

OPINION

DAILY JOURNAL

JEFFREY W. OWEN
PUBLISHER
E-mail address:
jowen@thejournalnet.com

SCARLETT SYSE
EDITOR
E-mail address:
syse@thejournalnet.com

"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 reassignment of Franklin Community High School principal Leighton Turner means the district will be looking for a new principal.

OUR POINT

The superintendent will search for someone in tune with his philosophies, but maintaining the openness that Turner showed is important.

New leader of high school needs Turner's frankness

The Daily Journal

The Franklin school board voted Jan. 9 to reassign high school principal Leighton Turner.

Beginning next school year, he will return to the position of assistant principal, the post he held before being named principal five years ago.

Superintendent William Patterson says he wants someone in the position who will be ready to change what students learn and how they learn it.

He will launch a national search for someone to lead the high school through what he called significant reform.

Patterson wants to create smaller schools within the school. He wants teachers to use technology and change instructional methods based on what students need.

For example, he said creating a small school based on technology would give students who are computer-savvy but not too interested in traditional classroom structure a chance to reconnect with the school and its teachers.

Some of the items included on a job description for a new principal will be:

- Lead a staff through significant school improvement.
- Analyze and improve curriculum.
- Plan and implement short- and long-range goals.
- Use data effectively to make informed decisions.

These clearly are worthy considerations. But we would like to add one more, one that was reflected well in Turner's administration and should be continued:

Openness. Turner consistently has been forthright about what goes on at the high school. He regularly presented information to the public to keep them informed and to keep rumors at a minimum.

A good example is his handling of an incident in September involving drinking by a few members of the football team.

He provided information readily, carefully balancing the students' privacy and the need of the public to be informed.

Turner also evenly applied the school's code of conduct so there could be no claims of favoritism.

When Patterson talks to prospective principals, we hope he will discuss the need for effective public outreach as well as the philosophical and pragmatic issues on his agenda.

The community was well-served by Turner's openness. Let's hope that tone continues.

Focus: Washington

Congress must set rules for lobbying politicians

San Francisco Chronicle

Cold-blooded politics are on display in Washington as colleagues of scandal-tainted former House leader Tom DeLay joust for his job.

But a fresh name and bountiful pledges of probity aren't enough. What DeLay brazenly refined, lawmaking by lobbyist, must be wiped away. The House must invoke far tougher rules on influence peddling.

The right to petition government is enshrined in the Constitution. This First Amendment guarantee, on a par with freedom of speech and religion in the minds of the Founding Fathers, is designed to give citizens a voice in Washington.

Look how far DeLay bent this legitimate principle. His single-minded campaign to burnish GOP strength in the House descended into an alliance with lobbyists such as Jack Abramoff to freeze out support for anyone but Republicans. It went further by showering legislators with trips, gifts and campaign checks. Though Abramoff's largesse partly went to Democrats, his targets were Republicans who ruled Congress with DeLay as a prime beneficiary.

In a rush to smother the scandal, GOP leaders want laws to disclose more about lobbyist contacts. For example, a new rule might require a log of contacts between lawmaker and professional favor-seeker. It's a start, though it won't stop the worst of DeLay pay-to-play abuses. It's also meant to soften future public outrage if other big names are indicted as Abramoff sings to federal investigators.

Democrats, handed a vote-grabbing issue in an election year, want more. Maybe a ban on paid-for travel or tougher restrictions on ex-lawmakers who take a second career as a lobbyist.

