

## **Additional `Letters to the Editor`**

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### **Body**

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*NOTE: The following letters are unedited and reflect only the views of the author.*

I was pleased to read Annamarie McDonald's response to my letter that you published on Saturday. I have long thought that it is only by getting some facts into the debate that wild rhetoric can be eliminated, and rational people can begin to address the real problems in our society, so I'd like to respond to Ms. McDonald's letter.

Some facts about the Estate Tax - from IRS Statistics for 2001, the most recent year I can find:

- 1) Those who died in 2001 and left Estates that were subject to the Estate Tax represented less than 1% of the total US population
- 2) They also represented only 4.6% of all US deaths that year.
- 3) Those who died and whose estates ACTUALLY PAID ESTATE TAX in 2001 represented only 2.1% of all US deaths in that year.

We are talking about a problem (the Estate Tax) affecting only an elite group.

According to David Cay Johnston (New York Times Pulitzer prize-winning investigative journalist), in his excellent book "Perfectly Legal," the effective estate tax rate paid on estates subject to the estate tax, in the year 2000, was less than 19%. Far, far below the 1/2half of what is left, reported by Ms. McDonald. (It's just sad that no one - except Johnston and a few others - calls the politicians when they rant on factlessly to a credulous public.) ["Factlessly" is a word that, I think, I just made up that means "without benefit of facts or evidence." It has a lot to do with "truthiness"].

Since then, of course, at the behest of some of the super rich, Congress has made significant changes to the Estate Tax, significantly reducing its incidence. Those changes will continue to be enhanced until the tax is eliminated in 2010. The heirs of the wealthiest 2% of those who die in 2010 will benefit that year; but then in 2011 the estate tax will be re-introduced and the heirs of the wealthiest 2% who die that year and thereafter will find themselves about 19% (or so) poorer than they would otherwise have been. (Always assuming that the proposal to increase the estate tax exemption to estates of up to \$10,000,000 - being proposed by some politicians who are not in favor of giving the super rich any more freebies - is not voted into law by then.)

Interestingly, for those family members who contributed to the accumulation of substantial family wealth without being fairly paid for their work, that 19% (or so) estate tax will not even amount to the percentage rate of the social security taxes, Medicare taxes and income taxes they, and their fathers, would have had to pay on their compensation for after school employment, back in the day. Effective long-term tax planning!

Incidentally, other lucky lottery winners will continue to pay higher effective rates of tax indefinitely.

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Howard Thomas, Los Gatos

These students have it backwards (Mercury News article 7/16, "Lebanese students protest violence against homeland"). Shouldn't they go to the source, and protest against those who kidnapped 2 Israeli soldiers? This action by Hezbollah started the violence, and these students are blaming Israel? Mr. Charafeddine, calling Israel's actions "unjustified," compares the kidnapping of Israeli soldiers to picking an apple from someone's garden. He's right, stealing an apple doesn't give someone the right to burn your house down. However, if this same person kidnaps a member of your family, you have the right and a duty to retaliate! We sympathize with innocent Lebanese civilians, who are also victims in this war, but their anger should be directed at Hezbollah and Lebanon, not at the country who responded to an unprovoked attack.

Sue Sidensol, San Jose

Half the signs I see at anti-immigration control rallies use the word "racist." This is slanderous of those for intelligent border management. Countries all over the world have border control, so why single out Americans? It's redundant. These people want to shut down the conversation with an unvarnished power grab at moral superiority. Having deemed anyone who opposes them "racists," the very skin color of the immigrants takes precedence over open debate and our laws. This is really regressive thinking for people who like to consider themselves progressive. Basing policy on skin color is the definition of racism.

If, as they say, racism is the reason whites oppose free immigration, then that must apply to Latino Americans who oppose it as well. Can these white protesters really tell a Latino he hates his own race? It's awfully arrogant. They also imply if neglected Canadians were fleeing an oligarchy and over taxing our institutions we wouldn't mind, since they're white. Who are they kidding? Mexico is due for a good, old fashioned, French style revolution. They're wonderful people in complicated straits that call for wise leadership, not childish taunting.

