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OPINION

South Bend Tribune
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Locally owned since 1872
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Clinton's promise

President Clinton has proposed that all new tax revenues, as well as budget-cut savings during the next five years, be placed in a trust fund dedicated to reduction of the federal deficit. It's an idea worthy of consideration.

Clinton's candidacy was founded on his promise to stabilize the American economy and get the nation back on financial tracks.

The trust fund isn't a new idea. Former President George Bush, during the 1992 Republican convention, offered to allow taxpayers to earmark their tax payments for deficit reduction — an idea scorned at the time by Democrats.

Perhaps there would be less skepticism if the trust-fund proposal were approved and the deficit were actually lower a year or so from now. Government officials have failed to keep so many promises that it is difficult for anyone not to be skeptical. Indeed, Clinton's presidency will fail unless there is a general perception that his economic promises have been kept.

As outlined by Clinton, the proposal would establish a separate trust fund for the $496 billion for budget reduction that has been written into the president's budget resolution. The idea is that the trust fund would be safe from any new spending proposals.

Senate Minority Leader Robert Dole, R-Kan., denounced Clinton's proposal as a gimmick, saying that the public wants the deficit reduced through reductions in spending and not through new taxes.

Dole is right, but for the wrong reasons. What the public wants is a financially stable government. The American people have shown a great tolerance for making sacrifices when required to do so, such as in times of war.

Dole is correct in observing that the public is not keen on new taxes and that most people believe there is a lot of waste in government.

What the Senate minority leader is missing, however, is the growing public impatience with the political gridlock in Washington. What Dole seemed to be saying was, "I'll make sure the trust fund idea won't work so that Clinton looks bad."

The Clinton administration's approach isn't much better. According to the New York Times, White House staff decided to adopt the trust-fund approach because they wanted to offset efforts by Dole and by former presidential candidate Ross Perot to undercut Clinton's proposed federal budget. It appears that in Washington statesmanship has been replaced by gamesmanship.

The greatest proponent of using a trust fund to reduce the deficit has been Rep. Charles E. Schumer, a Democrat from Brooklyn, N.Y., who told the New York Times that the plan's greatest barrier is public credibility. "The public does not believe we will really cut the deficit when we say we will," said Schumer. "This puts our feet to the fire."

Schumer said his own observations have convinced him that people are willing to tighten their belts to reduce the deficit but are afraid Congress will divert new taxes into new spending.

The trust fund, if allowed to function as planned and not used as a budget gimmick, sounds like a fine idea. It would also be a fine idea for the government to take seriously the notion that cutting spending must be a top priority of the Clinton administration.

But the best idea of all is for governmental leaders to stop playing politics with each other and to start listening to what the people really are saying.

OTHER OPINIONS

Travel costs

From the Vincennes (Ind.) Sun-Commercial

One of the first things business does in a recession is cut employee travel. Not so the Indiana General Assembly.

Though Indiana had begun to slump into the financial doldrums in the late 1980s, state lawmakers continued their footloose ways, all courtesy of their fellow Hoosiers.

A review of state records conducted by The Evansville Courier shows that since 1988 Indiana taxpayers shelled out about $890,000 so that 150 legislators could attend meetings in such popular tourist spots as Las Vegas, the Virgin Islands and Hawaii.

In March, 11 legislators attended a meeting at a Florida resort that offers 45 holes of golf and 25 tennis courts and ocean-view rooms that start — start, that is — at $237 a night.

For out-of-state travel, the state pays transportation and no-limit hotel costs. In addition, legislators collect their $101 daily allowance. What's more, the $890,000 tally does not include hundreds of thousands in tax dollars spent on conference registration fees and memberships in national legislative organizations.

More than 38 percent of the travel expenses went to 10 lawmakers, nine of them senators. The biggest payout of all went to Sen. Robert Garton, R-Columbus, president pro tem of the Senate. He spent about $35,000 in just five years.

And despite Garton's assertions that the trips provided valuable information, nothing satisfies a legislator's search for cold facts like spending a week or so in sunny Florida or Honolulu.

Just deserts

From Scripps Howard News Service

The trustees of the City College of New York got their just deserts the other day when a court overruled their decision to rein in Prof. Leonard Jeffries. For 20 years, the trustees tolerated Jeffries' antics: seven times, they rubber stamped his reappointment as chairman of Black Studies, though he preached racist theories as intellectually respectable as those of the Ku Klux Klan. Now a federal jury says that to deny Jeffries reappointment as department chairman is to punish a tenured professor for free speech.

The issue, though, isn't academic freedom, it's competence. Jeffries, as a New York Times editorial put it two years ago, is "a confused man whose ramblings are as unintelligible as they are hateful." His doctrine of the "ice people" (cold, domineering Europeans) and the "sun people" (gentle, cooperative blacks) has much foundation in science or sociology as Hitler's fantasy of Aryan superiority. His disregard for fact — for example, he teaches that the ancient Egyptians were black — should disqualify him as an authority in any nonfiction discipline.

It's time for Clinton to back political reform

President Clinton made political reform a key issue during his campaign. Like Ross Perot, he railed against special-interest lobbyists and pledged to eliminate their influence over our elected officials once he got to Washington. Now that he has taken the oath of office, it is time for him to keep that pledge.

As a District Three voter, I will be watching to make sure Congressman Tim Roemer, D-South Bend helps him.

