

OPINION

The Tribune-Democrat
 Founded in 1853

"It is the organ of no faction or clique, and will aim to be, in truth, a tribune of the people, 'standing up' for Johnstown always."

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Did the killing stop?

Death penalty moratorium debated

A state Supreme Court panel, which proposed a moratorium on executions, will doubtless get little support for its point of view from Governor Rendell and his one-time Republican gubernatorial opponent, Attorney General Mike Fisher.

Both men helped write the state's death penalty law 25 years ago, when Rendell was a DA in Philadelphia and Fisher was a state legislator. Based upon their pronouncements lately, they haven't changed positions.

Nonetheless, the high court's Committee on Racial and Gender Bias in the Justice System is calling for a moratorium. It contends that race appears to play a major, "if not overwhelming" role in the imposition of the death penalty.

Of the 242 people on Pennsylvania's death row, the report said, 62 percent are black. Only Louisiana has a higher percentage of blacks on death row, the report said.

Does this mean that the Pennsylvania death penalty is unevenly applied? The issue can be debated ad infinitum.

"There's nothing new here," said a spokesman for Fisher, Sean Connolly. "Ultimately, the conclusion is that we need another study."

Perhaps — unless, of course, we could all agree that we need to eliminate the death penalty on the basis that it's barbaric, uncivilized and doesn't serve a purpose.

Not a chance.

But since 1995, Pennsylvania has executed only three people by lethal injection. Three people in eight years. That sounds like a de facto moratorium.

Maybe somebody should check to see if the murder rate went down.

Since 1995, Pennsylvania has executed only three people by lethal injection.

Our Miss Gordon

The city of Johnstown is a little less rich these days, and not because of poor finances.

Pauline Gordon died last Tuesday at age 83. Miss Gordon was one of the best-known business owners in the city. And she certainly defied the odds as an African-American female mortician, but for 56 years she served families and her profession with skill and style. She was known for her flamboyant hats and proud walk, and often carried a small dog with her as she made her way about town.

She was beloved, and friends and associates remembered her as intelligent, gracious and humble. She was known for helping young people and the community. Her empathy and compassion served her well in her profession, and many families relied on her service and advice during their time of bereavement.

But Pauline Gordon wasn't a pushover. She was feisty and self-assured. Over the years, she served in various capacities as a city alderman, traffic court magistrate and tax assessor. She had a sense for people, justice and truth, which earned her respect in many circles.

Miss Gordon will certainly be missed. She set a standard many could strive for, but few will attain.



Gordon



READERS' FORUM

Another dark side to Jessica's story

Jesica Santillan was the sick Mexican teenager who died after a heart-lung transplant, mistakenly from a donor with the wrong blood type. Now that people have stopped sobbing about her, perhaps we can learn lessons from her death.

They are not the lessons discussed in Ellen Goodman's March 1 column. "A lesson in Jessica's death." Goodman's theme was medical mistakes and how we need "systems" of teamwork, more sharing of information and so on. Yes, that's probably true. But more important, Jessica's death is an example of the way American hospitals are besieged by illegal immigrants, who by law must be treated, with the huge bills going to United States citizens.

First, a few facts, some of them politically incorrect:

- The Santillan family was smuggled into the U.S. expressly for medical treatment not available in Mexico, and to stick Americans with the bill.
- The girl would have died without American-quality treatment, but even a successful heart-lung transplant reportedly has a survival rate of less than 50 percent after five years. Therefore, Goodman was wrong in stating the girl "passed the point of no return" when surgeons at Duke University Hospital transplanted organs of the wrong blood type. Her true point of no return was when she was born with defective organs.
- In America, where nearly 4,000 patients are on the waiting list for a new heart and about that number waiting for a lung transplant, and where about 10 percent per year die waiting, Jessica's operations wasted four organs over two surgeries. On top of that, the Santillan family refused to donate any of Jessica's organs when she died.

Obviously, medical errors should be prevented as much as reasonably possible, but we should not overlook the Santillans' level of selfishness that is sincere and monumental.

American hospitals spend uncounted millions of dollars per year treating illegal immigrants at a time when U.S. citizens are losing coverage (e.g., Bethlehem Steel retirees) and when we are threatened by terrorists. If we don't get



Jesica

control of our borders, we're in big trouble from both bankrupt, closed hospitals and future terrorist attacks.

