comfortably settled into my seat, the girls asked if I would go back down to purchase them a few sodas, the cost of which ensured that the captain and his deck hands could send their kids to elite private colleges.

Shortly after we left the dock, the captain warned us that the ride might get ‘a little rough’ as he took us out to where the dolphins were hanging out with their squad. Once the boat stopped rocking and I managed to extract my iPhone from my left nostril, the captain alerted us to the presence of dolphins, always directing us to look on the side of the boat opposite from where I was standing. By the time I had stumbled over to the correct side for ‘original’ dolphin viewing, all I saw was an elderly dude in a kayak wearing nothing but a zebra striped Speedo.

Next on the agenda was a relaxing sunset journey to the fireworks launch site. As we motored out alongside the Queen Isabella Causeway, the crew dropped a net and brought up several ocean creatures for display. They caught a blue crab, a starfish, and several other cast members from ‘SpongeBob SquarePants.’My wife

and I were also delighted that after the perfunctory playing of ‘Margaritaville,’ the on-board music featured hits from the 80’s, when almost every song had that ‘Dude, this new synthesizer is totally rad’ moment. My children really enjoyed it when I let loose to Toto’s ‘Africa,’ especially since I never get the lyrics right.

‘I guess it rains down in Aaaafricaaaa!’

The highlight of the evening was a spectacular fireworks display over the bay. After the show ended and we cruised back to the dock, I reflected on the special time I had spent with my family and couldn’t resist singing along with Corey Hart’s ‘I Wear My Sunglasses at Night.’

‘Don’t be afraaaaaaid of the guy with shakes, oh no!’

My kids now refuse to sit by me in public when music is playing. I’m not sure why.

Copyright 2018 Jase Graves distributed exclusively by Cagle Cartoons newspaper syndicate. Graves is an award-winning humor columnist from East Texas. His columns have been featured in Texas Escapes magazine, The Shreveport Times, The Longview News Journal, and The Kilgore News Herald. Contact Graves at susanjase@sbcglobal.net.

In Our 120th Year

The News

Rich Macke
publisher

Ken Stickney
editor

EDITORIAL

Violent death points
to a scourge in Texas

The death was new, the story too familiar. Port Arthur police believe Aletha Gonzalez met her end near midnight Feb. 24 at the hands of Daniel Shackelford, 34, with whom she'd shared a home in Port Acres. Police had been there before but not for a while.

On the night of Feb. 24, Shackelford called police there with an unusual story of finding his domestic partner on the floor with a television set on her. Later, he changed his story.

Investigation told a different story, too: Her body showed multiple bruises to her face, neck, arms and an autopsy revealed blunt force trauma to her head, which included a large hemorrhage to the right side. Authorities said she was assaulted.

That's why police were leading Shackelford through the back door of the downtown police station Thursday evening to a waiting SUV, spiriting him away to the Jefferson County jail after charging him with first-degree murder. Bond was set at \$500,000. It's hard to hide the results of domestic abuse.

"Domestic violence is difficult to stop," said police department spokesman Mike Hebert. Incidents are difficult to predict and most take place in private.

Domestic violence victims can seek help through police, who also distribute materials about domestic abuse to suspected victims and others. Sometimes it helps; other times, victims end up on the floor of their homes, with abusers talking nonsense about televisions landing on top of their victims.

The state's Department of Public Safety said there were more than 214,000 domestic violence victims in Texas in 2016: Women and men, wives, girlfriends and more. It needs to stop ... fast.

"We continue to underestimate the reach and devastation of domestic violence," said Gloria Aguilera Terry, chief executive of the Texas Council on Family Violence, in a 2017 news story. Underestimate at your peril.

