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2019 Entry Form

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What is the subject/title of the entry? Some legislation seems to defy all logic; Put sheriff's offices under county control

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

Please give a brief explanation of issues discussed and the results achieved. (This space will expand as you type in your comments.) Extreme abuse of power among too many state sheriffs, which led to new legislation that seems should not even be necessary, as well as an editorial suggesting the state's sheriffs be answerable and accountable to county councils, rather than leaving the most powerful county elected officials nearly untouchable.

INDEX-JOURNAL

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OUR VIEW

Some legislation seems to defy all logic

And now, from the “Are you serious? We need such a law?” file comes this. Apparently, it will be necessary for some legislation to come out of Columbia that would spell out that felons cannot seek one of the state’s highest law enforcement positions — sheriff.

Based on a rather rich history of abuse of power in office carried out by no fewer than eight sheriffs in the past decade, lawmakers are eyeing legislation that would prevent anyone from running for sheriff who has been convicted, pleaded guilty to, or been pardoned of a felony or crime of moral turpitude, the Associated Press reported this past week.

A law is already on the books that ostensibly would prevent such a ridiculous scenario since sheriffs have to be certified law officers. A felony conviction would prevent certification. But the “moral turpitude” clause surfaced because of scenarios such as the one involving former Saluda Sheriff Jason Booth. Booth pleaded guilty to misconduct in office in 2012 for using inmate labor for construction projects at his home. He also allowed that inmate unsupervised visits with the inmate’s girlfriend, who wound up pregnant.

As much as one would think that should spell the end to Booth’s career in law enforcement that very nearly was not the case. Four years later, Booth filed to run for his former post and got 31 percent of the vote. If it were not so sad, this would be nearly as humorous as Sheriff Andy Taylor given Deputy Barney Fife a fully loaded revolver.

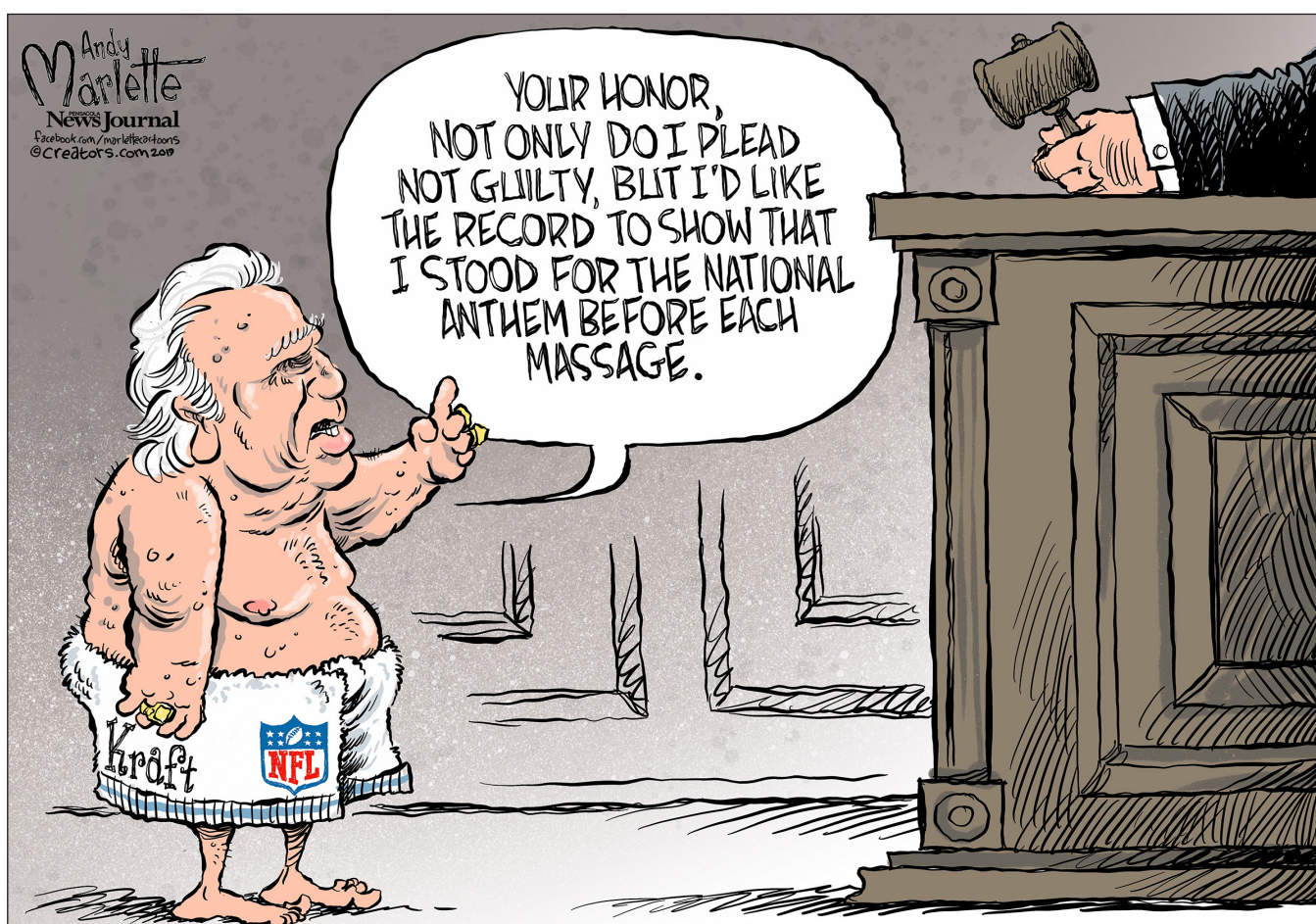
As state Rep. Bruce Bryant, who was sheriff of York County from 1997 to 2017, said, “A sheriff needs to be held to the highest standards. If you have been convicted of a crime, how could the public have any confidence in your ability to uphold the law fairly for them?”

