

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

Opinion roundup

The Daily Journal

EDITOR'S NOTE — Today the Daily Journal presents a sampling of editorials from around the state and nation:

Ben Franklin first all-American hero

Chronicle-Tribune, Marion

If he hadn't been one of us, it would be easy to think of Benjamin Franklin as legend, not man.

If Norway, for instance, bragged of one of its own who established the nation's first public hospital, first public lending library, first public fire department and first insurance company in the country; invented bifocals, swim fins, the rocking chair, the lightning rod and an ingenious, efficient and affordable way to heat homes; was a popular and prolific writer, editor and philosopher; and helped invent the country in the first place, we would have to wonder if maybe some imaginations were working overtime.

But Americans know Benjamin Franklin was real, and he was one of us. He was — is — our nation's biggest overachiever.

Franklin's life was an amazing one. His vision guided Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, Patrick Henry and other Founding Fathers. He, along with George Washington, probably was the most indispensable of the Founders.

His father took him out of school at 11, but Franklin's mind never rested, and his curiosity and joy of learning drove him to educate himself. He had every opportunity to be a nobody, but he chose to become a somebody, quite possibly the most remarkable American ever.

Franklin is a wonderful example of what America is about. You can start out poor, with the odds against you, but if you're willing to work at it, you don't have to end up that way.

Does IRS bully unfavorable party, poor?

The Herald Bulletin, Anderson

You have more reason to be wary of the Internal Revenue Service, particularly if you are poor, or of the "wrong" political party.

Revelations in the past week have painted a disturbing picture of the IRS. First came news that hundreds of thousands of poor Americans had their tax refunds frozen and labeled fraudulent, even though closer reviews of the returns showed most were clearly not fraudulent.

Then came the admission by IRS officials that the agency has for months been collecting political party affiliation of taxpayers in 20 states.

While targeting the poorest Americans is unsavory, having the IRS collect political party affiliation is down-right dangerous. The IRS claims it hasn't used the party affiliation information, but hasn't explained why the government's tax-collecting agency would need to know if someone is a Republican, Democrat or Green Party member.

The revelations about the IRS practices are chilling and need to be corrected. There are few things more dangerous to the country than a government that misuses and abuses its authority.

Civil rights leader crucial in shaping nation

Lake City (Fla.) Reporter

The United States, perhaps unique in the world, is a nation of documents that are peculiarly significant to our identity, because we were founded on written principles that each generation must explore and amplify.

Monday (honored) the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. and his contributions to the great canon of political and moral principles that define ourselves and our ideals. King is most often described as a "civil rights leader" and, while the categorization is indeed accurate and we were reminded of it with the recent death of Rosa Parks, it tends to pigeonhole the man.

At a crucial point in American history, the turbulent '60s, King eloquently made the case that the great promise of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution had not yet been fulfilled for all our citizens. His "I Have a Dream" and "I've Been to the Mountaintop" speeches and his "Letter From Birmingham Jail" are essential reading in any course of American history because they are American history.

The "Mountaintop" speech is especially poignant both because of its optimism and because, in it, he seemed to foretell his death:

"I just want to do God's will. And He's allowed me to go up to the mountain. And I've looked over. And I've seen the promised land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight, that we, as a people, will get to the promised land." And, because of people like King who appear throughout our history, we will.

Senator wants media to ignore truths of war

Erie (Pa.) Times-News

U.S. Sen. Rick Santorum faces a difficult re-election campaign. The Pennsylvania Republican shouldn't make it harder by making it absurd. In a speech Thursday, he attacked the media for reporting the "tragic consequences" of the war in Iraq. Focusing on them was "helping Islamic fascism win the battle."

Of course, the media report far more than tragedy. They report about military operations in the field; American efforts to establish a new Iraqi army; the trial of Saddam Hussein, including how many of its participants are murdered or threatened; and, of course, terrorist attacks.

But do not report war's "tragic consequences"? Does Santorum want the American media to forget the bravery and sacrifices of U.S. troops on the ground? The media can't report them without also reporting "tragic consequences."

Imagine the outcry of grieving families if suddenly those sacrifices were deliberately, cynically forgotten. Santorum wants no questions. He expects the American media to stick their collective head in the sand.

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SAMUEL ALITO FILLING JUSTICE O'CONNOR'S RIGHT SHOE

U.S. must use every weapon it can to defuse nuclear Iran

Four years after terrorists slaughtered 3,000 innocent Americans, it should go without saying that the international community would not let a terrorist-sponsoring nation acquire nuclear weapons.

But it does not go without saying.

On the contrary, the rulers of Iran, who subscribe to an ideology not appreciably different from Osama bin Laden's, are moving closer than ever to getting their own nukes.

And they are not bothering to disguise the uses to which the weapons may be put. Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad has infamously threatened to wipe Israel off the map.

