

# 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

## Opinion roundup

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

### Students' futures depend on NCAA diligence

The Columbus (Ohio) Dispatch

The NCAA's crackdown on academic performance by student-athletes has paid dividends.

Fewer than 2 percent of collegiate sports teams were penalized for poor academic performance, compared with 6 percent making the list a year ago.

But keeping schools afloat academically will continue to be a challenge until the NCAA decides to take a closer look at the prep schools that are feeding some NCAA basketball programs. And the NCAA needs to protect the schools and students who play by the rules.

A number of bogus prep schools have sprung up that teach their students little outside of basketball.

The sham schools not only cheat players out of a legitimate education, they give the colleges that admit such players an unfair advantage on the court, and they take scholarships away from youngsters who have played by the rules and kept up their grades.

### Good parents deserve chance to adopt

The Tampa (Fla.) Tribune

Florida has barred homosexuals from adopting children since 1977, yet gays and lesbians are allowed to be foster parents and raise wards of the state for years at a time.

Perhaps that paradox is why, even as 16 other states move to ban adoptions by homosexuals, Florida lawmakers may be ready to reconsider.

A House bill would let a judge decide whether a child living in foster care with a gay adult could benefit from adoption. The bill, which leaves in place the policy favoring adoption by married couples, deserves a fair hearing. Rep. Bill Gavano, R-Bradenton and chairman of the Future of Florida's Families Committee, says he will allow a vote if companion legislation resurfaces in the Senate.

Sen. Nan Rich, D-Sunrise, withdrew a similar bill when it became clear it would not survive a first committee vote.

This need not turn into a divisive ideological battle. The truth is that adoption is necessarily a difficult and discriminating process. Children who are wards of the state must be protected, so Florida requires rigorous investigation of any home where its children may be placed. The moment the adoption is completed, the state loses that oversight.

We don't know how many homosexuals want to become adoptive parents, but those who have proved themselves to be exemplary foster parents in the eyes of the child and a judge should have that chance.

### Army not suited to investigate soldier's death

San Francisco Chronicle

The U.S. Army has conducted four investigations into the death of Cpl. Pat Tillman, and questions still persist about what really happened to him in Afghanistan on April 22, 2004.

Now the Army is about to embark on a fifth investigation into Tillman's death, at the suggestion of a Department of Defense inspector general who reviewed the earlier probes. The next investigation is expected to focus on whether his death was the result of homicide, criminal negligence or an accident.

Before the Army gets too deep into its fifth review, someone in the top echelons of the Pentagon should ask the fundamental question: Hasn't the Army already exhausted its credibility on this case?

After all, the Army's initial report on Tillman's death was like something out of a John Wayne movie: It claimed he was caught in a Taliban ambush, barking commands and leading his fellow Rangers "without regard for his own safety," when he was killed by enemy fire.

A month later, the Army acknowledged that Tillman's death appeared to be the result of friendly fire. Other elements of the Army story have either changed or revealed potential evidence of cover-up.

Tillman, an American hero, left the glory and riches of the NFL to serve his country after Sept. 11. The Army's lack of rectitude about his death has been unworthy of the great faith he put in it.

Yes, a thorough, credible, independent investigation is needed. The Army is not the one to do it.

### Laws won't silence military funeral protests

St. Paul (Minn.) Pioneer Press

The impulse is almost irresistible: Stifle the creep from Kansas who offends our every sensibility.

But there's a little strip of difference between "almost irresistible" and "irresistible." In the long run, it's the difference between freedom and oppression. That's why tolerance for offensive speech has to be so high.

The creep from Kansas, as you may know, has instigated noisy protests at funerals for soldiers. He cheers the death of our soldiers, saying God is punishing the United States because gay people live here.

Nothing he screams has redeeming social value. Nothing he stands for has redeeming social value. The venue he's chosen — intrusion on the grief of soldiers' survivors — is beyond offensive.

His pathetic theater has provoked two primary responses:

1. A rallying of good people to shield the bereaved from his screams.
2. A well-intentioned but unnecessary race to "do something" — that is, to pass new laws — to keep him away from soldiers' funerals.

Far better the former. Legal restrictions designed for him merely feed his mania. Instead, his demented behavior ought to provoke an outpouring of support for those whose grief he would disturb.



# Whole community can help CG students reach potential

By DON DEGENHARDT  
GUEST COLUMNIST

By now we're all aware of what happened March 2 at Center Grove High School. As a 16-year resident of White River Township and a parent of four current students and a 2003 graduate of Center Grove schools, I have the equivalent of 47 student-years experience with our schools.

In 1989, prior to changing careers, I completed my eighth year as a teacher; the final four were at Custer Baker Middle School.

Last Thursday morning I picked up one of my kids from middle school to attend a doctor appointment. Having just signed her out on the office clipboard, she asked in a typical pre-teen way, "Why do the schools have to be so overly protective and know where we are every minute? I mean it's not like someone's gonna bring a gun to school or something."

I asked her if she could remember Columbine High School in Colorado. "Uh, yeah, but that wouldn't happen here."

