

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

The most recent election problems in Florida raise questions for all governments that use touch-screen voting systems.

OUR POINT

A paper trail would help ensure legitimate vote totals.

Require written record of how ballots are cast

The Daily Journal

Florida seems to have a unique talent for botching elections, and each time the fallout is felt in Johnson County.

In the wake of the hanging chad fiasco in 2000, Congress decided no one should use punch-card voting machines.

So after years of running successful, relatively trouble-free elections, Johnson County had to move to another form of voting. The county opted for touch-screen machines.

The ensuing elections didn't go off without a hitch, though; but the problems were the result of the machine-and-software supplier, not the county.

Florida went with touch-screen machines, too. But its experience was much less pleasant.

Uncertainty still hangs over November election results in the state's 13th Congressional District, where Republican Vern Buchanan bested Democrat Christine Jennings by 369 votes.

Jennings has sued, pointing to Sarasota County's 18,000 "under-votes," or the number of voters who made no choice for their ballot's congressional contest.

Neighboring counties recorded much fewer under-votes.

So far, a judge has not allowed the Jennings campaign to bring in its own experts for an examination of the copyright-protected software in the Election Systems & Software iVotronic voting machine. Florida officials have already conducted a review, ES&S spokesman Ken Fields said.

ES&S is the company Johnson County has had trouble with.

This latest round of problems in Florida has prompted action in Congress.

Rep. Rush Holt, D-N.J., has introduced a bill that requires machines to have paper trails that allow voters to verify their choices.

Sen. Diane Feinstein, D-Calif., last week asked the Government Accountability Office to launch an investigation of the electronic system used in Sarasota County.

Both lawmakers want to put the new standard in place before the 2008 presidential election.

"I think we should try. Whether we can get there or not remains to be seen," said Feinstein, who chairs the Senate Committee on Rules and Administration. "There needs to be some national standard."

Both lawmakers would like to see a paper trail that could be used to verify voting.

Whether by electronic error or willful tampering, there is no way to prove that a vote total is correct. If the under-count experienced in Florida represents people who cast votes in a particular race, then those people have been disenfranchised.

It's not so far-fetched to imagine a hacker reprogramming software so that, say, every 200th vote for Candidate A is shifted to Candidate B, thus swinging a close election.

If there were the equivalent of receipts for each ballot, then the actual totals could be verified or challenged in a recount.

Some members of Congress are talking about barring touch-screen machines altogether. This could pose a financial burden on governments that purchased the machines.

But without a physical way to verify totals, the risk of problem remains.

Rather than banning the machines, Congress should offer to help governments add a paper trail to the voting process.

Elections are too important to a democracy to take needless risks.

Focus: Judicial system

White House needs less control over prosecutors

Scrrips Howard News Service

The Senate should extend its inquiry into why the Bush administration has forced at least seven U.S. attorneys out of office.

By tradition, presidents appoint these federal prosecutors when they first enter office. President Bush replaced nearly all those who had been appointed by Bill Clinton; President Clinton had done much the same before him. But it is odd for a president to remove his own choices, especially if they are performing adequately.

An amendment tacked on to the reauthorized Patriot Act last year empowers the attorney general to replace U.S. attorneys for indefinite periods. Though Attorney General Alberto Gonzales has vowed to submit new appointees' names to the Senate for confirmation, the law apparently does not require it.

Previously, U.S. District Court judges had the power to make limited interim appointments. But Gonzales recently argued that this was improper: The judges might install their friends.

Some Democrats are pushing for a return to the old system, which seems better insulated from executive whims. The more heavily politicized these offices become, the less independently U.S. attorneys will act. The ultimate casualty is justice.

YOUR

VIEWES & COMMENTARY

President Bush still has many proud supporters

To the editor:

After watching President Bush's State of the Union Address, my husband and I feel that we need to stop being part of "the silent majority" and speak up.

We support President Bush. We believe that he is making the hard decisions that are necessary to protect our country. We believe that he is sincere in his belief that he is acting in the best interest for our country.

He has not backed down when the polls say that "the American people" have turned against him and "his" war. It would be much easier to give in and try and save his popularity in the polls, but he has the courage of his convictions, unlike some politicians who have turned against Bush because they're afraid they won't get re-elected if they stick with him.

Speaking of the polls that show President Bush's approval rating has slipped so low, my husband and I have to wonder how this is so, because everyone that we know, ourselves included, who supported the president from the beginning, still support him: our family members, friends, acquaintances, everyone who supported him before still does. We have to wonder how accurate these polls are.

