

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 recent deaths of two boys in a vehicle-train accident underscores the need for enhanced crossing safety.

OUR POINT

Improving crossings won't come cheaply, but cities and the county must make this a higher priority.

Leaders should focus on improving rail crossings

The Daily Journal

Last weekend, Jacob "Jake" Findley, 12, and Travis Findley, 9, were riding in a sport utility vehicle with family friends.

They were traveling on Stones Crossing Road about a half-mile west of State Road 135. At the railroad crossing, the vehicle was hit by a train. The driver, an adult passenger and a young passenger were injured. The Findley brothers were fatally injured.



J. FINDLEY



T. FINDLEY

This is a tragic accident that will forever affect the families and friends of both families.

And questions will be raised about whether an accident of this kind could have been avoided.

The crossing is marked with cross arms (the diagonal railroad crossing signs) and a stop sign.

To the Federal Railroad Administration, the stop sign is an upgrade to the crossing warning devices.

However, nearby houses make it difficult to see down the tracks even under the best of conditions. Neighbors have described how they have to inch forward in order to get a view of the tracks.

A generation ago, the area around the crossing was much less developed. Even when the farm fields were planted, motorists could see approaching trains fairly easily. A crossing with limited safety devices was sufficient.

Today, that's not enough.

And the crossing at Stones Crossing Road is not alone. There are dozens of rail crossings throughout the county. At several of them, thousands of vehicles a day cross. At only a few are there lights, bells and crossing arms.

Crossings such as Stones Crossing and Olive Branch roads in the Center Grove area and County Road 144 in Bargersville pose a danger to motorists because increased development has made visibility difficult. The warning devices need to be upgraded.

Making the changes won't be easy or cheap.

But as Forrest Chambers, a Center Grove area resident, said: "The need is different than what it was 15 to 20 years ago. You don't want to waste money, but this is needed."

The ultimate responsibility for upgrading the crossings lies with the government that owns the road. Waiting for the state to do the job will mean several years of delay.

Johnson County and the local communities should begin setting aside funds and looking for state and federal grants specifically for upgrading the safety at railroad crossings.

We are aware of the problems, and we have seen the tragic results of a vehicle-train collision.

Failure to act could mean we all are responsible for the next fatal accident.

Focus: Congress

Republicans should step up, criticize Bush

Scrrips Howard News Service

Congressional Democrats promised during the election that once in control of Congress they would launch a long overdue series of oversight hearings on the performance of the Bush administration. This week they began to make good on that promise.

The House Oversight and Government Reform Committee began looking into the incompetence of the Coalition Provisional Authority that squandered billions while failing to bring order to postwar Iraq.

The committee summoned the head of the now disbanded CPA, L. Paul Bremer, but won only an admission from the official who presided over the disbanding of the Iraqi army, police and, effectively, the government, and the looting of Baghdad that in hindsight he might have done some things differently.

Washington Post reporter Dana Milbank suggested that the Democratic members' inability to go for the jugular was lack of practice during their 12 years in the minority. And the chairman did make a rookie mistake by letting each member of the committee read an opening statement, consuming hours of valuable question-and-answer time.

The Senate Judiciary Committee had better luck investigating what seems to be the politically motivated firing of seven U.S. attorneys in the South and West. The Justice Department denied that politics was involved, but it sure looked that way.

The top federal prosecutor in Little Rock was removed to be replaced by a former aide to presidential intimate Karl Rove and Republican National Committee staffer. Another who was removed was the respected U.S. attorney in San Diego who won the bribery conviction of former Republican Rep. Duke Cunningham and who has an ongoing investigation into GOP-linked government contractors.

There may be an element of bipartisanship in the oversight, but in their unwillingness to confront or even faintly criticize the Bush administration, the Republicans let an important function of Congress lapse.



DARTH DATER

YOUR

VIEWS & COMMENTARY

Cigarettes not sole cause of vice-related health woes

To the editor:

Why is there a warning on liquor bottles about impairment of driving and health problems?

Seems to me that these warnings should be taken off those bottles, because all everyone wants to do is hike up cigarettes. I'm so tired of reading all your complaints on cigarettes as if that's the only health issue in the state of Indiana.

Trust me; if you'd all be honest and search your hearts, you'd help your own heart and not eat so much, and most of all you'd not step inside that car and drive when you know you are over the limit (of drinks you have consumed).

I often wonder why when the government people are caught drinking and driving they only are given a slap on the hand. Let's raise the tax on alcohol to \$2 in memory of all our loved ones who have been killed by drunken drivers, put those lawmakers in jail and make them stay there until they are bonded out like every other Hoosier.