Dwight B. Owen
 Westmont

Methodists 'Stand For Children'

We went to the state Capitol as United Methodists' living in Pennsylvania to "Stand For Children." We represented three UM conferences — Central, Western and Eastern Pennsylvania. Collectively, we represented more than 500,000 Methodists and more than 2,200 congregations united in deep belief that no child in Pennsylvania should be excluded from the privilege of an excellent education — not just adequate, not just an education, but an excellent education. After all, we live in a country where that is not only possible, but is expected.

Sadly, current reality in Pennsylvania is that a child's location, zip code, neighborhood and life situation are determining the quality of education that child receives. Our commitment as United Methodists, our involvement in this justice issue of education reform, is based primarily on these five theses:

- On scriptural advocacy for justice and fairness and life abundant on behalf of the most vulnerable, the children.
- Our tradition, which is one of action for the social gospel.
- Our experiences as evidenced in the communities where we live and serve.
- Our reason, which tells us that our public education system is failing our children.
- Our spirit, which is telling us that we must be agents of change who act now.

It is fitting to also honor the legacy of Mary McLeod Bethune, a Methodist woman who was an educator and one who sought justice for all people at all costs. Bethune left a legacy of love, hope and a thirst for education.

We are asking our governor, state senators and representatives the question: "What will be your legacy for Pennsylvania's children?"

We will be watching and waiting for their answers.

Verna Lawes
 Johnstown

Twp. decision made for good of all

I would like to thank The Tribune-Democrat for last Thursday's news story concerning Susquehanna Township's water needs ("Susquehanna OKs water plan"). I would also like to thank you for calling Larry Custer (Cambria County Redevelopment Authority executive director) and getting his opinion. It was written fairly and had the facts, giving both sides of the controversy.

At least you checked into the story before writing about it, unlike WJAC-TV, which ran the story as "100 Susquehanna Township residents forced to get water." That makes it sound like the supervisors had no regard for the residents or their opinions, which is not true. Many of the residents involved are very much for the water. It was not an easy decision and officials knew they couldn't please everyone. The supervisors did what they thought was in the best interest of the township's future.

Thank you for not giving a negative spin to the story.

Dave Bobik
 Susquehanna Township supervisor
 Northern Cambria

Send letters to: Readers' Forum, The Tribune-Democrat, 425 Locust St., P.O. Box 340, Johnstown, Pa. 15907-0340. Include a daytime telephone number and address so your letter can be verified. Letters must be limited to 250 words. All letters are subject to editing. The Tribune-Democrat does not publish anonymous letters.

Stuffed-toy sales doing 'beary' good

I would like to comment about the news story in The Tribune-Democrat Feb 9, "Bear-ing up: Family raising awareness of disease." It talked about my 8-month-old daughter, Allie, who suffers with the deadly genetic disease cystic fibrosis.

I would like to thank the reporter and all of those at the paper for writing this wonderful article.

Since your article, we have sold about 132 Burke P. Bears. Gardner's

Candy and Ice Cream Parlor in Bedford has had a hard time keeping the bears in stock.

There have been a lot of wonderful people buying Burke, whether to just add him to their stuffed animal collection or to buy him because of the article. Whatever the reason, thanks, because, like I have said before, the more Burkes we can sell the more money there is to find a cure, and the faster my daughter will get in line to be one of the first cured.

We have gotten help and support from our families, church, friends, God, the newspapers, people we don't even know, Bob and Linda Derr (Burke's dad and stepmom), and last but not least my wonderful 4-year-old daughter, Maria.

Without all of these, I don't know what we would have done, especially without Maria. She was my lifeline when my husband was hurt last May 26, and when Allie was being born on the 31st and then our being told two weeks later that she might have CF.

Maria is my hero. But a big thanks to all.

Brandy Claycomb and family
 Imler

France's strange way of saying thanks

The thousands who "rest" in Flanders Field, after twice winning back their land for the French, might now be wondering why?

George E. Luther
 Johnstown

National Debt

The national debt, updated as of 5 p.m. yesterday by the federal government, is:

- \$6,466,888,249,773.97
- Since last update: Up \$39,219,432,580.99
- Your share: \$22,261.77

Doonesbury

BY GARRY TRUDEAU

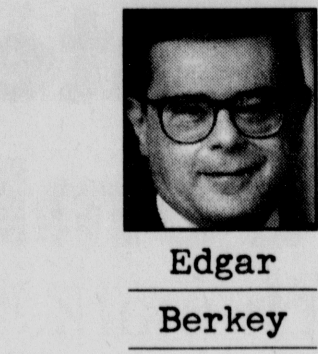
SO, FRANK — WHY DOES THE GOP NOW EMBRACE DEFICITS? A LITTLE COUNTER-INTUITIVE, NO?

