

OPINION

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"The Daily Journal is dedicated to community service, to defense of individual rights and to providing those checks upon government which no constitution can ensure."

SCOTT ALEXANDER
founding editor, 1963

AT ISSUE

The 300th anniversary of Benjamin Franklin's birth is Tuesday.

OUR POINT

Despite the passage of time, people today can learn a lot from the writer, inventor and statesman.

At age 300, Franklin still can teach us something

The Daily Journal

For someone about to turn 300, Benjamin Franklin holds up pretty well.

Tuesday marks the 300th anniversary of Franklin's birth. Every schoolchild learns about his flying a kite in a thunderstorm to demonstrate that lightning is a form of electricity.

Or they learn about Franklin's publication, Poor Richard's Almanac, which dispensed wisdom such as "A word to the wise is enough" or "God helps them that help themselves."

Or they hear about his involvement in the writing of the Declaration of Independence and Constitution. But despite a prolific, even amazing, career as a writer, inventor and politician, is Franklin relevant to today's society?

The answer is yes.

People today can learn a lot from the not-so-humble 17th century writer, entrepreneur, scientist, philosopher, diplomat — you get the idea.

Ellis Hall, dean of students at Franklin College, is teaching a special four-week course on the leadership of Franklin in the 21st century. Hall says the core of Franklin's genius and relevance today was his ability to combine community gain that also benefited himself.

Franklin didn't set out strictly to gain something, Hall insists, but if he was a beneficiary, so much the better.

Hall offers as examples Franklin's establishment of one of the first organized fire brigades and the American colonies' first lending libraries. In each case, by pooling the resources of several people, the result was an improvement for all involved.

Another example of the lessons we can learn from Franklin is to benefit from all kinds of experience and apply that learning.

Hall says, "A liberal arts education is a good way to learn to be a leader. You develop broader perspectives. You bring a lot more to the table."

Even though Franklin never attended college, he studied a wide array of subjects and applied them to his life, his business interests and the community.

"He very much believed in being a good public citizen," Hall said. "He also saw that little actions can lead to great happiness."

For instance, Franklin saw that there was a problem with street dust in Philadelphia. It bothered a lot of people. By paving streets, it solved the dust problem and improved the lives of many people.

If Franklin were alive today, he would urge people to become engaged in the community and in local groups dedicated to public good. He would tell them to travel, to keep an open mind, to look for ways to do things better.

So happy birthday, Ben. We've been the beneficiary of your work for 300 years.

May we all continue to learn from you.

Focus: Appointees

Senate needs to speed up approval process

Scripps Howard News Service

On Jan. 4, President Bush outraged Democrats and discomfited some institution-minded Republicans when he bypassed the Senate confirmation process and made 17 recess appointments to posts in his administration.

Some of the positions were not particularly significant, various advisory boards, for example, but others truly were, especially Gordon England's recess appointment to be deputy secretary of defense.

And two of the appointees, one to head the Bureau of Immigration and Customs Enforcement, the other to assistant secretary of state for refugees, were controversial and may well have been voted down if the Senate had been given a chance.

The recess appointment is a constitutional power allowing presidents to staff their administrations when Congress is out of town. It dates back to the earliest days of the republic when distances were vast, travel slow and congressional sessions brief.

The appointments last until the end of the "next" congressional session. In the case of the most recent recess appointees, the Democrats argue that the appointments expire at the end of this year. But the White House contends that because the Senate returned last month for a one-day pro forma session, the appointees can stay until the end of 2007.

Senate Democrats contend that Bush was ducking the normal confirmation process. Maybe so, but while not what the Founding Fathers intended, what he did was within the rules. The appropriateness of his actions and how long the appointees stay are subject to debate.

But partisan politics aside, there is a larger systemic problem here: the Senate confirmation process is too slow, onerous and complex. It is a bipartisan problem. President Bill Clinton also resorted to recess appointments out of frustration.

The now-disbanded Presidential Appointee Initiative charted the length of time it took the Senate to confirm nominees in the first year of a president's term and found a worsening problem: For Bush it was 180 days; for Clinton, 174 days, and for Reagan, 142.

And, it has to be said, the problem is largely of the Senate's own making — short workweeks that make it tough to schedule hearings and votes, allowing individual senators too much leeway in delaying nominees and a general institutional dilatoriness.

Good government demands that the confirmation process, as the PAI urged, be simple, fast and fair. Recess appointments should be reserved for emergencies.

City of Indianapolis at odds with NK Hurst bean company over stadium site



YOUR

VIEWS AND COMMENTARY

Principal always wanted what is best for students

To the editor:

I was very disappointed to read that my friend and colleague of 17 years was terminated as the principal of Franklin Community High School.