Gary Gilliam, Newark

Dr Henry Miller's opinion (Page 17A, June 23): "saying no to gene-spliced crops means saying yes to pesticides," demands a reply. Gene-splicing is shocking because it allows the introduction of genetic material from another organism and opens the door to previously unimaginable traits such as the production of pharmaceuticals, and resistance to a manufactured herbicide. Herbicides are a great expense that farmers using them would prefer to avoid. Corn, gene-spliced to be resistant to Monsanto's herbicide, is intended to be grown on land initially cleared of weeds by the application of that herbicide. This is surely gene-splicing being used to increase the use of a specific pesticide.

There is another agricultural philosophy that truly allows reduction in pesticide use: The selection of food plants and corresponding growing conditions such that there is winning competition with weeds and natural disease resistance. With this viewpoint the possibility exists for local farmers to produce food sustainably without any pesticide use, for their local population for very long time, and to learn to produce local specialties that can be exported. Regions such as Santa Cruz County, farmed using this philosophy stand to be enriched greatly in both health and wealth.

Monica Spiller, Los Altos

President Bush is an embarrassment to America. The press laughed him off the stage when he told Putin that he should have a democracy like Iraq's, and Putin said that no, he did not want a democracy like Iraq. The press asked him a serious question and Bush replied "Aren't you going to ask me about the pig?" Then slouched in a chair, a mouth full of dinner roll saying Hezbollah should knock that sh\*t off and how he's just gonna "wing it" when addressing the G8 because the other leaders "talk too much anyway." Then he give an unsolicited back rub to German Chancellor Angela Merkel which causes her to recoil in obvious displeasure.

This is a man who smiles when speaking of the war in Iraq. This is a man when asked about the whereabouts of Osama bin Laden said, "I don't know where he is. I don't think about it that much." This is a man who treats the G8 summit like it's a frat-house field trip. This is a man who will use his first veto on stem cell research because human

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life is so precious, yet has no problem sending our troops to die in a war of choice for corporate gain. I'm embarrassed to call this man President.

Bob Williamson, Sunnyvale

Thank you for your editorial regarding the selection process for San Jose's new fire chief. While informative on its own, it also confirmed what I already suspected. Chief Clet's self imposed demotion to allow his son to join the department was noble to say the least. It was, however not the only reason. The Chief was tired of the fight. Because he was not the union's choice, they (the union) made his life miserable. By constantly putting up roadblocks, the union prevented Clet from accomplishing many of the things he wanted to do. Even the Police Department got so tired of Local 230's antics they signed their own labor agreement with the City, a totally unprecedented move. Finally, the Chief decided the only way the department could move forward would be for him to step down, much to the delight of the union, I'm sure. If the City allows the union to select the next Chief, union boss Randy Sekany will have achieved his goal of being the de facto San Jose Fire Chief.

While we're on the subject, exactly what was Sekany's point when he said the "Chiefs have always hired their sons and it always raises questions." Is he implying that Steven Clet is unqualified for the position? Pretty strong accusation. I would suggest to Mr. Sekany to look around at all the Fire Departments and Police Departments in this country, and around the world. While it may be true that Chief's "always" hire their sons, it is also true they hire the sons, daughters, brothers, sisters, nieces and nephews of Deputy Chiefs, Battalion Chiefs, Captains and even union hack firefighters. Some may view it as nepotism. I see it as families that have something in their genetic makeup that drives them to be firefighters or police officers. I thank God for these families for providing the people to do the job that the vast majority of us want no part of.

