

OPINION

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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 new Colts stadium in Indianapolis will bear the name of a California oil company.

OUR POINT

Lucas Oil Products has Hoosier connections, and the company is thinking of moving its headquarters to Indiana.

Stadium sponsor's roots firmly planted in Indiana

The Daily Journal

Almost as soon as the deal was announced, the jokes began:

The Indianapolis Colts hit oil while digging for its new stadium.

The team now owns an oil well that will yield millions of dollars.

Just don't call the stadium an oilfield.

With a fair amount of hoopla, the football team announced last week that the new stadium in downtown Indianapolis would be called Lucas Oil Stadium.

Lucas Oil Products of Corona, Calif., will pay the Colts \$121.5 million over 20 years for naming rights for the stadium. The company will begin making annual payments in 2008, when the stadium is to open.

The company's name will be on the roof and sides of the stadium and all around the inside, even on each of the 63,000 cupholders.

So what is a company that specializes in products for trucking and racing doing sponsoring a football team?

To begin with, stadium names have more to do with business than sports. It's a way to get a name before the public. More important, though, Lucas Oil is no stranger to Indiana.

It's the official oil product of the Colts. The company has sponsored aspects of the U.S. Nationals drag races at Indianapolis Raceway Park. In 2004, the company sponsored a car in the Indianapolis 500.

And company founder Forrest Lucas is a native Hoosier. He was born in Jackson County and grew up in Brown and Bartholomew counties. He graduated from high school in Harrison County.

Lucas was a truck driver and founded his company in 1989, initially to serve the trucking industry.

Now it appears he is thinking of moving the company's headquarters to Indiana. Economic development officials from Indiana plan to meet with him soon about a possible move.

There is more than just the stadium to draw Lucas here. He still has relatives in Columbus, and the company's main manufacturing plant is in Corydon.

Moving the headquarters to Indiana would be good for Indiana, but it likely would benefit Lucas Oil Products, as well. It would put it closer to the emotional heart of auto racing as well as the manufacturing plant.

Now we'd like to offer a suggestion:

Look seriously at Johnson County as the site of a new corporate headquarters. A site near the interstate in Franklin or Greenwood would offer speedy access south to the Corydon plant and relatives in Columbus and north to the downtown stadium.

So ignore the oil field jokes and celebrate that a company with strong Indiana ties has won the naming rights sweepstakes.

If the company headquarters are moved too, that's an unexpected bonus of even greater worth.

Focus: Obesity

Healthy lifestyle may become campaign issue

Scripps Howard News Service

Issues in American presidential politics tend to be collective ones — defense, education, environment — but in the 2008 campaign health care could be discussed in disconcertingly concrete terms: individual obesity.

It's early yet, but the signs are there that obesity could indeed be a political issue.

Former President Bill Clinton, whose political instincts are second to none, has picked up on it, having become a late convert to a healthy lifestyle after heart bypass surgery in 2004.

"We have a huge cultural problem and unless we change it our children may grow up to be the first generation with shorter lifespans than we had," he told a recent governors meeting.

Clinton would certainly not shy away from using the 2008 campaign, in which his wife, Hillary, might well be a candidate, to try to change the culture. He is already embarked on trying to raise the level of nutrition and physical activity in the schools.

Obesity was much discussed by the governors, and it has become a signature issue for one of their own, Republican Mike Huckabee of Arkansas, who is contemplating a White House run. Huckabee dropped 110 pounds and wrote about it in "Quit Digging Your Grave With A Knife And Fork," which sounds rather more arresting than the usual campaign autobiography.

U.S. Surgeon General Richard Carmona put obesity in terms some canny political operative will certainly seize on. Obesity is a greater long-term threat than terrorism, he said, framing the problem in terms of national security.

"Where will our soldiers and sailors and airmen come from? Where will our policemen and firemen come from if the youngsters today are on a trajectory that says they will be obese, laden with cardiovascular disease, increased cancers and a host of other diseases when they reach adulthood?" he asked an audience in South Carolina.

And who, he might have asked as a politician surely would, is going to pick up the tab for all those extra health-care costs?

According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 16 percent of people ages 6 to 19 are overweight, a rate that has tripled since 1980, and 30 percent of adults older than 20 are obese.

To the usual expectations the voters attach to candidates — make us prosperous, make us safe — might be added: Make us thin.



Puckett proved hard work, good attitude could pay off

By MIKE DAVIS
GUEST COLUMNIST

A great baseball player, Kirby Puckett, died Monday.

If we were playing at the parks today, I would request that the flag be lowered to half-staff in his honor.

I would like to share with you a memory of an experience my family had while watching Kirby play for the Minnesota Twins.

The date was Tuesday, Aug. 15, 1995, at the Metrodome in Minneapolis. The Twins were playing the Seattle Mariners. The Davis family was on what became an almost annual pilgrimage to another city to attend a major league baseball game at a different ballpark.