How many people have been killed by a driver smoking a cigarette?

I used to work in a liquor store many years ago, and believe you me, there are so many "higher-ups" who drink booze like it's coming out of a faucet.

Look at your own selves in the mirror and confess your vice. Soon there isn't going to be any reason to hike up anything — for we'll all be gone and your piddly bickering won't matter anyway.

Thank the Lord.

Please find something else that matters more to complain about and stop trying to make tons of money to fill your pockets off of your stupid ideas, especially before your home is demolished for a beltway.

Let's start being thankful for what we do have and stop tearing down what good, honest people have worked so hard for all their lives. It seems the law God laid down, the devil and his (or her) army are working overtime to take it away.

Is it no wonder the road is so narrow, and Jesus doesn't charge a fee to be on it?

Jo Lanell Bowen
Franklin

Hiring children to perform labor abusive, wrong

To the editor:

My name is Katelyn, and I'm 11 years old, and I think abusive child labor is wrong. Even though I have never had abusive child labor, I have read about it. I learned that a lot of kids have had or still have abusive child labor. In this letter I will be talking a lot about child labor.

Why is it wrong? It's because they hurt innocent children, and we all know that that's not right. You can't say that they don't hurt children because 11 million to 12 million kids have child labor in Pakistan. Also, 5 million to 6 million of those children will die before they turn 12 years old. So, child labor can not only hurt innocent children but kill them also.

What are some stuff kids can make for companies? They can

make soccer balls or basketballs. They can also make clothes and shoes. Kids get paid so little for these jobs.

Why do they use kids instead of adults? Well, the answer is money. It costs less money to use children than to use adults. So if it's cheaper, that means they can have more money to make more products. More products mean more child labor.

What can I do to help stop it? You can ask your neighborhood to help stop abusive child labor. Also, you can write a letter to a company that has child labor. Or you can write a letter to the newspaper, like I did.

Now you know why child labor is wrong, what stuff kids make for companies, why they use kids instead of adults and what you can do to help stop it. I hope this letter will convince you child labor is wrong.

Katelyn Aman,
Sixth-grader at Clark-Pleasant
Intermediate School
Greenwood

NFL ruling on showing games shuts out fans

To the editor:

Help me understand this. We are taxed to support a stadium for games that I cannot afford to attend and are prevented from joining with friends at church to watch one game.

However, I may go to a bar to see that event.

Is this the payback for the outstanding support the team has received from Indianapolis and the surrounding community?

Don Meyer
Greenwood

Untangling state funds from property taxes takes planning

In a column about property taxes, Ball State University professor Cecil E. Bohanon states, "For years the state has bailed (which should be bailed) out taxpayers and local governments with state financed property tax relief."

As a professor of anything, especially economics, he should know that bail-out dollars come from taxpayers and local governments.

As with most dollar transactions, there is a cost associated with handling. The state takes the dollars from taxpayers, finances their departments and agencies, pays for pork and perks, delays and deletes portions of those dollars which go to local governments, caps property tax replacement credits and tells local governments to make up the difference without raising any additional revenues.

Also in the column, former state budget official Bill Styring states, "Abolish the property tax. Get rid of the assessment and collection mechanisms so it can't grow back."

As a former state budget official, Styring should know that there are many counties in Indiana with small populations, little or no industry and commercial operations, and are predominantly rural and agricultural.

Financing the state's needs and local government services with a local income tax would be inadequate or disproportionate. Likewise a sales tax, unless applied to farm crops and livestock, would generate minimal dollars.

So how would we finance these counties? Obviously the state would have to subsidize many counties.

So where would the state get the money? Again, obviously the money would come from you and me, if we didn't live in one of the subsidized counties.

Do we need property tax reform and relief? Yes. Can we completely do away with property taxes? Yes, however, doing so would create more problems than we currently have.

What is the solution?

First, we must realize that government spending is best



Ron West
GUEST COLUMNIST

exemplified by a balloon. You can push the balloon in on one side and out on the other, but the volume of air inside the balloon remains the same.

If you put pressure on the balloon, the air will heat up and expand. Conversely, if we take pressure off the balloon, it will remain the same or we could reduce the air volume.

Bottom line, it makes little or no difference what source government uses for tax revenue, we still pay the same amount.

Relief comes in two ways: stop tax growth or reduce current taxes.

A few suggestions on how we might stop growth and reduce current taxes:

• **Consolidation.** As posed at the beginning of this article, why collect tax dollars at the local level, forward them to the state then wait for a return?