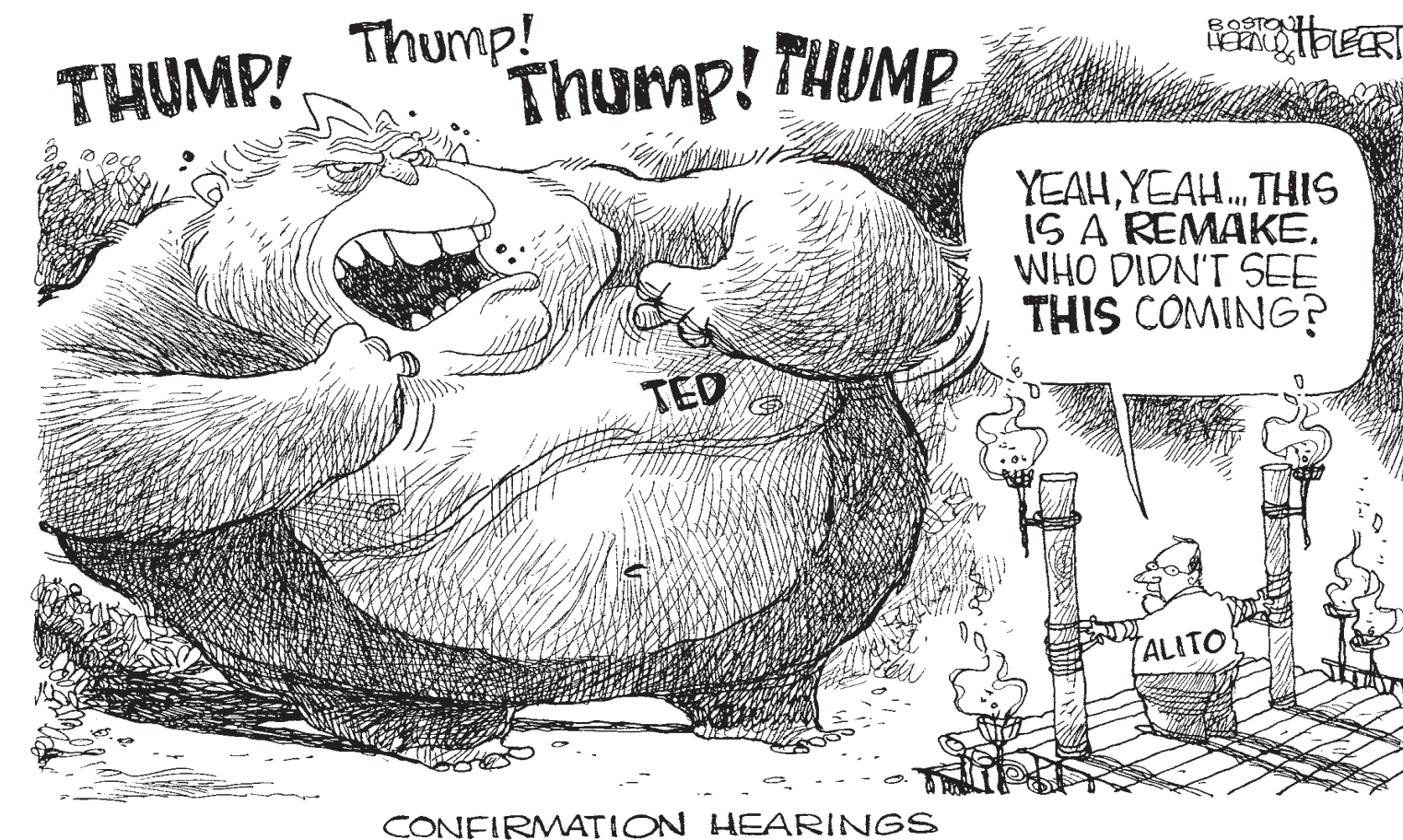
This scandal can't be masked by choosing a new House majority leader. Congress should get serious about putting together clear rules that protect the integrity of the people's business no matter which party and which individuals happens to be in power at any given moment.



PATTERSON



TURNER



CONFIRMATION HEARINGS

YOUR

VIEWS & COMMENTARY

Columnist's insight, humor inspires reader to reflect

To the editor:

As 2006 begins, we reflect on 2005 as one of uncertainty as peacekeeping forces remain in the Middle East; the economy flounders; and we help those who have been affected by Hurricane Katrina, the tsunami, earthquakes and terrorism.

We, the last of the baby-boomer generation, must adjust to our new roles as we enter middle age, kicking and fighting as we may. We're now grandparents, making career changes and discovering we are no longer the young ones in our jobs, churches and community. We acknowledge that we are really adults, with all the physical and emotional aches, pains and scars, but also the wisdom that one can earn only in time.

I read the column by Norman Knight, a teacher at Clark-Pleasant Middle School and one of my favorite columnists. I enjoy his sense of humor and the frames of reference that many of us can relate to. Mr. Knight's love of music, literature and teaching is inspiring. And when he lost his wife, also a teacher, we grieved with him. This is why his tribute to Mrs. Karen McDaniel was very much deserved.

Mrs. McDaniel may not remember me as I was only in a class or two during which she either substituted or monitored a study hall, but I remember a woman who loved her job and her students. She was a gentle person but managed to control a class with many hormone-charged adolescents passing notes, talking and simply being in that awkward stage between childhood and young adulthood.