That certainly is a reasonable expectation, but given the percentage of votes Booth received in 2016, we wonder about voters’ recall abilities. Really, one would reason that a sheriff who abuses his office for personal gain, whether a misdemeanor or felony, would have the decency not to run again. And one would reason that voters would know better to return such a person to the most powerful law enforcement position in the county.

Maybe not.

SHARE YOUR VIEWS

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Trump’s rambling CPAC speech should alarm all of us

WASHINGTON

The president of the United States gave a rambling and incoherent two-hour speech in which he raved like a lunatic and told crazy, self-serving lies from start to finish. If that no longer qualifies as alarming, we’re in serious trouble.



EUGENE ROBINSON

WASHINGTON POST WRITERS GROUP

I realize the speed-of-light news cycle has moved on. I realize anything that happened the past week has all but faded into the mists of time. But President Trump’s unhinged performance Saturday at the Conservative Political Action Conference is surely worth more than a passing shrug. If you had an uncle or a grandpa who sounded so divorced from reality, you’d be urgently concerned.

“You know I’m totally off script right now,” he said. “And this is how I got elected, by being off script. True. And if we don’t go off script, our country is in big trouble, folks. Because we have to get it back.”

There was nothing, anything like a script.

He tried to talk about the Democratic Party’s proposed Green New Deal: “When the wind stops blowing, that’s the end of your electric. Let’s hurry up. ‘Darling — Darling, is the wind blowing today? I’d like to watch television, darling.’ No, but it’s true.”

Not even remotely true, but he was just getting started.

He raged about the special counsel’s

investigation: “Now, Robert Mueller never received a vote, and neither did the person that appointed him. And as you know, the attorney general says, ‘I’m going to recuse myself. I’m going to recuse.’ And I said, why the hell didn’t he tell me that before I put him in? How do you recuse yourself?”