Almost every year from 1993 to 2001, Pam would put together last-minute plans upon the conclusion of the boys' baseball season after being eliminated from Little League all-star play or travel team play had concluded to take our summer vacation to a new city and visit another ballpark and watch a major league baseball game.

These impromptu trips took us to Wrigley Field in Chicago, Fenway Park in Boston, Busch Stadium in St. Louis, Veterans Stadium in Philadelphia, Riverfront Stadium in Cincinnati, and even Dodger Stadium in Los Angeles, Qualcomm Stadium in San Diego and The Bob in Phoenix on one trip in 2001.

Our 1995 trip had taken us to Minneapolis to watch the Twins and visit The Mall of America and other attractions.

Anyway, the score was 6-2 in Seattle's favor going into the bottom of the ninth inning.



PUCKETT

It hurts when your childhood heroes die.

The Twins got two runs across and had two men on base as the small crowd of less than 15,000 people rose to their feet and screamed in anticipation as Kirby Puckett approached the plate.

Imagine our joy when Kirby rose to the occasion and sent one over the left center field fence for a walk-off home run and a Twins victory.

Of all of the baseball games I have taken my boys to throughout the years, this one will always stand out as one of my favorites because of the last-inning heroics of Kirby Puckett.

As we exited the ballpark, the boys begged Pam and me to let them go to the player exit area and try to get autographs.

After much pleading, we succumbed to the pressure and went to stand deep in a line of autograph seekers. After what seemed an eternity, the players finally begin to exit the ballpark.

First one, then another and then several would walk by and not even acknowledge the crowd. Finally, after most of the team had exited the ballpark there was a loud cheer as Kirby Puckett, Minneapolis' favorite son, appeared.

And, in a moment I remember to this day, he actually came over and signed several autographs, spoke with the fans and allowed his picture to be taken. He was the star of the team and the only player that night to sign autographs and acknowledge the crowd.

Unfortunately, we were deep in the line and Kirby was led away by some official-looking person to his ride and his family before we were

able to get an autograph. The simple fact he stopped and signed many autographs left a great impression on my entire family.

I always admire Kirby and his accomplishments because here was a short man, slightly overweight and more like the majority of us in his physique. Despite these shortcomings, he was one of the greatest players of his era and possibly the most feared hitter in the game from the mid 1980s until his retirement.

I would sometimes hold him up as an example to my players when I was coaching that he was proof that you didn't have to be a large man to succeed in baseball and that, with hard work, perseverance and a great attitude, you had the chance to be a good, even great baseball player.

That is one reason it pains me to see parents pull their talented kids out of baseball and try to make them into a star basketball or football player when their son is never going to be over 6-feet-tall and in all likelihood will be slow and unable to jump very high, no matter what they do. But baseball isn't as glamorous a sport these days, so off they go to try their luck at basketball and football.

I seldom cry about anything and usually only when a close relative dies. I cried when my dad died, when my grandparents died and when our pug Chipper died.

I cried when Roberto Clemente died, when Mickey Mantle and Walter Payton died, and when Harry Chapin ("Taxi," "Cats in the Hat," "Dad," "I Cried Yesterday") died. It hurts when your childhood heroes die, and it hurts when your heroes in your adult life die also.

Mike Davis is a baseball fan and president of Center Grove Little League. Send comments to letters@thejournalnet.com.

Complex Medicare drug benefit plan proving bitter financial pill to swallow

WASHINGTON

Congress seldom does anything simple, especially in the realm of so-called entitlements, where efforts to balance the needs of a diverse population with the demands of a free-enterprise system always are difficult and generally more expensive than they should be.

From efforts to simplify the tax code to the latest program to provide insurance coverage for skyrocketing prescriptions, while keeping the people and big business happy, the result is usually a nightmare of complexity.

This certifies the truth of Will Rogers' assessment that Congress is the largest body of comedians in the world: Every time the lawmakers make a law it's a joke, and every time they make a joke it becomes a law.

The prescription benefit, officially Part D of Medicare, is almost wonderful in its bureaucratic intricacies, a splendid creation of multi-tiered bewilderment that has left huge numbers of those eligible unable to proceed intelligently.

Now in its second full month of operation, the price tag, according to critics, is headed for \$80 billion a month, a giant windfall for the pharmaceutical industry. By the end of the first decade, in 2016, it is expected to have cost taxpayers a shocking \$1 trillion, double the original estimate.

But here's the latest bad news: Those seniors at the lowest end of the economic scale who would and should get their drugs for next to nothing under the law's provision that shifted 6 million of them away from Medicaid for prescription purposes aren't cashing in.

Despite \$400 million allocated to enroll those with low incomes, only about 1.4 million of the eligible 8 million have signed up, according to news reports. It now



Dan K. Thomasson

is estimated the government will spend about \$250 per eligible recipient and still only have enrolled 2 million.

Why? Many of those at the lowest level have no idea how to proceed.

They lack English skills, are challenged mentally or physically, change addresses constantly or don't even know that this benefit exists.