I am not in a position to evaluate Leighton Turner as the high school principal. However, I do know that he was a very good assistant principal. I know that he is a very intelligent and experienced educator who often gave me very sage advice and that he wanted very much to do an outstanding job as a high school principal.

I know that he wants what is best for students, that he is very supportive of teachers, and that he understands that he works for the people of the school district and treats them with respect.

I was very happy that he was the principal of the school which my granddaughters attend.

I have read that Superintendent William Patterson was concerned about the dropout rate, the number of suspensions and expulsions, and the lack of variety in teaching methods used at FCHS.

If I understood correctly what I read, and if the superintendent was quoted accurately, I assume that these are major reasons for the termination, if not the only reasons.

Politicians and the media have promoted the idea that high schools with higher-than-average dropout rates and higher-than-average numbers of suspensions are bad schools. That is the conventional wisdom as a result. I wonder how many people have really analyzed what this means and the pressure it puts on school administrators.

There are many factors that can and do cause students to have difficulties in high school and eventually drop out, and most of them are very much in evidence long before they ever enter the doors of the high school. When are high school principals told what they can do to prevent these students from dropping out?

The financial costs of special programs that would be needed beginning in Grade 1 and continuing through high school (this is a school district problem, not a high school problem) to attempt to solve this problem would be very high.

Is the public willing to have the necessary tax increases to pay these costs?

Schools now are so pressured to have students "pass" ISTEP and other tests that most of their energies and resources are aimed in that direction. That is another issue, but it is another one where the politicians and media have created a monster that does more harm for education than good.

WRITE

A LETTER

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The surest way for a high school principal to lower the dropout rate is for the principal to lower attendance, behavioral and academic standards in the school. No one wants that. My grandson attends a law school with a very high dropout rate among first-year students. Does that make it a poor law school?

School disciplinary problems which result in suspensions and expulsions are really the same "problem" as the dropout problem.

Does the public want disruptive, unmotivated students who make it difficult for the serious, well-behaved students to learn, to be allowed to remain in school and continue to make learning for others difficult or impossible?

Alternative schools and special learning programs with a very small teacher/student ratio are possible solutions for some of these students; but they are very expensive, and they do not exist in the Franklin Community School Corp.

The final point that Superintendent Patterson mentioned was the use of varieties of methods by the staff. I found most of the teachers at Franklin high school willing and eager to try different methods.

However, when class sizes keep growing and teachers are required to spend large amounts of time on test preparation, it is much more difficult to try new teaching methods. In order to foster a confidence among teachers that they may try new methods without fear of failure, the district must assure these teachers that they will be supported even when new methods are not successful.

Teachers and principals feel threatened when the legislature is talking about firing principals and teachers whose students have low test scores. The safe way is to continue to do what has worked well or reasonably well.

Walt Vanderbush
Franklin

Flexibility in finances will help Indiana schools

To the editor:

As the Indiana General Assembly begins to debate local government legislation, I would like to share my thoughts on this important issue. Having spent four years on the Johnson County Council, I know the

vital role local government plays in the lives of our community.

For a very long time, state government provided cities, towns, counties and schools very little flexibility in controlling their own financial decisions. It was very frustrating to identify deteriorating roads, failing bridges, and to not compensate employees who had gone many years without a pay raise while other funds in local government were overflowing with money.

State law mandated that we could not move this money to where we believed it would serve the public best.

There is current legislation before us that would enable local government to transfer money from one account to another, something businesses and households have always been able to do. Local government should be allowed to have the same ability.

School funding is a critical problem in need of a solution. I have always viewed educational reform in Indiana along two distinct lines.

First, Indiana must establish high standards for academic excellence.

Second, the legislature must recognize that teachers need to be paid more for their important work in order to attract and retain quality educators.

I was proud to vote for the CORE 40 curriculum last year that will make Indiana students competitive with their counterparts throughout the United States.

The world is becoming smaller, and the next generation of Hoosiers must be prepared to meet challenges their parents and grandparents never imagined.

While Indiana is advancing its educational standards, we must fulfill the second goal of financially rewarding teachers for their success.

Few people would find it fair in their jobs to be compelled to shoulder a heavier burden and increased responsibilities without receiving some increase in compensation. We must ask no less of our teachers.

With school budgets very tight, I am pleased that the legislature is beginning to think creatively in solving funding challenges.

I will support legislation that permits schools to transfer money from different line items in their budgets. Some care, however, must be made to ensure that long-term building funds that are not depleted all at once. Otherwise, higher property taxes may result from the need to issue bonds instead of relying on these monies to help fund building construction and renovations.

In other words, if a school has extra money in their office supply budget because they used fewer printer cartridges or less sidewalk de-icer, they will be able to transfer these funds to grant teacher pay raises.

There are literally dozens of line items that build up over the years that may never be used to assist schools educate children.

Offering schools the choice of transferring funds is a fiscally responsible method of allocating education funds.