Um, by following the rules. Former Attorney General Jeff Sessions recused himself because he was potentially a witness in the investigation, or even a subject. He had no choice.

Trump imagined what the organizer of the CPAC conference, Matt Schlapp, might be thinking right then: “This is a lot more than we paid for.’ You know, normally you read a few pages and you say, ‘Bye, folks.’ But you know what I like about this? Number one, I’m in love, and you’re in love. We’re all in love together.”

Love is indeed a wonderful thing.

Two full years into his term, the president talked obsessively about the crowds at his inauguration: “And they showed — they showed from the White House all the way down. ... There were people. Nobody has ever seen it. The Capitol down to the Washington Monument — people. But I saw pictures that there were no people. Those pictures were taken hours before.”

Trump’s crowd was big. President Obama’s was bigger. Someday, perhaps, he will get over it.

“They had to walk with high heels, in many cases. They had to walk all the way down to the Washington Monument and then back. And I looked, and I made a speech, and I said, before I got on — I said to the people that were sitting next to me, ‘I’ve never seen anything like this.’”

Not over it yet.

Trump talked about an encounter with an old friend, New York developer Richard LeFrak: “Richard came up [to Melania]; he said, ‘I’ve known your husband for 65 years.’ I said, ‘Don’t say that.’ I say, ‘Say 25, 30. Don’t say 65 years.’ But I said, ‘Richard — Richard, call me Donald, like you always do. Call me Don.’ ‘OK. OK, Don. OK.’ He gets his breath. Uh-huh. Two minutes later — ‘Mr. President ... ‘That’s called respect for the office, right? Maybe that’s a good thing, right? Many — many of my friends. And that wasn’t in the script either.”

One hopes not.

He talked about the hardship of the government shutdown: “I spent my New Year’s all by myself. ... It was me and about 500 men and women outside with machine guns. I never saw so many beautiful-looking machine guns. I’d look at that equipment and I’d say, ‘Man ... ‘They sit in the trees. They sit on the lawn.”

He talked about his quick trip to Iraq: “General one, general two, general three. I mean, these generals — there’s no person in Hollywood that could play the role. These guys are like perfect people. I said, ‘What’s your name?’ ‘Sir, my name is Raisin.’ What the hell kind of a name? I said, ‘Raisin, like the fruit?’ He goes, ‘Yes, sir, Raisin.’ ‘What’s your last name?’ ‘Caine.’ Raisin Caine. I said, ‘You got to be kidding me.’”

That is what sticks with Trump from his visit to a war zone.

“I’m going to regret this speech,” he said. The rest of us certainly do.

Eugene Robinson can be reached at eugenerobinson@washpost.com

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Supports law enforcement, but not medical marijuana

Every morning as I read the Index-Journal, of which I am fond, I read of arrests recently made of scamps charged with drug violations of one kind or another. This gives me comfort seeing our law enforcement officers being successful, but it

does cause me concern about the spread and use of illegal drugs.

For example, there was an interesting story of the arrests of several men in what appeared to be in a massive drug activity, but were caught and property seized. We must be proud of our law enforcement officers.

Can you imagine what we would suf-

fer if they weren’t there to catch the sorry crooks?

Yet the state legislature has under consideration a bill to legalize marijuana for medical purposes. We must not permit the use of marijuana or any other known illegal drug for any purpose.

JULIUS BAGGETT
McCormick

Bibi and Trump agonistes

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is facing indictment on charges of fraud, corruption, breach of trust and bribery. He’s also running for re-election, and with less than six weeks until ballots are scheduled to be cast in Israel, some have raised suspicions of a political hit, not unlike the various hearings and investigations ensnaring President Trump.

From a geopolitical standpoint there is no one, including Netanyahu’s political opponents, in the prime minister’s league when it comes to national security, economics and politics. In this, again, he in some ways resembles President Trump.