Our country is at war. We did not start it. It began on Sept. 11.

As I stood in front of my TV on that morning and watched those planes hit and those towers come down, I was horrified, but mainly I was deeply angry that someone could do this to us.

Words cannot describe how angry I was. But what I wanted

was not revenge, what I wanted was something to be done that would keep this from happening again. And that is what President Bush is doing.

Richard and Linda Isley
Greenwood

Drivers receive ample warning from trains

To the editor:

Right back to the basics we learned as children (but that was when children actually walked to school): Stop, look and listen!

A long distance before any road crossing is located a sign, along the train track, with a big "W" on it. That is the "whistle post." The locomotive engineer begins to blow his horns (and they are very, very loud) at that whistle post. The tones are two longs, a short and a long. So, he is blowing the horns for quite some distance.

And, he must hold the last long until he is over the crossing. If there are multiple crossings, such as small towns and cities, he/she continues to blow the horns in the same pattern until the last crossing is covered.

Everyone writing in has only one solution to the "problem," and that is crossing arms, all kinds of bells and whistles. They will not work unless the person driving the car is, at the very least, listening.

There must have been a terrible distraction in the car these two little boys were killed in. How could we believe less with three excited little boys in the back seat?

I'm sure a husband and wife were talking in the front seat, possibly with a radio on, maybe even a DVD player in the back. That's neither here nor there;

what is pertinent is that the horns on the trains are deafening, loud and terrifying if you are paying attention to the road/railroad.

My heart bleeds for the parents, grandparents and other relatives of these children. What needs to be addressed is driving habits.

The solution to the problem is to drive defensively and with your full attention on what is going on outside the vehicle, not on what is on the inside.

Patty Knox
New Whiteland

Burton brothers make for poor representatives

To the editor:

It was great to see that Woody Burton is now concerned about free/reduced textbooks and lunch fee abuse. Maybe he should be more concerned about the abuse of the system the taxpayers have to put up with from legislators.

Woody should look to his own brother, Dan. Dan's apology for missing 19 votes was interesting. He actually turned a half-hearted apology on the Democrats by blaming them for having sessions during the time of the big golf outing.

How dare Congress, the voters and taxpayers expect him to earn his keep during a tourney in which he plays for free? Under Republican leadership, this was a vacation time for Congress immediately after opening sessions.

He also wants us to forgive this one of his many mistakes and abuses of the system. It really is our mistake as voters for putting up with incompetents like the infamous Burton boys.

Walter Aldoriso
Greenwood

Paper carriers braved ice, snow to deliver your news

At first blush, a blast of snow makes the world seem clean, fresh and pretty.

Soon the snow gets dirty and is a nuisance. Folks get a wee bit cranky.

I base my grumpy theory on the following comments.

"Do you care?" "What are you people doing down there?" "Looks like you don't work any more than (a paper carrier) does." "Apparently the Daily Journal doesn't work when it snows."

I know there has been a coarsening of the culture and the language. But puh-leez.

The comments have been directed at the people who deliver the Daily Journal. They came as motor-route drivers and carriers worked hard to get through snow and ice to deliver the paper to thousands of subscribers last week.

Don't get me wrong. We expect to get beat up. That comes with the territory.

But sometimes the tone of the jabs leaves your jaw dropped, your head shaking and your lips at a loss for words.

Snowstorms make getting the paper to you difficult.

But, according to Mike Warren, who oversees the delivery of the Daily Journal, it's those few days weeks after the snow falls that are just as challenging.

Part of it has to do with expectations.

You start expecting timely delivery because you see motorists whizzing down cleared-off interstates and some state roads.

Here's the rub, though.

The folks who deliver the paper are not traveling on interstates. They have to cross the nooks and crannies of county roads and subdivisions. They are driving in the dark, constantly stopping and starting and often sliding on roads that are still covered with



Scarlett Syse

snow and ice.

As you know, not every road is equal when it comes to getting plowed. Some get a quick clearing; others may not see a snow pusher for a few days.

And sometimes it's the plowing that makes delivery more problematic. The newspaper tubes often get hidden in a big mound of snow after the plow rolls through. If we can't get to the newspaper tube (and you probably can't either), we put the paper in a plastic bag and place it in a prominent place. Sometimes that is the only option.

The fact of the matter is that routes are going to take longer when there is ice and snow. Delivery people cannot drive 50 mph until they get to a newspaper box, slam on the brakes and take off again. Safety must be paramount.