Cities, towns and counties are capable of retaining their share of taxes collected and forwarding the state its share.

This would allow the state to substantially reduce the Department of Revenue. Further examination would probably reveal other state activities that could be provided by local governments more efficiently.

• **Budgeting.** Performance-based budgeting at all levels of government would improve costs and efficiency.

This would allow departments to collect fees comparable to the costs of such service.

• **Criminal justice system.** Drastically change the criminal justice system, which comprises up to 70 percent or more of many local budgets.

Each year the criminal justice

system requires more funding, and the results are that the courts are overloaded, jails are full, juvenile detention cases and costs are skyrocketing and crime continues to increase.

• **Pension funding.** Change government pension funding requirements, which would lessen government funding as a result of positive market factors.

• **Schools.** Allow educators to teach our children those skills that will allow them to be productive and informed citizens. Our schools should not be day-care centers, and our teachers should not be surrogate parents. Create a new school funding formula based on what it takes to educate a student at the district level.

• **Legislature.** Drastically overhaul our state legislature. Impose term limits. Create nonpartisan redistricting. Limit long session bill introduction to state budget and top 10 issues for debate and balloting; the short session could deal with all other concerns.

Require all bill sponsors to clearly indicate what their bill will accomplish, the time frame in which it will occur and the cost of implementation. If one of these requirements fails, the bill would be repealed.

I will never understand why we the people tolerate the state raising new taxes in order to give relief from another tax.

History has clearly demonstrated that when the people are in possession and control of their money, society as a whole prospers.

We prosper from money saved or invested, which can finance businesses, healthier lifestyles, higher education for our children, less need for both parents to work outside the home and more tax revenue for government services.

OK, I said let the legislature focus on the top 10 issues.

I have mentioned six and the budget, so I will leave four for you. What's important to you?

Ron West of Greenwood is a member of the Johnson County Council. Send comments to letters@thejournalnet.com.



Dick Wolfie

No junk filter for snail mail

Do you get junk in the mail? Of course, we all do. And I am getting a little tired of it.

I can screen my phone calls for telemarketers, and I have a pretty nifty spam filter on my computer, but somebody needs to do something about the clutter in my mailbox.

I've talked to Tom, my mailman. I've even given him full authority to stuff any questionable or unsolicited correspondence down the sewer. Tom's afraid he may accidentally throw out a utility bill. I told him not to worry about it. These things happen.

Of course, I am not the first person to write about junk mail. I wasn't the first humorist to complain about junk food. I've written stories about all the junk in my basement. I admitted last year in a column that I once invested in junk bonds.

No one has written about more junk than I have.

Which brings me back to my mailbox, a mailbox that just yesterday contained the seductive MoneyMailer. These are hefty little packets filled with tantalizing coupons — coupons that are the answer to your every prayer, assuming one of your prayers is to find nine different companies that will shampoo six rooms of your house for \$34.95.

There are also the pizza coupons, which I usually forget to use or I can't find when I order pizza, or I call the wrong pizza place, or by the time I use them they are expired, or I really don't want cinnamon rolls with my pizza.

I noticed a coupon for a one-night stay in a lavish suite that included a luxurious bath and pet care for only \$23. I inquired, but when I discovered it was a kennel, I knew my wife wouldn't enjoy it. Oh wait, I get it: PETcare.

I also got a coupon that says: Enjoy your dry cleaning with 50 percent off. Look, I don't enjoy my dry cleaning. I once got a kick out of it when they gave me back a pair of pants with a 46-inch waist. Yeah, that was funny when I put them on and walked around the house. But, in general, I don't enjoy my dry cleaning.

Cleaning seems to be an obsession with the companies that use these mailers. There are services that clean your air ducts, something I have never done in 30 years of home ownership, which might explain my murky complexion. Now that I've mentioned this, all these sales people will be calling me, and because I'm an easy touch, strange men will be crawling up my vents by noon tomorrow.

A great many dentists use coupons to market their services. Maybe it's the Novocain that makes them insensitive.

"Your teeth really, and we mean really, need to be cleaned."

But, here's my favorite from the pack, a "personal letter" from a colorectal physician:

You need a colonoscopy! Because the you was in italics, I became extremely uncomfortable. Which I think is normal. They made it seem like everyone else in central Indiana had made their appointment already, but I was just sitting on my ... well, I was delaying the whole process. Let's just put it that way.

Taking care of your health is a priority. And I guess this is a good time to think about required diagnostic procedures. If Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton can form exploratory committees, the very least I can do is form one of my own.

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

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