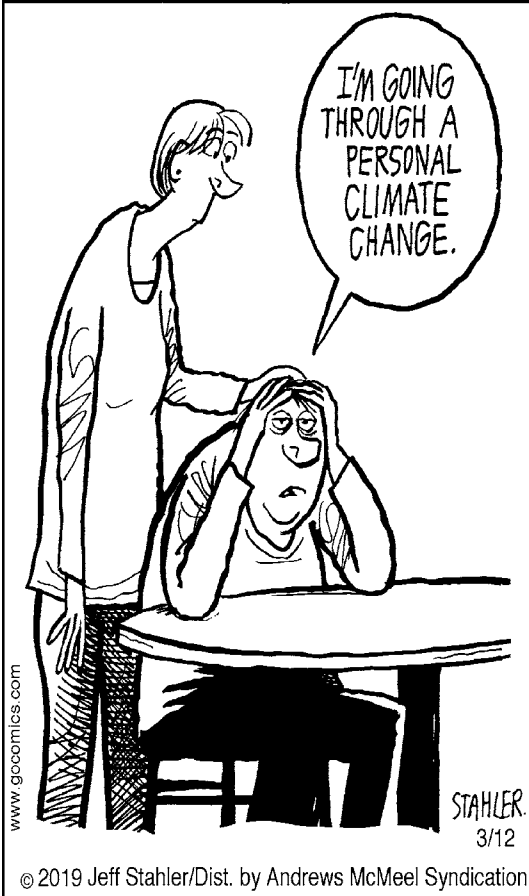
Wholesale slaughter at First Baptist Church in Sutherland Springs in November 2017 changed a lot of minds about domestic abuse and family violence. It's no private matter. At the church, a shooter with a long history of domestic abuse killed 26 people and wounded 20 others; he'd threatened before to shoot family members. The damage that domestic abuse can impose on others can reach far beyond any single residence.

Texas law says domestic violence charges can be brought against an abuser for harm against a broad range of family members or domestic partners, including someone with whom the accused shares a child; a spouse or former spouse; foster child or foster parent; any family member by marriage, blood or adoption; a child or the child of a former spouse or partner.

The state must be relentless in fighting this scourge with counseling and with harsh penalties. Stakes are steep. Aletha Gonzalez might tell you, if she could.

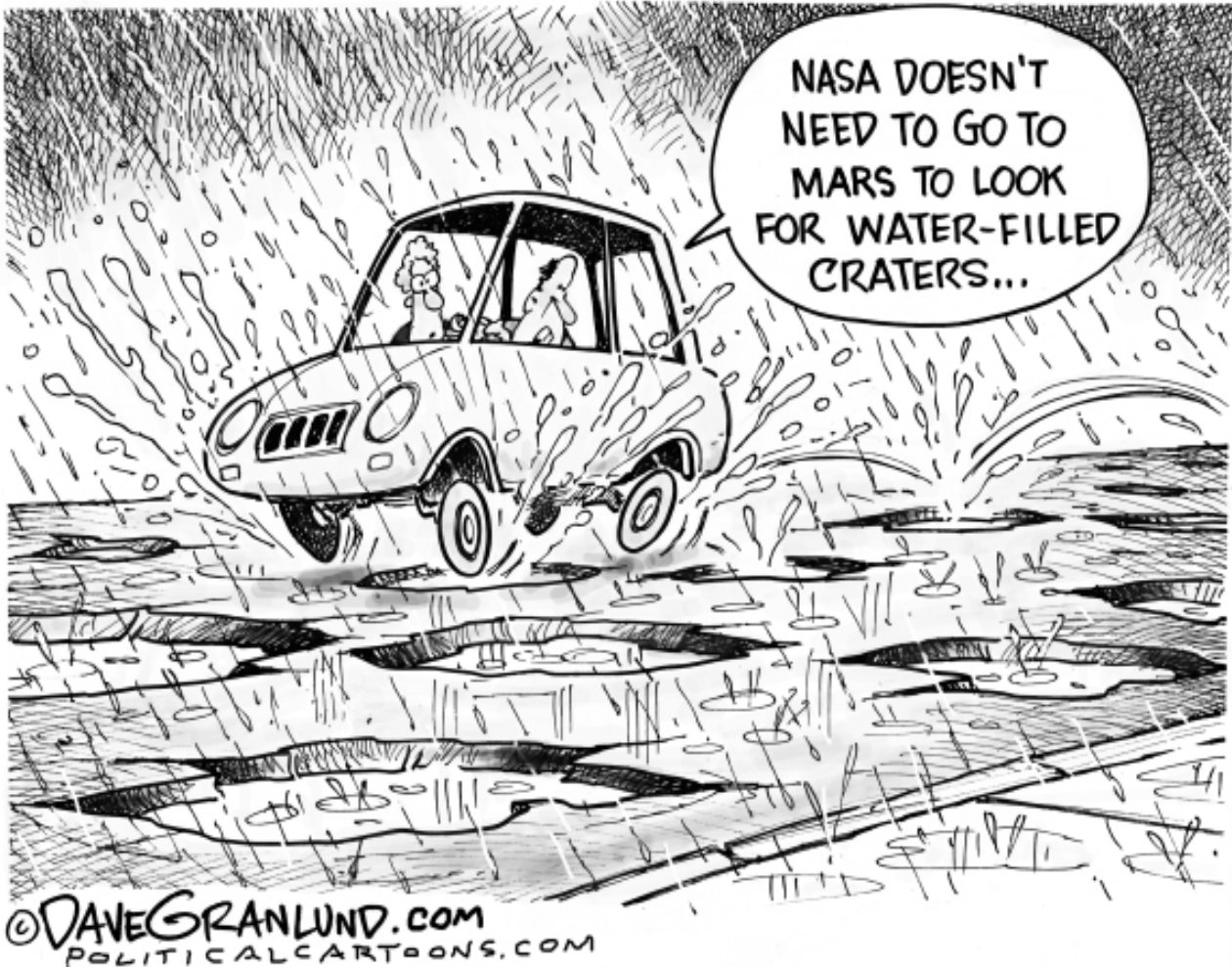
There are nights when the
wolves are silent and only the
moon howls.

