

Carmage Walls
Commentary Prize

2019 Entry Form

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

This was an editorial designed to get readers to laugh at the author's folly — and hopefully not follow in his footsteps.

OUR OPINION

The electric scooter test

Gerry Tritz

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The electric scooters have arrived in Jefferson City. Just in time to be put away for winter.

Or, in my case, just in time to almost go tumbling head over heels while going at breakneck speed downhill. But let's not get ahead of ourselves.

This editorial is about doing as I say, not as I do.

Last week — for you, dear readers — I tested one of the 75 new Spin scooters that rolled out earlier this month. The scooters were added to the company's existing rental bikes that launched this summer.

It was a bit of a process to rent the scooter but it wasn't difficult, even for someone like me who's still trying to learn to program his VCR. (An upgrade from my Betamax.) After downloading the app, I entered my credit card information and found a nearby scooter.

The app has a map showing where the scooters are located around town. Touch the icons representing the individual scooters around town and it will even show the percent of its battery charge.

I simply pressed a "scan" button on the app and pointed my phone at a QR code between the handles of the scooter to unlock it.

Before it allowed me to ride, the app made me view some information, possibly about safety. It might have said something about a helmet and not riding on sidewalks. I'm not sure.

Anyway, it started quickly and I was quickly riding along East Capitol Avenue at about 15 mph. It was a smooth ride, as long as I stayed on a smooth road.

The problem occurred when I decided to turn off Capitol Avenue onto the hill on Monroe Street facing the train station. At first, the brakes seemed responsive, but it became quickly apparent that they only slowed the scooter, which was still building speed down the hill. As I careened toward the railroad tracks, I realized I had two choices, neither good: I could: A) try to make a U-turn in the road, trying to keep my balance and avoid a growing number of motorists exiting the parking garage. Or, B) bail.

I chose the latter, hoping that I could literally hit the ground running, and run fast enough to avoid a terrible fall. It worked. Barely.

But the sight of a 51-year-old man in a button-down shirt and tie bailing off a speeding scooter must have given several passers-by a good laugh. If that didn't, the sight of me trying to ride up the hill surely did. Imagine a small, electric-powered motor struggling to pull a 200-pound man uphill. Or imagine Paul Blart: Mall Cop. Either way.

Fortunately, both me and the scooter survived. No scratches on me, and I didn't see any on the scooter either.

The cost to rent the scooters is more than the bikes. It's \$1 to unlock a scooter and 15 cents a minute. My short ride was \$1.80, but I got a \$1 credit for my first ride.

Anyway, if you decide to ride one of the new electric scooters, learn from my mistakes. Ride on smooth roads, and avoid steep hills (uphill or downhill). You might even want to consider wearing a helmet.



Bush 41's funerals offer blunt talk about life after death

During 60 years of friendship, George H.W. Bush went on countless trips with James Baker III, his secretary of state and a confidant so close that America's 41st president liked to call him his "little brother"

On the last day of Bush's life, Baker checked on his friend. The result was an exchange Baker shared several times, including on CNN's "State of the Union."

"Hey, Bake, where are we going today?" asked Bush, alert after days of struggle.

"Well, Jefe, we're going to heaven," Baker replied.

"Good. That's where I want to go," said Bush.

Bush died about 12 hours later, surrounded by family and friends, including his pastor, the Rev. Russell J. Levenson Jr. It was a time for prayers and goodbyes, and the priest shared some details in sermons during both the state funeral in Washington, D.C., and the final rites at St. Martin's Episcopal Church in Houston, the Bush family's home parish for 50 years.

"It was a beautiful end. It was a beautiful beginning. ... The president so loved his church — he loved the Episcopal Church. He so loved our great nation. He so loved you, his friends. He so loved every member of his family," said Levenson, at Washington National Cathedral.