I told her about a family in our neighborhood who had lived several years in Littleton, Colo.

In April 1999, while discussing Columbine with this family, they said, "Littleton is very similar to Greenwood, and Columbine High is a lot like (Center Grove). That's one of the scary things about all this. It could have been Center Grove High School just as easily."

I have never forgotten that conversation. Prophetic? Possibly. Realistic? Unfortunately.

I had no idea what was taking place in (the high school) at the exact time my daughter and I were leaving (the middle school) for her appointment.

But why were the teenagers who devised the nine-step plan so distraught in the first place?

According to one report I read, they were targets of ridicule and teasing from certain athletes in the high school. Yesterday's Daily Journal reports their plan included demands for \$4 million ransom (March 7, Daily Journal).

Last week three of my kids were

talking about Center Grove schools being the most clique-ish places anyone can imagine. A few weeks earlier, a group of high school students told me, "You don't tell on, or 'give up,' someone doing something wrong."

That is their limited experience.

Change the name of the school and it probably applies there too. As a parent, concerned citizen and member of our community, this disturbs me.

Have you heard about Jason McElwain, an autistic 17-year-old young man from Rochester, N.Y., who is the manager of his varsity basketball team at Greece Athena High School?

During the final game this season, Jason was given a chance to play. He scored 20 points, including six 3-pointers in less than four minutes.

The interviews of his classmates presented an open acceptance of this young man and his illness; to the basketball team, "He's just one of us."

However, the amazing part of this particular high school is the intentional and deliberate manner with which the entire school population progressively works to include numerous handicapped students in the everyday life, learning and activities of the school. (I've seen this same attribute exhibited many times throughout the CG schools my children attend.)

If I remember correctly, Greece Athena High School is part of a school district which five or six years ago had been cited by the state of New York for not doing enough to include handicapped students in their schools. Students such as Jason were then sent to special schools.

In the interview, I remember Jason talking about his school and classmates and the fact that he has many friends and doesn't get teased.

Hello Center Grove. Are we listening?

Everyone everywhere should be listening. If it almost happened here, it could and very possibly will happen somewhere again.

So what can we be doing to help

our schools become more like Greece Athena High School 2006 and less like the Columbine High School of 1999? Plenty.

When I compare the Center Grove schools my first child attended, beginning in 1993, to our schools in 2006, there are many positives and definite negatives.

Our community can take pride in numerous positive aspects, such as solid academics, excellent fine arts and sports programs, the Creating Alternative Redirected Education program, teachers and administration who generally do what is best for the students, peer-mentor programs and more.

But we should also be aware of, and respond appropriately to, challenges such as a bullying and teasing, easy availability of illegal drugs and alcohol, sexual promiscuity, in-school gambling, over-indulgence and more.

Let's not be ignorant, naïve or in denial. It is not our schools' responsibility to carry the banner of reform and change; it begins in our homes and workplaces, our places of worship and recreation. It begins individually and grows from there.

"It takes a village to raise a child."

Speaking from personal experiences, perhaps too many, I have adapted that saying to be: "It takes our entire community to raise our children."

I am one of many thankful for the abundant blessings we enjoy in this community.

Could it be, however, we are overlooking, if not ignoring, some people who need to be more directly and intentionally included in the sharing of those blessings?

It is perhaps too early to fully determine and understand what went wrong in our homes, schools and community that would lead a group of teenage students to devise a plan of holding hostage at gunpoint the majority of our high school populace.

The challenges are there. We need to address them and act accordingly, before it is too late.

Don Degenhardt is a Center Grove area resident. Send comments to letters@thejournalnet.com

# Drained advisers, alienated Congress sap president's powers of persuasion

Our president, George W. Bush, recently returned from a trip to India and Pakistan. As the war on terror and the war in Iraq continue, this kind of trip to rally our allies is important. As he departed to go abroad, he left a host of problems behind.

The ports security issue, in light of a potential sale, was greeted with strong opposition from the mass media and Congress.

Democracy in Iraq has hit a snag with the country on the brink of civil war. The United Nations and some of our allies, such as Great Britain, are calling for the United States to close the U.S.-run detention center at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

As a political scientist, the issue that should worry him most is the new low in the public opinion poll. The president and vice president's approval ratings have dropped to record lows.

Vice President Dick Cheney had an 18-point approval rating. This is low, but not that serious.

The vice president has traditionally played a supportive role to the president, and he does not have any clear functions to perform.

As such, his approval rating has little to do with his job rating and mostly to do with his personality. Cheney has never been a popular figure. He is not the type to kiss babies and enjoy shaking hands with supporters.

In light of the recent hunting accident and his perceived uncooperative personality, the low numbers are understandable.

But the president's 34 percent approval rating should create some alarm in the White House.

Public opinion polls provide a barometer of the confidence we have in our leaders. When the majority loses the trust and confidence they once placed in their leaders, it becomes difficult for



Yu-long Ling

them to lead the country in the direction they want.