Some see it as a government handout, and others believe that if they sign up they will lose the benefits they already have. In some cases, they don't want to provide financial information they believe will encroach on their privacy.

The problem has been exacerbated by the fact that, in its original efforts to cover those in the extra help category, the government sent out letters to 19 million who might be qualified and ended up dragging in about 2 million who weren't, each of whom cost an estimated \$50 in follow-up fees.

Close to three-fourths of those caught in the Social Security Administration net were rejected. According to reports, more than half of those rejections came because they had more than \$11,500 in assets, not counting a home or car.

The confusion among seniors generally has been well-publicized. Untold numbers have opted not to be covered because they simply found the blizzard of options too difficult to comprehend and would rather keep their own insurance programs as long as their monthly

prescription bills don't run too high.

To discourage that, the law includes penalties for signing up after a Jan. 1 deadline.

Critics of the prescription benefit, citing a new study financed by a group of liberal organizations, charged that lobbyists for drug companies, the insurance industry and a broad array of health services were responsible for its rising costs and complexities.

The report says that these influential groups poured \$96 million into political campaigns, with 71 percent going to Republicans. The study also contends that 13 Bush administration and congressional officials in key positions during the writing and passage of the bill now work for pharmaceutical companies.

There is little question that the ever-increasing cost of campaigning has made lawmakers more vulnerable to special-interest demands.

But the real failing may be Congress' historic inability to simplify anything.

Simply giving Medicare the power to negotiate the lowest costs rather than permitting the benefit to become a financial sinecure for the drug companies might have saved some confusion and a lot of money. It might have, and then it might not have, given the unreliability of bureaucracies to save money.

One thing seems certain: This program was financially irresponsible in the first place. But it is never going away.

If it isn't to end up as one of the bitterest financial pills this nation has ever swallowed, major refinement is absolutely necessary.

Dan K. Thomasson, a Hoosier native and Franklin College trustee, is former editor of the Scripps Howard News Service. Send comments to letters@thejournalnet.com.

YOUR VIEWS

Special needs students saved by teens' actions

To the editor:

I would like to publicly thank the students who came forward and stopped the plotted attack on Center Grove High School's students and staff. My son is a student there, but not just your typical high school student.

My son is in the Essential Skills class, for those with developmental disabilities. There are small classrooms in the school with specially trained staff who work with students such as my son to educate them and teach them daily life skills.

Many of these students, my son included, have very special needs medically. Some are wheelchair bound; some have seizures, heart problems and other medical conditions; and some have sensory disabilities like autism.

Whether shots were fired or not during this potential takeover, these particular students would have been at risk simply by being in that stressful a situation. They would have been kept from much-needed supplies and medications.

My son would have been upset to the point that he could have had a major seizure episode or a stroke. He was so shaken by the incident that he was unable to attend school on Friday.

To the students who came forward, thank you from the bottom of my heart. My son has had many brushes with death in his young life, but I am in no way ready to lose him yet.

Your bravery should be commended, and your parents should be proud. Thank you for saving lives.

To the students who were reportedly plotting this scheme: I am so sorry that you felt you had no alternative other than violence.

If your reasons are those that have been reported, that you had been teased and harassed, I can understand your pain because that is something my own son has dealt with being disabled. But there are procedures in place to stop that type of harassment.

You should have simply confided in a teacher or counselor. I know, it's not "cool" to tell, but better to be uncool rather than where you are now.

Just remember, it's only high school, not life. Your life is just beginning, and a few years down the road, the teasing would be a distant memory and insignificant.

I urge all parents to step back now and take a look around you. Take time to make sure your kids aren't the butt of teasing or jokes or that they aren't the instigators.

Pay attention to their friends, their behaviors and the changes in their lives. They only have one life to live; and right now, you are the ones guiding them through.

And while you're at it, don't forget to hug them. You never know how long they will be in your lives.

Edwina Caito
Greenwood

Leasing of toll road shortsighted solution

To the editor:

I agree with Mr. Ron West's analysis (Daily Journal, March 3) that the 92 counties in Indiana will get the short end of the state's \$3.85 billion lease payment for the Indiana Toll Road, except that his estimate of the income is optimistic.

The toll road was refinanced in 1985 with about \$300 million in bonds that, to the best of my knowledge, have not been redeemed. This will cut into the income from the 75-year lease and also reduce the interest income.

The Indiana legislature has a history of spending excess money received to reduce taxes and other voter re-election maneuvering. (Casino-generated money was to build Indiana, not reduce excise tax on vehicles or reduce property tax.) So what is to stop them from doing the same with the income from the toll road lease?

If a private company can make that kind of money from operating the toll road, why can't the state of Indiana? Seventy-five years is longer than most of today's drivers will live.

The sale of the toll road is shortsighted and will only bring a temporary solution to the state's transportation problems. A graduated gasoline tax or a dedicated gasoline sales tax to keep highway construction and maintenance up with inflation are better long-term solutions.

William E. Gervasio
Greenwood

WRITE A LETTER

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