"But he was so ready to go to heaven. ... My hunch is heaven, as perfect as it must be, just got a bit kinder and gentler." The priest turned and addressed the coffin, blending faith with language from

Bush's days as a Navy pilot: "Mr. President, mission complete. Well done, good and faithful servant. Welcome to your eternal home, where ceiling and visibility are unlimited and life goes on forever."

There is nothing unusual about priests discussing heaven during funerals. After all, the Pew Research Center's massive "religious landscape" study a few years ago indicated that 72 percent of Americans believe in a place "where people who have led good lives are eternally rewarded," and the number is 82 percent for those affiliated with a religious tradition.

But the funeral rites for the 94-year-old Bush — build around scriptures, music and prayers he helped select — were packed with references to Christian faith and belief in life after death, using explicit religious language rarely heard in public life today.

There were visions of heaven in classic anthems and hymns sung by great choirs, as well as the Oak Ridge Boys.

During the state funeral, for example, granddaughter Jenna Bush Hager read from Revelation, chapter 21: "Then I saw a new heaven and a new Earth, for the first heaven and the first Earth had passed away. ... And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared, as a bride adorned for her husband. ... God himself will be with them. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more."

The Beltway service, of course, offered political intrigue — with Pres-

ident Donald Trump sharing a tense pew with all of America's surviving presidents and first ladies. And the eulogies in both rites contained family stories, church stories, fishing stories and war stories. There were memories of politics, baseball, the 41st president's struggles with grammar, imaginary adventures with grandchildren, a vodka-and-steak dinner smuggled into a hospital room and decades of tears and prayers after the loss of a 3-year-old daughter.

Fighting with his emotions, President George W. Bush ended his eulogy with images of a heavenly reunion: "In our grief, let us smile knowing that Dad is hugging Robin and holding Mom's hand again."

This was a topic, Levenson said, that he had discussed with his parishioner during the last years of his life, which included several close calls with death.

During a visit several years ago, a stricken Bush opened up.

"At the time, he didn't know how that struggle would end," said the priest, preaching in Houston. "He put a question to me about as simply as anybody could. He said, 'What do you think heaven is like?'"

"It was a confident statement. ... He didn't want to know if there was a heaven or whether he would be there when the end came. He said he just wanted to know what it would be like. He was ready for heaven, and heaven was ready for him."

Terry Mattingly is the editor of *GetReligion.org* and senior fellow for media and religion at *The King's College in New York City*. He lives in Oak Ridge, Tennessee.



Terry Mattingly

COMMENTARY

hangings, tearing apart families. It is sickening at the least. Liberty and justice for all, a Christian nation.

I also think of the Philippines, Iraq, Vietnam, Afghanistan, Central America, all the dead people and destruction.

Our nation's footprint has been heavy on Central America: arms, torture, dictators, etc.

I'm just not going to whine about these illegal non-citizens. God bless them.

Harold mentions how many non-citizens are on welfare. The cost is \$57 billion a year. I say so what. Look at the billions we have spent on war in the Middle East. I have read our nation has spent \$5 to \$6 trillion on war in the Middle East. That includes caring for veterans with limbs blown off, etc.

I'm just not going to whine about non-citizens. Most of our debt is war-related. By the way, that is what the Second Amendment was about, killing Indians, westward expansion and keeping black slaves in line. Read Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz's book, "Loaded," on the Second Amendment.

Another good book on our policies in Central America is "Truth, Torture and the American Way," by Jennifer K. Harbury.

I don't mean to offend anyone. I just like the truth to be known. I'm a truth-seeker. The truth will set you free.

May there be peace, the world over this Christmas. Peace is priceless.

Bush: great president, honorable man

Charles Schroeder Westphalia

Dear Editor:

The passing of a great man: George H.W. Bush, a great person, a leader, a gentleman and honorable man. His service for the U.S.A. began as an 18-year-old WWII pilot and he served this country all his life.

If past, present and future presidents would follow his example, they would be better people.

President Bush accomplishments were many, without fan-fair: A great president! Tail wind 41!

History will show that he was one of our greatest presidents, and only served one term. A patriot!