In a democratic society, leadership refers to a relationship between the leaders and followers. The leaders base their authority on the trust placed in them by the followers. But when that trust fades away, so does the authority.

When Bush was interviewed by Elizabeth Vargas of ABC News, he made it clear that he does not pay attention to public opinion polls. His explanation is that if he is dictated by polls, he would never make tough decisions.

To a certain extent, I agree with him. The majority is not always right. As the leader of the country, he should have his own ideas and vision.

But if public opinion drops to such lows, it shows that the majority not only disagrees with his policies but has also lost confidence in him.

Even though he will soon be a lame duck president, this is the time for him to create a legacy that will last beyond his time in office.

In the long run, Bush's reputation will suffer. In the short run, his party will suffer in the midterm elections.

At one time, he was one of the most popular presidents in our history.

But during the past couple of years, that popularity has steadily declined.

And in the past couple of months, his standings in the polls have

taken a sharp dive.

Many of the policies advocated by the president did not work out the way he had projected. It is interesting that so many good intentions, such as changing regimes in Iraq, reforming Social Security and other recent policies, ended up in such a bad way.

The implementation of his policies is what is lacking from Bush's administration.

The president has power, but he does not have expertise on every issue. One answer to this dilemma is for the president to surround himself with many people who can provide expert advice on issues.

But Bush has surrounded himself with close friends, many of whom have been with him since he was governor of Texas.

Most have been in Washington for almost six years now. They are drained and worn out, and it is starting to become evident.

Their creativity has hit a wall, and they have turned inward during difficult times rather than facing reality.

This isolation has not helped the administration effectively answer its critics.

The power of the president is based on persuasion.

In Bush's case, he has alienated Congress (even many lawmakers from his own party), the mass media and now the public.

If a leader cannot persuade, he or she cannot lead.

Now that the president has returned from his overseas trip, it would be a good time to focus on his waning power of persuasion.

Professor Yu-long Ling holds the Williams Chair in Law and Public Service at Franklin College and is an internationally respected expert in foreign policy. He writes this weekly opinion column for the Daily Journal. Send comments to letters@thejournalnet.com.

## YOUR VIEWS

### Cut budget instead of raising taxes in Franklin

To the editor:

As usual, the politicians are incapable of making tough decisions and doing the right thing.

Instead, they chose to take advantage of state law and a 2001 bookkeeping error to steal more money from the taxpayers instead of making serious cuts in the budget.

They make a mistake, and we are forced to pay for it. Sure, they've cut back on a few things, for now, but these cuts are not even close to what really needs to happen.

Politicians' solutions to financial shortfalls usually consist of one of the following: lay off emergency personnel, raise taxes or both. They never offer sensible, workable, long-term plans that would actually save the city money without lessening the quality of life we enjoy.

The following six ideas are presented as a place to start. This will not alleviate all of our fiscal problems, but it will get us going in the right direction.

- Eliminate the street sweepers. They don't clean anything.
- No more take-home cars for anyone. The program wastes money.

- No more SUVs. No need for a status symbol paid for by the taxpayers.
- Lease Greenlawn Cemetery. Save money and generate revenue.

- Lease the city pool. Let those who use it pay for it.
- Contract mowing of parks and other city property. No need to incur the extra expense.

As I said, this is a starting point. Maybe next time around our public servants will do what's best for their employers, the people, instead of scare tactics and idle threats of loss of necessary services.

The possible fire hydrant fee is completely unacceptable unless they give us a tax break. We are already paying for the hydrants, and adding a fee through the water company is a coward's run around the voters and tantamount to taxation without representation.

For more information about saving money instead of raising taxes in Franklin visit my blog at bradmanz.blogspot.com.

Brad Manzenberger  
Franklin

### Senator deserves praise for Major Moves vote

To the editor:

I would like to commend Brent Waltz on voting "no" to the Major Moves bill.

Finally we have a person that votes their beliefs and not what the almighty dollar has done to other representatives.

If only our Founding Fathers knew the way we are selling out to foreign nations, land that we fought for and paid for, just to make an extra buck, property that belongs to the taxpayers of the future and now.

I don't know the reason why Brent Waltz voted no to the bill, but I say "Hooray!" At least he is not a "yes" man and didn't just follow the party line and obey the dictatorship of the governor.

Let the people of Indiana vote on this bill because it is the people's property, our tax dollars that are being dealt with.

Thank you, Mr. Waltz, for standing up for the people and not voting your party line.

Scott Smith  
Franklin

### Nothing negative about smoke-free county

To the editor:

A smoke-free Johnson County has nothing but positive benefits and no negatives. I am completely in favor of it.

Push our officials to adopt a smoke-free home county and city for us.

John W. Johnson  
Franklin

## WRITE A LETTER

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

### GUIDELINES

- Letters published in the Daily Journal 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.
- Make sure the e-mail letter includes the writer's name, mailing address, telephone number and e-mail address for verification.
- Because of space and legal considerations, the Daily Journal reserves the right to edit any letters or articles and to limit comments.

### SEND IT

Drop-off  
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