NOT AT ALL! THE BIGGER THE DEFICIT, THE GREATER THE PRESSURE TO RESTRAIN SPENDING!

THAT'S WHY WE'RE TRYING TO GROW BUSH'S CURRENT \$300 BILLION DEFICIT! WITH THE WAR, WE MIGHT JUST HIT \$400 BILLION! MAYBE EVEN \$450 BIL!

FURTHER RESTRAINING SPENDING!

RIGHT! AND IF NOT, WE JUST KICK IT UP A NOTCH!



Edgar Berkey

Foreign oil's stranglehold on America

Continued turmoil in the Middle East reminds us once again of the necessity to reduce America's dependence on foreign oil. Yes, pursuing terrorists and shoring up our homeland defenses are vital. But protecting ourselves against a catastrophic cutoff in oil supplies is essential to the smooth running of our economy.

The Arab countries under which most of the world's oil lies are seething with discontent. No one can predict what might lead to a disruption in oil supplies, or whether war with Iraq might trigger terrorist attacks against oil fields and facilities in the region and beyond.

If push comes to shove, could we do without oil supplies from abroad? Not a chance. America consumes almost 19 million barrels of oil every day, and produces fewer than 8 million. The balance comes from overseas suppliers, with imports accounting for about 60 percent of daily consumption today compared to 47 percent 10 years ago. A bit less than one-quarter of that oil comes from the Persian Gulf region, and the volume is growing.

Over the past 30 years, we have suffered Middle East supply disruptions caused by the Yom Kippur War of 1973, the fall of the Shah of Iran in 1979 and Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1990. For the United States, the danger is that war with Iraq could threaten oil fields in neighboring countries.

Plainly, we need to expand America's Strategic Petroleum Reserve. And President Bush has said he wants to increase the reserve from its current level of 600 million barrels to 700 million barrels, enough to supply U.S. needs for over a month. His new budget request to Congress would provide almost \$200 million to meet that goal. Congress should take prompt action to fill the reserve. This would be used quickly if an oil disruption threatened the nation's economy.

Longer term, by scaling back our reliance on oil from the Persian Gulf we could reduce a major cause of anti-American feeling while simultaneously lessening our vulnerability to oil cutoffs and price spikes. We can broaden our sources of oil by getting more from Latin America, Africa and the Caspian Sea region of the former Soviet Union.

We can further expand the use of alternative energy sources, especially making greater use of clean-coal technology and nuclear power, since electricity can be substituted for the direct burning of oil in industry and transportation. We could also tap renewable energy sources like solar and wind power even more.

But the current attractiveness of nuclear power is working to bring it back into vogue. All indicators of safety and performance at nuclear plants around the country have gone up steadily since the early 1980s. Nuclear energy now supplies 36 percent of Pennsylvania's electricity and 20 percent of the nation's power.

Nuclear power continues to grow, and the U.S. has added the equivalent of 24 large power plants since 1990. This growth must be considered remarkable, given that there hasn't been an order for a new nuclear plant in this country since 1978.

Coal is affordable, supplies are plentiful and the United States possesses more than 240 billion tons of recoverable coal reserves, or about one-fourth of the world's total. We have a greater share of the world's coal than Saudi Arabia does of the world's oil, and the supply could last as long as 300 years at current usage levels. Pennsylvania alone has a reserve base of 28.6 billion tons.

And it should be clear by now that we ought to make some sacrifices for the common good. Improving the fuel efficiency of motor vehicles is an essential part of the solution. On top of that, we need more vehicles that don't rely on gasoline made from oil. Cars powered by batteries or fuel cells might not be practical or affordable yet, but there are several large discernable research and development programs all over the country moving us in that direction, as we seek alternatives to the internal combustion engine.

In short, the tenuousness of our current energy situation argues for a much more stimulative public policy that will encourage and lead to a balanced mix of energy sources that are more under America's control. Congress must not ignore the need for a sound energy policy and must act decisively on energy legislation, for we are fundamentally dealing with the security of this nation.

Edgar Berkey is vice president and chief quality officer of Concurrent Technologies Corp., Pittsburgh.