

OPINION

DAILY JOURNAL

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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

A bill passed by the state legislature seeks to address part of the high school dropout problem.

OUR POINT

School districts should be addressing this question and working toward preparing students for success after high school.

Reducing dropout rates should be high priority

The Daily Journal

Indiana high schools would have to identify and counsel students most at risk of dropping out under a proposal passed by the Indiana General Assembly and forwarded to the governor.

House Bill 1347 was passed by the Senate 49-1 last week. Now all it needs is Gov. Mitch Daniels' signature to become law.

Schools would record the rate at which students skip class along with other warning signs in annual reports, which would be published in local newspapers. In addition, the bill would limit the reasons students younger than 18 can drop out of school: financial troubles, illness or another reason approved by a judge.

Supporters called the bill one of the nation's most aggressive strategies to prevent dropouts.

Rep. Luke Messer, R-Shelbyville, said, "We need to do more to keep kids in school and to push our school systems to keep them there as well."

One of the reasons behind the bill is uncertainty over the exact dropout rate. Indiana has reported a graduation rate of better than 90 percent. However, that figure does not count students who dropped out between school years, rather than during the course of the school year.

Some researchers have estimated the actual graduation rate is much lower.

The problem of dropouts is not foreign to Johnson County school administrators.

In particular, Franklin Superintendent William Patterson is especially interested in the issue. The district reported a graduation rate of 78.7 percent for the class of 2005. This is well below the state average of 90 percent. However, Patterson said the local rate was far more realistic.

Franklin counts expelled students, dropouts, students who did not return to school in the fall and those who leave high school to be home-schooled (unless a valid and successful high school program is documented) as students who do not graduate.

At a meeting in January, the school board approved a district goal of a 90 percent graduation rate, a realistic 90 percent, not an inflated one.

This should be the goal of every school district, and that is one of the motivations behind the bill approved by the legislature.

After the bill becomes law, it will be up to the school districts to follow through. They must do so earnestly.

Standards cannot be lowered just to make it easier for students to pass and to boost graduation rates.

Having a high school diploma guarantees nothing. Schools must prepare students not only so they will graduate but so they will succeed after high school, whether it's by continuing their education, enlisting in the armed forces or working.

The legislature's bill should simply codify efforts every school district should take.

Focus: Katrina

White House report on disaster response weak

Scripps Howard News Service

To describe the White House's report, titled "Lessons Learned," on the government's response to Katrina as a whitewash is a little too strong, but it is far from a hard-eyed, take-no-prisoners dissection of what was clearly a botched response, at least at the outset.

The tone of the report is set in the foreword, which says that the hurricane exposed "significant flaws" in federal, state and local preparedness, and that their emergency plans "were put to the ultimate test and came up short." This is stating the obvious.

The Department of Homeland Security was in charge of the Katrina operation, but the harshest judgment in the report, after praising the "energy and professionalism of DHS personnel," is that the department "lacks both the requisite headquarters management institutions and sufficient field capabilities to organize a fully successful federal response effort." And the next hurricane season is a few short months away.

The report is heavy on bureaucratese — it includes more than three pages of a glossary of acronyms — and urges coordination, communication, cooperation and re-examination. Recommendation 81 calls for: "Linking prioritization for protection to prioritization for restoration will motivate private sector participation in the effort to prioritize critical infrastructure and develop disaster response plans."

The report describes but does not explain the mysterious delay in reporting the ultimately disastrous breach of the New Orleans levees. The first report of a breach to a government agency, the National Weather Service, was made at 9:12 a.m., but as late as 6 p.m. the White House and senior Homeland Security officials were being told there was no breach. A department official circulated an eyewitness account of the breaches that evening, but his account did not reach the White House until after midnight.

The report's "Lesson Learned Recommendation 15: Establish a National Operations Center to coordinate the national response and provide situational awareness and a common operating picture for the entire federal government."

Saddest is Federal Emergency Management Agency's failure, which the report doesn't explain or address, to make use of available resources such as the 300 dump trucks, 119 pieces of heavy equipment, 300 boats, 11 aircraft and 500 rooms the Interior Department was offering.

The most hopeful thing about the report is its title, "Lessons Learned." Let's hope that, underneath all that bureaucratese, the federal government did.