Recall Netanyahu’s speech to the United Nations General Assembly last September in which he conducted a “show and tell” drama with pictures of a secret Iranian nuclear facility, as well as hidden missiles in Beirut. The speech was a searing indictment of the West’s wishful thinking when it comes to Iran,

the nuclear deal negotiated by the Obama administration and the intentions of radical Muslim terrorists.

As David M. Weinberg wrote in The Jerusalem Post in 2017, “An overwhelming majority of Israelis ascribes the last decade of stability and triumph to Netanyahu’s leadership. He may not be the ultimate paragon of virtue — what politician is? But his prudence and professionalism have best served Israel’s strategic needs.”

Compared to the survival of Israel, the charges brought against Netanyahu are small potatoes.

Which brings me to President Trump. Those who criticize Trump supporters, including his evangelical Christian base, say the standard they

applied to President Clinton and his behavior has been abandoned when it comes to Trump. These critics say the economy was also good under Clinton (one argument Trump supporters say is in the current president’s favor), but that he received no credit from those who claimed then that personal character matters most.

All true, but what about a president’s policies? Should they matter more? President Clinton named justices to the Supreme Court and lower courts who are liberal interpreters of the Constitution and who uphold abortion rights. He also raised taxes, though he and then-Speaker Newt Gingrich did agree on welfare reform.

The question becomes: Which would you choose — questionable character or appealing policies?

Yes, conservatives and evangelicals would prefer a church-going, once-married, faithful politician (like Vice President Mike Pence), but if the choice is between socialism and

capitalism, between conservative and liberal judges, between more abortions or fewer, between redefining marriage and defending its once legal — even biblical — definition, between a strong economy and a weaker one, between record low unemployment and higher numbers of the unemployed, between open borders and controlling illegal immigration, the choice isn’t that difficult.

A look at history reveals some pretty bad characters whose policies were well regarded. As Britishheritage.com notes, “Winston Churchill was a strong and bullish leader. His leadership during WWII is remembered very fondly. ... Many, however, deem Churchill culpable in a plethora of human rights violations, and question his views toward races different to his own.”

Benjamin Franklin was no paragon of virtue, but his assistance in founding America, along with his inventions, are highly regarded

by historians. The same is true for Thomas Jefferson and other founders who owned slaves.

In modern times, John F. Kennedy was a notorious adulterer, but is credited with establishing the Peace Corps and launching America to the moon. His successor, Lyndon Johnson, fought for civil rights and open housing laws, but, according to his biographer, Robert Caro, used racist language in private.

The point is not to excuse bad behavior in leadership, but to examine their policies to see if they promote the general welfare. In the cases on Netanyahu and Trump, they have. Whether those policies overcome whatever personal flaws these men have will be up to Israel’s legal system and voters next month and the U.S. legal system and voters next year.

This year marks Cal Thomas’ 35th year as a syndicated columnist. Readers may email Cal Thomas at tcaeditors@tribpub.com.

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OUR VIEW

Put sheriff's offices under county control

Here we go again. Another South Carolina sheriff, another indictment and removal from office.

Kenney Boone, who was a longtime Florence County Sheriff's Department employee before being elected to the position, is the latest to fall from the highest law enforcement position our state's 46 counties have.

Boone, who was indicted Wednesday, is facing two felony counts of embezzlement and a misdemeanor count of misconduct in office. He was immediately suspended from office by Gov. Henry McMaster.

According to the indictment, Boone spent county funds and drug seizure money on an array of personal items, to include bicycle equipment, window tinting, groceries, tools, coolers and more. Trips to Walmart, GameStop, Mainstream Boutique, Rapid Weight Loss and Best Buy resulted in under \$20,000 in personal purchases.

We will acknowledge there is the presumption of innocence at this point in this case, but if Boone is found guilty and convicted we cannot help but recall Lord John Dalberg-Action's famous quote: "Power tends to corrupt; absolute power corrupts absolutely."