This led me to remember the many teachers who influenced me. These individuals do not reap great financial rewards, but they continue for the love of making a difference in their students' lives. Too many of us go on to live our lives without thanking those who were so influential.

I think of my second-grade teacher, Mrs. Carolyn Combs of Break-O-Day Elementary, who kindly welcomed this 8-year-old child from Minnesota with a funny northern accent and slight speech impediment. I think of Mrs. Charlotte Walters, in third grade, who complimented my handwriting and was one of the first to encourage my love of reading. My fifth-grade teacher, Mrs. Karen Gaeben, was delightful as a pretty woman who most of us girls wanted to be like and on whom the boys secretly had a crush. Today, she continues to work with children in various capacities in the community.

In middle school, I remember Mrs. Gloria Porter, who could smell gum a mile away, and Mrs. Mary Fisher, who did her best to make us proper young ladies and gentlemen, even if she had to "grrrr" to do this.

My class was Mr. Rodney King's first after graduating from Franklin College, and we were quite the challenge. He rose to the occasion and made our classes fun and informative, and he was so approachable. I'm happy he has continued to work in the education field.

There was Mr. Steve Vertrees who made math (somewhat) palatable for me. So many teachers, but so little space to thank them all.

In high school, I think of Mrs. Martha Loop, who also encouraged my love of the written word and responsible journalism, and Mrs. Norma Clark, who seemed formal in her dark business suits but who actually had a wicked sense of humor.

There was the feisty Miss Kay Unsworth (Oops! Je suis désolée! Mademoiselle Unsworth) who spoke French to her students at all times. Try to hide behind a locker, but while one would flush with embarrassment as teenagers do, she would wait. "Comment allez-vous, Simone?" "Très bien, Mademoiselle Unsworth." Then you tried to ignore the snickers of your friends who didn't take French, the cowards.

There was the controversial Mr. Jim Thayer. He pushed the envelope, and in doing so, challenged us. If we were brave enough to argue a point, he made sure we did so thoroughly.

Mr. Butch Zike was wonderful. Since he was a coach, I was a bit intimidated by him when I first sat in his history class. I feared that only athletes would fare well with him, and an athlete I was not. I was so wrong. He was, first, a teacher, then an athletic coach, but these two roles merged in the classroom. Mr. Zike taught class as he coached games, we were expected to do our best and that would be the ultimate "win."

Besides one's parents, teachers are often the most influential adults a child will have. I hope that, eventually, my teachers will know they always have a place in my heart and history. Mrs. McDaniel, you deserve a rich and rewarding retirement.

So, Mr. Knight, I think you also would have been a favorite of mine, and I'm very pleased you wrote this column. I'm certain that in a few years, you also will hear from a former student who tells you, "You did make a difference in my life." Because you had, and you will.

Gayle Blomberg
Greenwood

Superintendent, board wrong to demote Turner

To the editor:

I have been in the Franklin Community School Corp. since 1995.

As a parent, I'm writing to express my concern about the recent decision to remove Leighton Turner as principal. I understand that the decision has been made for him to now go back to being assistant principal.

However, I do not believe this decision is being made for the best interest of the students, faculty or parents of the students.

When reading the paper, I could not believe what I was reading; that Superintendent William Patterson, mind you, has only been here for about one year and the new school board members, whom, I might add, we as parents vote for, are even considering such a decision as removing Mr. Turner as principal of the high school.

I feel that Mr. Turner should remain principal, especially after all of his hard work. He is a well qualified, caring and reasonable man and has been doing a great job as principal for the past five years.

I can't but help wonder if the superintendent's and school board members' decision is justifiable. They say it is because of the high dropout rate, large numbers of students being expelled or suspended and the need for more alternative ways to educate students.

Is it because he suspended the athletes for drinking and going to a party? I know this was a big issue and the parents of the athletes were having a hissy fit like they were little children. They were in the wrong, and Mr. Turner was in the right and was trying to teach them to have some responsibility and self-discipline, to know there are consequences for your actions.

I think those parents need to stop and think about what is more important to them and their children, their football and scholarships or them knowing what is right from wrong, or better yet, that their lives could have been jeopardized because of alcohol.

I have a daughter in high school who has received a few detentions for being late or showing her midriff, and I do not get upset with Mr. Turner. These are two school rules she has broken, and she had to deal with the consequences.

There have to be rules and consequences. If we do not teach the children this at home and school, then they will never follow rules or laws and will end up in trouble.