End of an era, the civility, respect, honorable, love of country, faith in God, has basically been lost in our government and our country over the past years.

Maybe the passing of George H.W. Bush was at the exact time. After the mid-term elections, Christmas and the New Year. Maybe the people in government and our nation will realize that it is not about them, not about the party, it is about the United States of America, and all mankind.

We have a president who puts the United States first, that's why he was elected president.

Another plus for our country: A number of new elects to Congress are prior service personal. Thanks for serving.

PERSPECTIVE

Farm bill is headed to president's desk

This holiday season, families across America will gather around the table to enjoy wonderful holiday meals with their loved ones. As Americans, we are very fortunate to enjoy access to the safest and most abundant food supply in the world. During this season of reflection and thankfulness, we must remember the hardworking farmers who work day in and day out to put food on our tables and in our grocery stores.

Over the last few years, Missouri's nearly 100,000 farms have faced drought conditions and tariff uncertainty. Congress faced an uphill battle as we sought to protect the programs that are working, while providing our farmers with meaningful reforms they desperately needed. After months of bipartisan negotiations to reauthorize the farm bill, it is finally headed to the president's desk.

I was proud to support this legislation to provide the certainty Missouri farmers deserve while investing in the future of our rural communities. Missouri's 3rd Congressional District will benefit from many of the provisions included in this package.

The 2018 farm bill safeguards crop insurance, provides additional funding for animal disease prevention, and supports agricultural trade and research. Protecting more than 290 million acres across the nation, crop insurance is a sound investment that supports America's abundant food supply. I know our Missouri soybean farmers needed this certainty after the drought conditions they faced, and I'm happy we were able to protect the program and make additional reforms. In meetings over the last few years, I have also heard from dairy farmers across our state who were worried about animal disease prevention. Thankfully, the 2018 farm bill includes additional funding for animal disease prevention and management initiatives, including the stockpiling of foot-and-mouth disease vaccines. Finally, the 2018 farm bill provides more than \$400 million in additional funding for ag trade, along with increased funding for land grant universities and special research initiatives to ensure we have the best and safest crops.

Rural America is the heart of our nation and the heart of Missouri's 3rd District. The 2018 farm bill prioritizes our rural communities, strengthening the Department of Agriculture's capacity to combat the opioid crisis and making significant investments in rural broadband infrastructure. Rural broadband availability is one of the top issues my constituents bring to my attention, and this legislation includes forward looking standards to meet the needs of rural communities across the nation.

This Christmas, farmers are receiving the gift of certainty with a farm bill that prioritizes rural America and supports our Missouri farmers. As we gather for our holiday celebrations, I hope we all have a greater appreciation of those who work day in and day out to feed our nation and the world.

U.S. Rep. Blaine Luetkemeyer, R-Mo., shares his perspective each week on national issues, including ones that affect Missouri. He represents the state's 3rd District, which includes Jefferson City. His local office can be reached at 635-7232.



Blaine Luetkemeyer

YOUR OPINION

Issue-oriented letters to the editor are welcome. All letters should be limited to 400 words in length; longer letters may be edited to conform to the specified length. The author's name must appear with the letter, and the name, address and phone number provided for verification. Letters that cannot be verified by telephone will not be published.

With all we're guilty of, we focus on 'illegals?'

Dale Reichel
California

Dear Editor:

I look at things differently than many people, especially Republicans. Harold Horstmann's letter in Sunday's paper, the 9th, was on "illegals" and their cost to our country. Many others have whined about "illegals" too.

When I hear and read this stuff I think how Anglos, whites, run off Latin Americans, all the way into Mexico.

I think of Native Americans, how they were slaughtered by whites taking their land, burning their homes, tortured. Whites took more and more Indian land.

Then I think of African Americans. Legal slavery, beatings, rapes, breeding black people like animals,

Walter E. Hussman Jr.,
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Daily Bible verse
You, Lord, reign forever; your throne endures from generation to generation.
Lamentations 5:19