This trend of abuse of power, sadly, has been rampant in the Palmetto State where nearly one-fourth of the sheriffs have been found guilty of breaking the laws they are supposed to uphold. As noted this past month in this space, Charleston's Post & Courier released the results of a five-monthlong investigation into the sheriff's offices across the state, an investigation that, as we said, should give cause for concern about the structure we have in place that allows such abuse of power.

As we wrote then, the newspaper's investigative piece "reflects an attitude of self-righteousness, arrogance and entitlement among our state's more powerful law enforcement officers. As the story's headline reads, we have sheriffs who view themselves as above the law."

Short of indictments — when wrongdoing is actually discovered and reported — there's not much that can be done when corruption takes place in the sheriff's offices. The governor can remove a sheriff from office, but not permanently — at least, that is, not without a conviction on the heels of the indictment. So it's entirely possible for a sheriff who willfully breaks the law to retain his seat. While it seems logical that voters could take care of such business at the polls, bear in mind that voters don't always have great recall and certainly might not be aware of any misdoings, real or perceived.

It's time to revisit how sheriffs get into and remain in an office where they can control vast amounts of money and wield power over subordinates and inmates alike, all while remaining unaccountable to anyone but the voters.

Municipal police chiefs are not elected to their offices. They serve at the pleasure of the city and town councils who are elected by the voters. They and their budgets are under council scrutiny.

Enough evidence points to a need to establish the same type of system among our state's sheriffs departments by making them accountable to county councils and county treasurers. While such a move would not necessarily bring an end to corruption, it would likely circumvent many such attempts and create a better path toward true accountability and remediation.

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You hear that? It's spring, and that means music

It's spring, and you know what that means. It means love is in the air? Well, sure. There is that. But there is music in the air.

While there generally is always live music to be found in and around Greenwood — an excuse for our wonderful "the beat" columnist Laura Beth Brooks to venture out nearly every weekend — spring tends to be the launch pad for music to truly be in the air. As in outside. Witness Friday's Springfest in Uptown Greenwood. Coupled with that you will find more and more musicians venturing outside area watering holes, such as Howard's on Main. It's a great time to be in Greenwood, and there will be more to come.



WHITING'S WRITINGS

RICHARD S. WHITING

Howard's, T.W. Boons, Flynn's on Maxwell, The Mill House and more offer a great array of musicians. And while most performances are indoors, it's easy to enjoy the spring weather and have a meal or beverage just outside these venues and still hear the performers before venturing back in for a more intimate setting.

The Uptown Live music series will bring it all outdoors with the main stage

at the end of Oregon Avenue. There, music lovers can set up their lawn chairs while listening to bands and enjoying food and beverages provided by area vendors.

As Laura Beth and I have noted numerous times, we have no shortage of incredible talent in these here parts, plus the are — especially Greenwood's Uptown — has become a draw for musicians from outside the area. Trey Stephens, Spencer Rush, Tim White, Chris Hardy and a host of others have found Greenwood to be as welcoming as Greenville and other larger cities. If you haven't done so, you should check these people out sometime. You might want to add to your music selection too. Many of them sell CDs for only \$5 apiece.

Of course, you can't beat listening to all the homegrown talent. It's hard to list them all, so there's no sense in trying. Always a treat to hear Kenny Price and Rachel Davis, along with whoever they snag to help fill out the sound. Ashby Stokes keeps on keepin' on, plus cranking out the CDs. His latest, "The Spirit of You," is a nice 10-track album dedicated to his and brother Taylor's mother, Toots. All the tracks are his, with the exception of his renditions of "Route 66" and "Wildwood Flower." If he's out and about playing somewhere and you haven't snagged a copy of this one, you really

should.

Stephen Galloway, Greenwood's saxophone player extraordinaire, continues hitting the Greenwood circuit. And we have the successful Bad Weather States, which also just played at Springfest. Jake Bartley Band, which just cranked out a video and is getting rave reviews on and off campus, so to speak, are always a treat. Always good to hear Dubie Brown, Don Johnson, Kellar Ridgeway and, as I said, a string of others too numerous to mention, so pardon me for leaving some off the list.