Less well-known: He promises a world without America, adding recently that such a goal is attainable, and surely can be achieved.

Europeans who hear such statements and think, "Oh, well, too bad for those Israelis and Americans, but not my problem," need to think again.

"The message of the (Islamic) revolution is global," Ahmadinejad also has said. "Allah willing, Islam will conquer what? It will conquer all the mountaintops of the world."

Hassan Abbassi, intelligence adviser to the Iranian president, has been more specific: "We have a strategy drawn up for the destruction of Anglo-Saxon civilization," he boasted. "We must make use of everything we have at hand to strike at this front by means of our suicide operations or by means of our missiles."

In response to all this: Nothing serious has been done. It does now appear that what British Foreign Minister Jack Straw calls Iran's history of concealment and



Clifford D. May

deception regarding its nuclear programs finally will be referred to the U.N. Security Council. That could lead to economic sanctions against Iran.

Or not. China and Russia are both Security Council members and both enjoy lucrative trade ties with Iran. China relies on imports of Iranian oil.

Russia has long been selling its nuclear expertise to the Iranian theocrats.

"If the Russians and the Chinese, for reasons that would be abominable, do not join us," Sen. John McCain, an Arizona Republican, said recently, "then we will have to go with (a coalition of) the willing."

Sen. Bill Nelson, a Florida Democrat, agrees, arguing that the administration needs to tell the EU-3 — Britain, France and Germany — that "the time has come for them to join us in imposing economic pain on Iran. Trade sanctions, freezing assets and an embargo on refined petroleum, which Iran imports, would get the Iranians' attention."

He proposes that American diplomats begin persuading our European allies that if Iran doesn't change course immediately, ambassadors will be withdrawn from Tehran, while their Iranian counterparts are sent packing.

Nelson also wants the United States to insist that Lebanese

authorities disarm Hezbollah, the Iranian- and Syrian-backed terrorist organization that is second only to al Qaeda in number of Americans it has murdered. An added benefit: A disarmed Hezbollah is a necessary pre-condition for full Lebanese sovereignty and freedom.

Nelson recommends, too, that the United States makes every effort to shut down al-Manar, Hezbollah's satellite television station, which broadcasts incitement to terrorism around the world day after day.

Why the U.S. Treasury Department has not yet placed al-Manar on its Specially Designated Global Terrorist list, which would help choke off the financing that keeps it on the air, is a mystery.

Adopting these and other measures would isolate Iran diplomatically, cause it economic pain and weaken its primary transnational terrorist proxy.

I would add this: There should be a significant effort to assist, overtly or covertly or both, Iran's pro-freedom dissidents in their efforts to bring about regime change.

Finally, military options — particularly those aimed at destroying as many of Iran's nuclear facilities as possible — must remain on the table.

"To say under no circumstances would we exercise a military option," McCain noted, "that would be crazy." He added: "There is only one thing worse than the United States exercising a military option: that is a nuclear-armed Iran."

Clifford D. May is president of Foundation for the Defense of Democracies, a policy institute focusing on terrorism. Send comments to letters@thejournalnet.com.

Bush pushing market-driven health-care system

Having failed to reform Social Security last year, President Bush this year intends to make a smaller dent in a much bigger problem: America's health-care crisis.

Other items on his domestic agenda include trying once again to get tax cuts made permanent and a math-and-science initiative to keep America competitive.

Bush mentioned these items last week in a question-and-answer session with citizens in Louisville, Ky., which some White House aides described as a forecast of his State of the Union message.

Bush tried to reform Social Security last year claiming that he'd gained political capital in the 2004 elections. He spent a lot and failed to move Congress, even though it's GOP-dominated.

Now, he has less capital, his approval ratings are down and it's an election year.

The science initiative, if it's ambitious, could attract bipartisan support, but his tax cuts and incremental, market-based health reforms will be fought fiercely by Democrats.

Bush has yet to use the "c" word — "crisis" — about the health-care system, but it's clear there is one, and it presents an immediate threat to employers and moderate-income patients, a huge long-term threat to the U.S. economy and a political danger for Bush.

For the moment, health-care costs are not rising at double-digit rates, but they're just under. The government just reported that total health-care spending rose 7.9 percent in 2004.

But a survey of more than 2,000 employers conducted by the Kaiser Family Foundation found that premiums increased an average of 9.5 percent in 2005, down from 11.2 percent in 2004. "The rate of growth is still



Morton Kondracke

more than three times the growth in workers' earnings (2.7 percent) and two-and-a-half times the rate of inflation (3.5 percent)," Kaiser said.

"Since 2000, premiums have gone up 73 percent." The foundation found that 60 percent of U.S. businesses now offer insurance to their workers, down from 69 percent in 2000.

Not only are increasing numbers of firms dropping insurance coverage, but most are forcing their employees to pay more of the premium cost and imposing more co-pays and higher deductibles.