At the Daily Journal, the employees in our delivery department have been going above and beyond the call of duty since snow fell last week.

In one case, they delivered the paper to a subscriber.

But the subscriber did not think he could go outside, maneuver through and around a pile of snow and get to the newspaper tube. She called us. We made a return trip to her home, pulled the paper out of the tube and took it to the door.

And a reader reminded me that subscribers who didn't get their paper on Tuesday found

it in their tube along with Wednesday's paper.

Our delivery department also has become a mini towing business, pulling motor route carriers' vehicles out of ditches and getting them unstuck.

And this snow hasn't been good for the backsides of some managers. They have been falling on icy sidewalks and porches to get you the paper.

That's just a small glimpse of what we face even after the first few days of a snow. Please let us know if you are having delivery problems. We want to know so we can fix it.

And maybe I dwell too much on the barbs. That's human nature I guess. You remember the ones that sting the most.

We have gotten some flowers, too. Not everyone is crabby. Here are two bouquets from readers to our delivery department.

Thank you. Unfortunately, I do not know the name of my carrier, but I would like to thank him or her for braving this nasty weather to have my paper in my paper box early this morning as usual. I certainly did not expect it on a day like today.

There are people who look for any excuse to stay home from work, and yet I have my paper every morning without fail in time to read the headlines before I leave for work at 6 a.m. no matter what the weather is.

Good job. Hearts to the Daily Journal circulation department and to our carrier, Donald Sanders.

Our Daily Journal was in our paper box every morning during the storm, unlike our other paper, which missed two days of delivery.

Scarlett Syse is editor of The Daily Journal. Send comments to letters@thejournalnet.com



Dick Wolfisie

Where's a greedy kid when you need one?

It was the day before Valentine's Day; the snow had mounted at my front door, drifting to more than 3 feet. The entrance to my driveway was blocked by a huge pile of white stuff, the result of a private company plowing our cul de sac.

I was a man just primed to be taken advantage of by some savvy kid who knew I was a senior citizen with a good job, back problems and a cardiologist on retainer.

I walked outside and scanned the neighborhood. A few of my more fit neighbors were hard at work, if you call pushing a snow blower "work."

But teenagers, shoveling snow? Not a one. Where were those big, manly 17-year-olds whose parents have bumper stickers that say, "My son is a lineman for Lawrence North?" Yeah, where were they? I'll tell you where they were.

They checked the Internet to be sure schools were closed, text messaged their best friends to confirm the good word, then turned over and went back to sleep. Doesn't anyone want my 20 bucks?

It's odd. I've had kids lined up on my front step for the past 10 years looking for free handouts at Halloween. They used to come out on a blustery Oct. 31 dressed like devils and pirates for a lousy Kit Kat.

Ten years later, they're old enough to make an honest buck. Where are they? Arrrrgh!

Back in the old days when I was a kid in New York, as soon as school was canceled due to heavy snowfall, my best friend Arthur and I wrestled into our warm coats, armed ourselves with shovels, then set out in the neighborhood by 8 a.m. to make a financial killing.

I remember one day coming home with a wad of crumpled-up wet bills in my pocket. I showed my Mom the stash of \$52.

"That's more than your father made today!" she said. She wasn't kidding.

We never had a set fee for our work. Instead, we did a little glacial profiling. We knew who was desperate.

Like the widow Mrs. Abramson, who was snowed in and couldn't get her 1959 station wagon out of the driveway (\$15); or poor Mrs. Klaster, who, because her husband traveled, was left alone during the blizzard (\$10, plus two bucks for the walk); or Dr. Auer, a big-shot doctor, who would pay us pretty much anything we'd stick him for just so he could get his Cadillac to the hospital.

Yes, our pricing structure was downright despicable. Now, 45 years later, I deserve to be taken advantage of. So I'm waiting here at the front door. A door I can't get out of. Money in hand. Someone take the cash. Please!

I yearn for those days when I had the muscle and the heart (and the heart muscle) to shovel a driveway after a snowstorm.

Now, I am dependent on young men and women who don't want to make an extra buck and are, instead, holed up in their rooms with a video game.

Or is it possible a small band of young entrepreneurs did come by my house on Valentine's Day while my wife and I were huddled in the house awaiting assistance?

They saw the snow piled up at my front door and on the driveway.

The powder was deep, pristine and untrampled.

Maybe, they thought, the Wolfisies no longer live here.

Television personality Dick Wolfisie writes this weekly humor column for the Daily Journal. Send comments to letters@thejournalnet.com.

WRITE A LETTER

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

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