Allowing school corporations greater authority to make these types of decisions is a common-sense solution to ensuring education tax dollars will go where they are needed most: in the classroom.

Brent Waltz

State Senator, District 36

Changing community led to school's problems

To the editor:

Regarding the demotion of Franklin Community High School principal Leighton Turner, this is the most blatant case of scapegoating that I have ever seen.

The problems that Mr. William Patterson states as his reason for Turner's demotion have little or nothing to do with Mr. Turner. Patterson is barking up the wrong tree.

It wasn't Mr. Turner who has allowed the uncontrolled growth of our city, including the excessive low-income and government-funded apartments and housing.

These new "projects" have been a haven for drug dealers, thieves and every other law-breaking person imaginable. These people often drag young children into troubled family situations that result in school suspensions, dropouts and a declining graduation rate.

How dare Mr. Patterson blame this on Mr. Turner.

Originally from suburban Detroit, I have lived in Franklin for almost 12 years now.

I moved to a town that was small, attractive, friendly, laid back and courteous, with very little crime.

Anyone who has lived here for the past 10 years knows the truth of the situation and what Franklin has become. Just take a look at your property values.

You can also ask your local law enforcement officials, who do an outstanding job despite the fact that they are up to their ears in new crimes.

I travel the state of Indiana as an outside salesperson, and it is amazing how people have changed their view of Franklin in the past several years.

Perhaps more of us need to voice our opinions at the ballot boxes and get rid of those who are truly responsible for the demise of this community. It's time that "the stuff" starts to roll uphill.

Mr. Patterson, get your head out of the sand, take a look around and quit scapegoating.

Bob Long
Franklin

New Year's Eve menu choices: Take it or leave it

This is my New Year's Eve story. My wife thinks that, simply by telling it, I expose myself as the cheap, unromantic, stick-in-the-mud, party pooper that I am.

That is all true. But this was the 27th year in a row she has gone out with me. I mean, how hard up can she be?

For New Year's, we went to a restaurant that offered what's called prix fixe, a fixed menu. Basically, that means that they were fixing to get rich, and I was fixing to complain about the prices for the rest of 2006.

It has never been clear to me why a restaurant that has a glorious menu with hundreds of items all year 'round decides that one evening a year they are going to make you eat lamb shank and sushi whether you like it or not.

If I were in the restaurant business, my attitude would be: Hey, the year is just about done; I have all this tasty leftover stuff in the fridge; let's put it all out on a big buffet table and then start completely fresh Jan. 2.

At one point during the meal, I



Dick
Wolfsie

asked the waiter what I thought was a perfectly reasonable question, given the fact that I was about to pay more for an appetizer than I did my first Ford Pinto.

"Excuse me, Lionel. I don't like lobster bisque, so may I just have an extra endive salad?"

"Ummmmm, I don't think we can make that substitution. I'll check with Steve, the chef."

Ten minutes later, Lionel came back.

"Steve, the chef, says that substitution is not permitted."

NOT PERMITTED?

NOT PERMITTED!

A green endive salad for a bowl of lobster bisque is not permitted? I once bought a car here in town and after driving it for two days I told the owner of the dealership

that it really didn't handle quite the way I expected.

"No problem," said Rob, "bring it back, and we'll substitute it with a Tucson."

Wow! Now that's what I call a substitution. An endive salad for a bowl of lobster bisque is not a substitution. Don't ever buy a car from a chef. In fact, I'm thinking of having dinner next year at the Butler Hyundai-Kia dealership.

The meal was a seven-course affair, which is more courses than I took my senior year at George Washington University. And listen to this: The dinner New Year's Eve cost more than my entire academic semester in 1969. And that year I had a choice of 400 courses.

There was no fixed menu at GWU, although I did try to substitute my Romantic English Poetry for Great American Novels the day before class started. The dean said that switch wasn't permitted. I don't know what happened to Dean Bissell.

The rumor had it he went into the restaurant business.

When the bill came at the end of the evening, I took a quick glance, then used humor to cushion my shock.

"Lionel, I think you have mixed up our check for six people with that table of 20."

"I don't think that is funny, sir."

"You don't, Lionel? Maybe you should check with Steve, the chef."

The next day, I suggested to my wife that in 2006 we go out the night after New Year's Eve, thus having a better dinner at a cheaper price. I think this is a pretty good idea, but in all fairness to Mary Ellen, I think having Christmas morning on Dec. 27 for the past 10 years is about as much adjustment as she can take.

I really think that \$250 per couple for dinner was a lot of money. And that didn't include a 20 percent tip. Which makes me think everyone in that restaurant was stupid.

Except Lionel.

Television personality Dick Wolfsie writes this weekly humor column for the Daily Journal. Send comments to letters@thejournalnet.com.