— George Carlin



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COLUMN

Dems fail to take stance against antisemitism

After the massacre at the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh last year, it really shouldn't be a struggle to condemn antisemitism. In fact, after the Holocaust, there shouldn't be any heavy moral lifting at all. It's a self-evident principle that hatred of Jews is anathema and strikes at the heart of everything civilized.

But last week, Nancy Pelosi had a problem getting her caucus to vote on a resolution condemning antisemitism. The problem is that the trigger for this resolution was Democratic Rep. Ilhan Omar of Minnesota, a freshman congresswoman whose comments about Israel have some Americans of all faiths crying foul.

Omar has repeatedly made controversial statements about the United States' relationship with Israel. She is an avowed foe of AIPAC, the influential lobby that encourages politicians to support policies that favor Israel. Omar opposes Israel's treatment of the Palestinians, and tweeted in 2012 that "Israel has hypnotized the world" and criticized its "evil doings."

Omar made some feeble apologies that in tone and substance lacked sincerity in the ears of those used to hearing "it's not about Jews, it's about Israel." To this writer, and to many others, the apologies were worth-



CHRISTINE FLOWERS
Opinion

less, and the implications of her comments unambiguous. For example, she invoked the old anti-Semitic trope about Jews and money when, in response to a question about the relationship between Israel and the United States, she tweeted it was "all about the Benjamins, baby." And she has implied that Jewish Americans have a "dual allegiance" to a foreign country. As a Catholic whose grandparents had a picture of JFK in their living room, I remember how my people had to prove that our religion didn't dilute our patriotism.

Allies have rallied to the defense of Rep. Omar, who is a rock star in some circles. They argue that criticizing Israel is different from being anti-Semitic, and that attempts to paint her as such were signs of Islamophobia.

So back went the Democrats to the drawing board, and eventually reframed the initial resolution against an-

tisemitism to include a condemnation of racism in general and Islamophobia.

There is nothing wrong with specifically condemning Islamophobia. In a post-9/11 climate, it is necessary because of the insidious ways some people on the right have mistakenly conflated Islam with extremist violence. I'm a conservative who works in the immigration field, so perhaps my "bias" antenna is a bit more highly tuned to the confusion, but a number of my philosophical fellow travelers are tone-deaf to rhetoric that presumes "Muslim" means "terrorist."

I ran into this the other day when I told someone about my Muslim client from Pakistan who was filing for asylum because he ran a Western-style school that was targeted by the Taliban. Her response was, "I'm surprised Muslims even go to school." That's bigotry and ignorance, and it angered me, considering that my client almost lost his life trying to educate girls in Pakistan like Malala Yousafzai, the Nobel Peace Prize laureate who was shot in the head for doing the same thing.

But while it is always good to recognize bigotry whenever it assaults our eyes and ears, this refusal to issue a clear and stand-alone condemnation of antisemitism is extremely troubling. The

fact that congressional Democrats felt it necessary to include a condemnation of Islamophobia is a perfect example of "whataboutism" — getting distracted by another form of prejudice that, while real, is not relevant in this case to the substance of Omar's offending comments.