Really, the point is to say there's plenty of reason to stay right here in Greenwood throughout the spring and summer if music is a major part of your life. Plus, you know what's coming soon, right? July. And July means barbecue. It also means Greenwood Blues Cruise. So get ready to venture throughout Uptown that second weekend in July when Gary Erwin, aka Shrimp City Slim, comes to town and brings along a host of talented musicians.

And get your dancin' shoes ready, y'all.

Whiting is executive editor of the Index-Journal. Contact him at 864-943-2522; email rwhiting@indexjournal.com, or follow him on Twitter at IJEDITOR. Views expressed in this column are those of the writer only and do not represent the newspaper's opinion.

A level-2 zombie jamboree

The worst telephone connection you will ever have in your entire life is when you call your telephone company with a problem. The call is scratchy, you can't understand the person on the other end of the line, and when they transfer you to a supervisor, they drop the call.

I spent two hours on the phone last night with a phone company that I don't even use for phone service. Due to a merger, they are now my cable TV company — even though they don't do that very well, either. I'm calling because, like everyone else in the world, I'm cutting the cord. I no longer want to pay for the 110 channels I never watch.



JIM MULLEN

NEWSPAPER ENTERPRISE ASSN.

The whole calling experience was awful. I knew the zombie apocalypse was coming, but I thought the brain-eaters would be out on the street, not on the other end of my phone.

The first problem was the menu: Are you calling to pay your bill with a credit card or a debit card? Are you calling to upgrade your plan? Are you calling to switch to a plan that includes phone calls that actually get through? Are you calling because you have absolutely nothing else to do, no family, no friends, no children to feed and just want to kill a few hours?

Press three.

None of these choices addressed my problem or told me how to get it resolved. I used to just press zero a few times when confronted with this kind of phone menu, and that would switch me to a live person, but companies are on to that now. They will do anything to keep you from talking to a human. Because you have to pay humans, you see. Not very much, because that would cut into the CEO's bonuses, but you do have to pay them something, which is sooo annoying.

So now, instead of hitting zero, I say the word "representative." That gets me a live person. The connection is thin, tinny and crackling. It seems this phone company is spending all its money on TV commercials instead of cell towers. You'd think I was calling India. In 1950. For help with my party line. I spoke to a friend in the Congo last week, and the call was as clear as a bell, but the four calls I made to my phone company last night (since they kept dropping the connection) were almost unintelligible.

Now, no one expects every business transaction to be perfect. We've all returned things, or purchased something that looked good online, but wasn't what we wanted when we saw it in person. But there is nothing quite like phone companies and cable companies for being on the wrong side of a transaction and refusing to address it.

My problem, which took an hour to identify, was that my address was not

"findable," so the computer couldn't automatically close my account. The computer was still able to automatically bill my credit card, though. Funny how that works.

"Hold on, I'll switch you to a supervisor," they said. Except they don't say "supervisor," anymore, it's a "Level 2" person. "Just hold on!"

Click. The phone call drops.

I call back, go through the menu, say "representative," and tell the same sad story all over again to a new person over the same terrible connection.

"Don't worry, I can help you!" Another 45 minutes and guess what? My address can't be confirmed by their computer. "Hold on, I'm switching you to a Level 2 person."

Wash, rinse, repeat. This time, the Level 1 person couldn't even reach a Level 2. Between the clicks and cut-outs, Level 1 told me there were many notes on my file from the monthly phone calls I have made canceling the account, and not to worry, it would all be taken care of.

Today, bright and early, I got a robotic call from them, telling me that if I didn't pay the bill immediately, it would go to collections.

They'll have to talk to my Level 2 person about that.

Jim Mullen is the author of "It Takes a Village Idiot: Complicating the Simple Life" and "Baby's First Tattoo." Reach him at Mullen.jim@gmail.com