While I'm at it, I will tell you from personal experience that Mr. Turner is not, and I emphasize, is not, responsible for the dropout rate. My eldest daughter was not making her grades no matter what the school or I did or tried to do.

It was not Mr. Turner telling her to just drop out, it was the dean of students. I have another example of a teenager dropping out of high school because they just lacked one credit of having enough to graduate. This was a major deal for this student because they had lost their father the year before and quit school during the illness.

After the passing of the student's father, the student returned to school that following school year, which was the student's senior year. Much to the student's surprise, one day the counselor told student that they would not be graduating because they did not have enough credits and would be better off quitting school at this point. This was not a good decision on the behalf of the counselor, telling this student that they did not have enough credits, when it turned out the student needed only one credit to graduate.

The student would have continued if they had known they would have been able to graduate, even if it meant the student would have to come back the following year for just that history credit the student needed. So I do not agree with the superintendent or school board implying Mr. Turner is responsible for the high dropout rate.

So as everyone can see, it isn't all of Mr. Turner's responsibility for the high dropout rate because, in both of my personal experiences as far as a student dropping out, he had nothing to do with it.

In fact, when I went to him about both incidents, he was appalled that both students had been advised to quit school and wanted to do whatever he could to correct the advice the students received, wanted both to come back to school and personally wanted to talk to the two. So how dare anyone say he is responsible for the high dropout rate.

I just hope the superintendent and school board members reconsider this decision, because we are talking about a major issue here.

And what happened to the open forum on major changes as it goes for the Franklin Community School Corp.? Don't we as parents, students and faculty have a say in this decision and not just a few people?

Donetta Dowell
Franklin

Dancing good for brain, but not partner's feet

Normally I would be excited to read about a new study showing how to keep an aging brain in shape. But recent research showing people can dance their way to sharper brains does nothing but give Becky ammo in her campaign to get me to learn how to dance.

"When I'm done with my dissertation, I think it would be fun for us to take dancing lessons," she said way back when.

I nodded my head and smiled, hoping that she would forget about it once her work was actually finished. But her brain must be in good shape already because, besides finishing her doctoral work, she remembered that I had agreed to her dance lesson request.

I, on the other hand, had let that conversation slip from my obviously weak brain, due, no doubt, to my lack of dancing skills.

According to the USA Today article, research presented at the Society for Neuroscience indicates that performing challenging activities might help slow the decline in brainpower



Norman Knight

that comes with age.

Patricia McKinley of McGill University designed an experiment where one group of seniors simply walked for a period of time, while another group learned to tango, a dance that involves a series of complex moves. After 10 weeks, both groups had improved their memory skills, but only the tango group showed improved performance on a multi-tasking test.

Now, I'm an accommodating-type of guy, and I want to keep my brain chugging and wheezing along as much as the next person, but I've had a long and dismal experience with dancing.

I don't know why I was not blessed with the dancing gene. I

have been playing some sort of musical instrument since I was 9, so I know about rhythm. When I was a professional musician, I would watch people out on the dance floor night after night doing all the necessary moves, so I've observed what one is supposed to do. But somehow, the ability to put my feet in the right place at the right time has escaped me.

It's not like I haven't tried. Oh, how I've tried. When I would find myself at a club, wedding or some situation where there was dancing, and when I could no longer ignore my partner's obvious desire to dance, I would drag myself out to the dance floor and jerk and totter around to the music like Frankenstein's monster, except without the same grace.

Many is the time I have had someone literally walk me through each step slowly as if they were training a rather dim-witted animal. I would sort of get it, but I would wind up watching my feet and forgetting to move the rest of my body. Or I would move my arms and forget to move my feet.

Truth is, I have really never progressed beyond that little box-step thing I learned with my junior high girlfriend. Thank goodness we attended sock hops, and I was shoeless when I tromped all over her feet.

So you can imagine my dismay when we walked by the downtown YMCA recently, and Becky noticed a sign out front. "Look!" she exclaimed. "They're offering dance lessons."

Yikes! Not only dance lessons, but tango lessons. I knew in my feeble, dance-impaired head that there was no escape.

I suppose I should just go with it, accept the inevitable. Who knows, maybe this time I'll actually learn to dance. Stranger things have happened, I'm sure.

At least I will be improving my brainpower. That way, the next time she suggests something like this, maybe I will be able to think of a way to get out of it.

Norman Knight, a teacher at Clark-Pleasant Middle School, writes this weekly column for the Daily Journal. Send comments to letters@thejournalnet.com.