YOUR

VIEWS AND COMMENTARY

Wineries aren't to blame for teenage drinking

To the editor:

In her letter (Daily Journal, Feb. 27), Dee Owens of the Indiana Coalition to Reduce Underage Drinking misses the mark. While I applaud and sympathize with her mission, blaming Indiana wineries for this complex problem is without basis.

In 32 years of shipping wine, there has never been a documented case of minor abuse of an Indiana winery shipment.

The Federal Trade Commission has studied this problem (2003 report) and declared that underage access to wine shipments is essentially nonexistent.

Bill O'Donoghue, chief legal counsel for the Illinois Liquor Commission, states that he has been on the job since January 2004 and "has yet to see any hard empirical evidence that minors are buying alcohol on the Internet; never seen anyone charged with selling alcohol to minors on the Internet; and we've had zero complaints from parents contacting us about their child obtaining alcohol on the Internet."

Additionally, records would show that distributors and retailers ship more wine than wineries. It would appear that Indiana wineries may not be the problem.

Indiana wineries are, indeed, part of the system of which you speak, each with both a retail and a wholesale license. In addition, most wineries also distribute through the same state-sponsored three-tiered wholesale system.

Indiana wineries have no intention or mission to "tear down the regulatory system." We only wish to maintain the lawful rights and privileges under which we have existed since 1973 and responsibly sell our own products.

Our employees take their jobs seriously, are server-trained and have bartender licenses and, believe it or not, most of them are fathers and mothers.

Dr. Charles R. Thomas
Chateau Thomas Winery
Plainfield

Let marketplace decide if smoking hurts business

To the editor:

Viewing the growing groundswell of that faction who would severely limit the locations where smoking of tobacco products can be permitted, it is with some trepidation that I choose to take an opposing view.

To the best of my knowledge,

WRITE A

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

The Daily Journal invites readers to submit letters, opinion columns and e-mail comments for the opinion page.

GUIDELINES

- Letters published must contain the writer's name and city or town.
- Letters sent to the Daily Journal must be signed and must include a daytime telephone number for verification to be considered for publication.
- Letters should be kept as brief as possible.
- Make sure the e-mail letter includes the writer's name, mailing address, telephone number and e-mail address for verification.

- Opinion columns for the community forum section of the editorial page also will be considered for publication. The article should be kept to a reasonable length and should include the writer's name, address and telephone number for verification.

- Because of space and legal considerations, the Daily Journal reserves the right to edit any letters or articles and to limit comments.

WHERE TO SEND THE LETTER

Mail Letters to the editor The Daily Journal P. O. Box 699 Franklin, IN 46131	E-mail letters@thejournalnet.com	Fax 736-2766
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the use of tobacco products has never been declared illegal by any state or federal body of government.

Some day in the future this could change, resulting in tobacco joining other banned substances which cannot legally be sold or consumed.

Until that happens, I don't see how the owner or management of a business or other establishment can arbitrarily be denied the right to set its own policies on the use of tobacco products.

Some have argued that a smoking ban would actually be good for businesses and would increase profits.

Nonsmokers presumably would flock to bars and restaurants that are smoke-free.

Fair enough. Let's put that theory to the ultimate test. Let proprietors and managers make their own determinations of what standards best support their businesses. A certain number will surely elect to go smoke-free and will provide a haven for customers who seek that environment.

Others, I'm quite confident, will continue to cater to smokers, or a mix, and they will profit only if they have made a correct decision.

Let the marketplace be the final judge. After all, is that not the American way and one that has served our country so admirably for two, going on three, centuries?

James R. Vandivier
Franklin

Home's country feel replaced by night club

To the editor:

I just read the article on homebuyers seeking country life (Daily Journal, Feb. 27), and I was compelled to write. I live on Patterson Street in Greenwood.

When I moved into my home some 28 years ago, I too could walk out my back door and find a wooded field, a field where we could pick berries that grew in the wild and listen to the birds that gathered there.

Things change. The wooded field was developed into a strip mall. How bad can that be, having a strip mall in your backyard? One-Liners Comedy Club moved into that strip mall. I now have a night club in my backyard.

I have tried to get my city council member, John Gibson, to take steps to keep this from happening to anyone ever again in the city of Greenwood by implementing zoning changes, but I have discovered the hard way that, unless you are the one who is losing sleep because of the loud music, no one cares.

If only a member of the Greenwood City Council were a neighbor of mine, then I would have no such problems.

If I should ever move, I will be seeking a house that sits in the very middle of a subdivision with nothing but houses for miles and miles. That way I have no fear of having a nightclub in my yard again.