Tim Keehen, Fremont

Mr. Suhail Noor's letter in "Additional Letters To Editor," July 19, 2006 taking Mr. Joel Stein to task for advocating rampant drug use among athletes should have been printed upfront in the regular letters for proper exposure. Mr. Suhail's contention that the drug use, if legalized will scuttle competition, demean honest players and become a money game is beyond what a twelve year old can easily comprehend. That he did shows his concern for the athletes at large.

Abdulkader Khatri, San Jose

It's time people take responsibility for their actions. So what if Edith Delgado was an honor student and has no previous criminal record? That doesn't make it ok or excuse her for killing 3 people! She made the decision to race or speed so she needs to live with the consequence and should be sentenced accordingly.

Sandy Wu, San Jose

The numbers speak for themselves. Out of two dozen Israelis killed by Hezbollah rockets, half were soldiers. Out of 200+ Lebanese killed by Israeli bombs, one was a Hezbollah guerilla. Do those Israeli girls shown decorating the missiles know that their art project have a 99.5% chance of killing innocent civilians, maybe even Lebanese girls of the same age?

Au Nguyen, Santa Clara

Hooray for Valerie Plame, a true American patriot! While the evidence indicates Bush directed Cheney to retaliate against Plame's husband for daring to disagree with Bush's rationale for invading Iraq, and Libby and Rove leaked her name to certain columnists, exposing her as a covert CIA operative, the Special Prosecutor may be unable to prove a criminal case. So Plame has courageously filed a civil suit against the White House staffers who outed her. I'm sure all Americans, regardless of party, are eager to see these traitors punished, in civil court if not criminal court- aren't we?

Dave Magram, San Jose

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The recent narrow (5-4 if Chief Justice Roberts is voting) supreme court decision finding that the detainees at Guantanamo Bay must be treated according to the Geneva Convention is wrong. So, all we can ask them for is name, rank and serial number! Therefore, if we had detained M. Atta prior to 9/11 he would not have been required to answer or even asked questions about what he was planning to do on 9/11. While the Mercury editorial board and many in congress and elsewhere are applauding the courts' decision the al Qaida terrorists are plotting mass murder. We are in a new and different world today and everyone needs to understand that the old ways of doing things are not appropriate for the reality of this fanatical religious movement.

When Osama heard of this decision he must have been overjoyed and I'm sure he would have hosted a big dance party to celebrate al Qaida's good fortune in whatever cave they are in these days.

Bob Hayes, San Jose

Today I made a call to the City Clerks office just to find out when a couple of Commissions meet...I clocked the time I was on hold, 25 minutes. During that time there was repetitive boring music on the line and frequent interruptions to tell me to be patient, and also to say that the City Council meets every Tuesday at 1:30, and is on TV 26. Well, the City Council did not meet today, so that info was wrong.

The City takes such pride in being the 10th largest City in the Country, and yet does not serve its citizens. The man who finally answered was the only one answering the phone from the City Clerks office. It took him quite some time when I was on hold, again, to get the information I had asked for. This is very inconsiderate of the electorate, and totally inexcusable. We can spend \$4,000,000 for a Grand Prix that only helps private business but not enough money for a few more people in the City Clerks office to answer the the inquiries of the City's people. I would venture to say that not many people would wait 25 minutes to get a live person on the phone. I stuck it out just to find out how long it would take.

Alma Taylor, San Jose

I agree with the headline in Monday's editorial "World leaders should unite behind cease-fire" but I have to disagree strongly with your subhead that claims the bloodshed is "provoked by Hezbollah." As though referring to a schoolyard brawl, "they started it" is being used by Israel to justify the destruction of Lebanon's infrastructure and a rain of death that is killing roughly 10 times more civilians in Lebanon than have died from Hezbollah rockets.

Your limit of 125 words per **letter** prevent me from elaborating on who REALLY started it, but it is clear that by failing to support the U.N.'s call for a ceasefire, U.S. ambassador John Bolton and President Bush have the blood of many civilians, Lebanese and Israeli both, on their hands.

Charlotte Casey, San Jose

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