The White House is fully aware of the consequence. Bush's chief economic adviser, Al Hubbard, told me in an interview last week that health costs were a primary reason that — despite a robust economy — wages have been rising slowly.

That's a major talking point for Democrats and some outsiders agree it could severely impact the 2006 elections.

On "Fox News Sunday," Jan. 1, Diane Swonk, chief economist of Mesirow Financial, predicted that the Dow Jones industrial average would roar up to 12,000 in 2006, but added, "If you're rich, this is a great economy to be wealthy in, but other than that, it's not great. And that's what people remember when they go to the polls." The other guest on the pro-

gram, John Bogle, founder of the Vanguard Group, agreed.

"Workers are falling behind cost-of-living increases, and I think there's a lot of economic dissatisfaction," he said.

"And since the Republicans are in power, it will rebound against them."

Under current conditions, higher costs mean more people uninsured — some 45 million at some time during any year, and rising. About 20 million lack insurance all year long.

According to the American's Health Insurance Plan association, the health insurance lobby, 15 million of the uninsured are lower-income persons not eligible for public programs like Medicaid, 9 million are eligible but not enrolled and about 10 million are higher-income persons who choose to go uninsured.

In the past, according to AHIP President Karen Ignani, the administration has aimed its proposals — tax credits, Health Savings Accounts and association health pools — at about 10 million to 12 million of the uninsured.

Based on what Bush and Hubbard said, it appears Bush will be back with the same proposals.

It remains to be seen how ambitious the administration will be, but it's clear that health care will get more emphasis.

As Hubbard told me, "If you have insurance through your employer, there are huge tax advantages. If your employer doesn't provide it, you have to pay out of your after-tax income. We've got to level the playing field."

Bush said he would also propose expansion of HSAs, tax-protected savings accounts that employees use to pay medical expenses and premiums for high-

YOUR VIEWS

With America at war, wiretaps are allowed

To the editor:

There seems to be concern as to whether our president has a constitutional right to wiretap phones and/or censorship of any kind.

Well let us look and see what one war-time president in the past had the right to do.

There is no question about it; we are at war with certain elements of Islamic nations. I have enclosed a letter that was written during the early part of World War II, by my uncle who was in the United States Army, fighting the Japanese forces in New Guinea, one of, if not the most terrible, places in the world.

All mail written by U.S. servicemen in World War II was censored by officers. Imagine the uprising that would take place now if President Bush would initiate this policy today.

My uncle wrote two more letters that were censored right before being killed by a Japanese soldier. It would only seem right to say that if censoring is right in one war it should be right in other wars.

I think we should hear no more about this. If there is necessity to wiretap to protect the nation, let the president have the right just as President Roosevelt had.

Ray Link
Trafalgar

Franklin's principal deserves to keep job

To the editor:

Memo to the Franklin school board: You're never going to find anyone as good as Leighton Turner to be principal of the high school.

He's simply the best. I am ashamed of you that you would even consider demoting Mr. Turner, who has the esteem and respect of the students, the parents and the teachers.

To put it in the words of my daughter Jeni, a recent graduate and president of the student council there, "Well, that's just ridiculous."

My son, a junior at Franklin Community High School, is upset as well.

My husband and I will make a point of telling our children that this is not how good employees should be treated. A person who is loyal and who does an excellent job should not be demeaned and demoted. It's a signal that we don't want to send our kids about how to treat other people.

Please reinstate Mr. Turner immediately and have Superintendent William Patterson work with him to bring about the desired reforms.

Elizabeth Jessen
Franklin

WRITE A LETTER

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deductible insurance policies.

Both Bush and Hubbard said that HSAs would help lower health costs by making consumers aware of what they are spending for care.

"The fundamental problem with health care," Hubbard said, "is that people think it's free. If your employer paid for food, when you go to the grocery you would never pay attention to price and you would buy more than you needed."

"Eventually, supermarkets wouldn't even have prices. And if they didn't list prices, don't you think they would charge more? Absolutely, they would."

It's undoubtedly true, but Bush's incremental, market-based approach is anathema to Democrats and many health-care nonprofit groups, which favor a comprehensive, government-backed plan.

It's also not clear how much money Bush will put behind his proposals. For sure, he will again try to trim the growth of Medicare and Medicaid, which present 10 times the long-term burden on the economy of Social Security benefits for the baby boom generation.

And, at the same time, he will try to get Congress to make his tax cuts permanent, at a cost estimated at nearly \$2 trillion during a 10-year period, most of which would accrue to upper-income taxpayers.

At the end of the year, Republican candidates will have to try to convince voters, especially workers whose wages are rising slowly, that they care about them as much as they do about those benefiting from tax cuts.

Morton Kondracke is executive editor of Roll Call, the newspaper of Capitol Hill. Send comments to letters@thejournalnet.com.