And if the neighbors get too loud, the police will come and, if needed, write a noise ordinance violation ticket.

But if you're a business, which when translated means, if you are making money doing it, you can make all the racket you want in the city of Greenwood.

Good luck to those seeking the country life.

Diana Downey
Greenwood

Woman's giving spirit will be greatly missed

To the editor:

Ernest Hemingway once wrote that courage is "grace under pressure." One of the most courageous people I have ever met left us recently. Cancer claimed her life, but not her spirit.

Jean E. Sutton was an intelligent, compassionate, vital, loving woman. She ran the prescription program at St. Thomas Church clinic with skill, efficiency, care and wit. She related very well to all the people with whom she came in contact: clients, volunteers, pharmaceutical liaisons and medical personnel.

She lost a dear daughter to cancer and bravely carried on, becoming one of the best supporters of the local Relay for Life program. She was always ready to help wherever help was needed and share her wisdom and her wonderful sense of humor.

She will be sorely missed and mourned by her family and by everyone who knew her. Would that more of us could be as committed and as unflinching in the struggles of life.

Mary M.Q. Holeman
Franklin

Get to know candidates before primary in May

To the editor:

During the week of Feb. 13, both candidates for state representative, District 58, ran ads in the Daily Journal.

Candidate Ron West's ads said he would be available from 2 to 4 p.m. Saturday afternoon to meet and register all voters. Candidate Woody Burton's ads said he would have a fund-raising event Saturday evening featuring an Elvis impersonator.

I took the opportunity to share time, coffee and hot chocolate with Mr. West and several people who came to register to vote on a bitter cold afternoon.

I never made it to the fund-raising event; however, I will be voting in the May 2 primary.

Eugene Nix
Greenwood

Former president's home can tell quite a story



James H. Johnson

"one of the most impressive inside of all the presidents' homes?"

11. Which future president led the 70th Indiana Regiment in the Civil War and earned a battlefield promotion to brigadier general?

12. Which president spent his whole adult life in Indianapolis, living on North Delaware Street before and after serving his term in the White House?

Ready for the answers?

Actually, there is one correct answer for all 12 questions. It is Benjamin Harrison, the 23rd president of the United States and the only man from Indiana to live in the White House.

His grandfather was William Henry Harrison, our ninth president. Benjamin's great-grandfather had served as governor of Virginia and was a signer of the Declaration of Independence.

Benjamin Harrison was born in Ohio and graduated from Miami

University in Ohio.

As a young attorney, he moved to Indianapolis and developed a thriving practice. During the Civil War, he led the 70th Indiana Regiment. Later he served a term as U.S. senator.

In 1888, he was nominated by the Republican Party to oppose President Grover Cleveland in his bid for re-election. Harrison lost the popular vote by a narrow margin but won easily in the electoral vote.

In the White House, he served the people with honesty and conscientious hard work. Caroline, his beloved wife of 39 years, was seriously ill when he mounted a halfhearted bid for re-election.

Two weeks after she died from tuberculosis, he lost the election to Cleveland, who returned to the executive mansion to become the only man to serve non-consecutive terms.

After leaving office in 1893, Harrison returned home to the lovely Italianate brick home he and Caroline had built on North Delaware Street in 1875. It was there that he died in 1901. The home, a National Historic Landmark, is now a museum and a focal point for a variety of social and educational gatherings throughout the year.

More than 30,000 people tour

the home each year.

That includes Indianapolis schoolchildren, who get a chance to experience what life was like in a 19th century home that historian Richard Norton Smith describes as almost a stage set for Victorian America.

The President Benjamin Harrison Home has just opened a new exhibit called "Death in the White House."

On display are artifacts gathered from around the country concerning the eight presidents and three first ladies who died during their terms in office.

Included among the hundreds of items are an exact reproduction of Lincoln's coffin and the black mourning cape worn by his wife, Mary.

The home is located at 1230 N. Delaware St. and is open Monday through Saturday. Tours begin each half-hour from 10 a.m. until 3:30 p.m.

A visit to the Benjamin Harrison home allows entry to an elegant home with tall ceilings, exquisite furnishings and a spiral staircase. It also provides a real-life history lesson about a man who is called "Indiana's First Citizen."

Board of contributors columnist James H. Johnson is a retired teacher who lives in Greenwood. Send comments to letters@thejournalnet.com.