Omar is a refugee from Somalia who spent years in a Kenyan refugee camp, so you can understand her sympathy for other refugees, including Palestinians. But her language is not the language of a human rights advocate. It's peppered with the dog whistles of bigotry, recalling old Protocols of the Elders of Zion stereotypes that, expressed in this climate, are dangerous.

We should not be in the business of placating a freshman congresswoman and her allies by refusing to call antisemitism by its true name. Criticizing Israeli policy is fine. Resorting to ancient slurs with a wink and a tweet is not.

The congressional Democrats should condemn that prejudice with full-throated, righteous force.

Copyright 2019 Christine Flowers. Flowers is an attorney and a columnist for the Philadelphia Daily News, and can be reached at cflowers1961@gmail.com.

COLUMN

Play ball! Baseball fans brace for big changes

Spring training is underway, and fans whose passion for baseball dates back decades brace themselves for more game-altering, useless and annoying changes. Major League Baseball commissioner Rob "Meddling" Manfred is back at it with more dumb ideas that will, if implemented, distract from the game on the field.

Manfred's latest folly, currently being tested in spring training, is the pitch clock that will limit hurlers to 20 seconds in between pitches. Another experiment that the Atlantic League is testing is a three-batter minimum on relief pitchers. And eventually, the dreaded robot umpire will take its place behind home plate. Count on it!

Fans will remember, with irritation, that Manfred is responsible for the tedious replay review system which slows the game's pace. As fans sit on their hands, bench coaches call their video guys, umpires stare at managers for an order to look at replay, and the umpiring crew deliberates, then consults with the New York-based experts - snail's pace stuff. More Manfred tedium: the automatic intentional base on balls wherein the manager simply flashes four fingers, and the batter trots to first base. The pitcher is



JOE GUZZARDI
Opinion

relieved of throwing the traditional four wide ones. The estimated game time saved is only a few seconds, but to Manfred every second lost is precious.

Manfred being Manfred, he cooked up the pitch clock with an eye toward bringing it to regular season games as quickly as possible. Manfred's czar-like authority over MLB allows him to impose the pitch clock in 2019 regardless of the players or their union's opinions. Kansas City Royals' manager Ned Yost has his doubts. Yost said: "I'm not so sure if a 20-second clock is going to make that big of a difference." And three-time Cy Young Award winner Max Scherzer is a pitch clock critic, too, and thinks that it messes with the game's fabric. Wild guess: Yost and Scherzer know more about baseball than Manfred.

In reality, the pitch clock will slow the game as the

umpires will have the challenging responsibility to decide whether the pitcher has released the ball before the clock expires. The arguments that will certainly ensue will be time eater-uppers, too. Truth is that baseball games aren't too long especially when compared to the National Football League. Lining up for punts, kick offs, injury time outs, huddles, penalties, endless half time shows and more commercial breaks than anyone can endure are the stuff of mind-crushing boredom.

According to a Wall Street Journal analysis, shots of players standing around doing nothing takes up 67 minutes per telecast; commercials take up another hour, and actual on-field action is a mere 11 minutes. Yet, fans don't mind. The 2019 Super Bowl, the granddaddy of long games, set a streaming viewership record with a 31 percent increase over last year.

Baseball games' length isn't the problem, especially when they take place on balmy summer evenings when the yard is perhaps the most pleasant place in town to spend a few leisurely hours. The problem isn't the elapsed time between pitches, but rather the amount of time that passes without

on-field action. Too many strikeouts and too many foul balls put too many fans to sleep.

During the 2018 season, in at least one month, batters struck out more times than they registered hits. And Travis Sawchik reported at FiveThirtyEight.com that, over the last two decades, foul balls have increased significantly while the number of balls put in play has dropped dramatically. Pitch clocks can't cure those ills. Sawchik recommends that MLB investigate decreasing the foul territory's area which might produce more foul outs that, in turn, would shorten games.

Fans might as well relax; the pitch clock is coming and sooner rather than later. Manfred's fixation with reducing the length of baseball games isn't going away. Too bad that Manfred can't learn from baseball's rich history. Dating back to the first games in the mid-19th century, baseball, and the way it's played, has always ebbed and flowed. Let the game be the game, and stop fiddling with it.

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