I am a member of Network, a national, Catholic, social-justice lobbying organization located in Washington, D.C. Network is involved in lobbying legislators for real campaign finance reform. For reform to be real, members believe that campaign finance reform legislation must include provisions that: impose spending limits to cap skyrocketing campaign costs; reduce substantially PAC monies and individual contributors; replace special-interest money by ending special tax breaks for lobbyists, banning "soft money" PAC contributions and increasing the voluntary tax form check-off for political campaigns.

Elected officials must serve the interest of all citizens, not just PACs and wealthy contributors. Citizens are ready to rally around a bold plan to recapture our government. We will not be fooled by phony reform. If Clinton and Roemer are serious about cleaning up congressional politics they should support real campaign finance reform this congressional session.

JEAN ANN CAMPANA
Mishawaka

VOICE OF THE PEOPLE

Junk food

People are always saying today's kids aren't healthy and are eating too much junk food. Most of the junk food kids eat is brought in their lunches. Maybe if schools made an edible hot lunch that is healthy, but still good, children would have a healthier diet.

Until then, kids will continue to eat the junk food brought in their lunches.

MEGAN ABERNETHY
Eighth-grader, St. Matthews School
South Bend

True love

This is in response to Mary G. Edgington's May 11 Voice letter in which she stated "God is love and does not hate anything or anybody."

Yes, our God is a loving God, but he is also a holy God and a just God. His holiness requires him to hate sin, and his justice requires him to punish sin.

And yes, God does hate homosexuality too. The Bible tells us that because the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah was great and because their sin was grievous, God went down and destroyed these two wicked cities and their inhabitants.

Yes our God is a holy God and a just God, but he is also a loving God. He loved mankind so much that he sent his only begotten Son down to this earth to pay the price for our sin by dying in our stead and taking our punishment on the cross of Calvary. That is true love, a holy and a just God putting on humanity and dying a sacrificial death for all mankind, that we by faith might be reconciled to God.

JOAN HARTSTEEN
Mishawaka

Poor fields

The poor condition of many public baseball fields throughout the South Bend area should be changed for the good of the many participants of this widespread sport called our national pastime.

There are very few good, playable, public fields. Many fields, such as Studebaker Park, are hard and rugged, posing dangers such as glass and rocks scattered throughout. Other parks, including Boehm Park, don't even include grass infields. Most outfields are kept in fair condition, while others are scarred by holes, divots and/or lumps of grass and dirt.

Not all public baseball fields are kept in poor condition. Don't get me wrong. Fields such those in Shordan and Boland parks are well-kept. For those that are not, I strongly recommend a change.

IAN SIENICKI
Eighth-grader, St. Matthews School
South Bend

It's tough to cast stones with own snubbing history

RUSSELL BAKER

Here is another country club problem. They are always the same. Someone political is found to be a member of, or to have played golf at, a racially segregated country club. After the discovery, the fat is in the fire, as we used to say back when we still had clichés fit for children's ears.

This week's case involves Webster L. Hubbell, a Little Rock lawyer nominated to become associate attorney general. The usual minuet is now in progress.

Hubbell, who joined the club in the mid-1980s, is said to have worked to get blacks admitted to membership. If so, says the chairman of the Arkansas Legislature's black caucus, Hubbell never asked any of the caucus' 13 members to recommend candidates for admission.

And so on.

Joining country clubs, segregated or not, has always seemed foolish to me, but so does the game of golf, which is closely associated with country clubs, and I know a few sensible people for whom life without golf would not be worth living.

For this reason, I always refuse to picket the Capitol demanding the abolition of country clubs. "Let a thousand bizarre tastes flourish," as Chairman Mao should have said.

What is baffling, however, is why segregation is necessary to country club culture. The aim of segregation is to put distance between yourself and people who are unworthy to enjoy the splendor of your company. This is precisely what a golf course affords: plenty of distance between the parties.

True, a golfer with keen vision may identify a player as black even from a distance of 100 yards, but at basketball, baseball and football games white people are positioned much closer than that to blacks playing games, yet do not seem affronted by the sight.

Since country members can't possibly need the segregation for their golf, other explanations must be sought. My knowledge of country clubs comes entirely from John O'Hara's "Appointment in Samarra." It is about an unpleasant group of people, all of them white, who spend most of their time getting drunk and insulting each other at dance parties at a country club.

Reading this book at an impressionable age probably warped my view of country clubs, but to this day I cleave to my youthful suspicion of country clubs as places full of ill-mannered clods who drink to excess and are liable to insult people whose fox trot is the least bit presumptuous.

I am sure Webster Hubbell's country club is not like that at all. The papers say the initiation fee is $25,000. For that kind of money, even a lawyer is surely entitled to a little respect from the other members.

Groucho Marx's refusal to pay good money to belong to a club that lets in "people like me" really goes to the heart of the matter. Groucho may have been able to see through the fraud of clubby exclusivity, but most of us do not see so clearly. The appeal of being accepted into exclusive clubs lies, just as Groucho saw, in the absurd suggestion that you are not just another person like you, but somebody fancier.

I speak from experience, having yielded many years ago to the urge to move up several floors above myself by joining a campus fraternity. Like all such operations, it excluded practically everybody. Included among the excluded were practically all the people whose company I most enjoyed.

These people were very patient with me. It was right after World War II and most of them were veterans and grown and knew that preaching didn't work when a man was determined to make a fool of himself. You let him learn for himself about the folly of taking the country-club route.

I was 21, tuxedoed, kneeling in a candlelit room and listening to ritualistic mumbo-jumbo suitable only for 17-year-olds when the wisdom of Groucho Marx overwhelmed me with a sense of my own silliness. I was engaged in a silly, childish project not to be somebody like me.

Nowadays, whenever tempted to sneer at politicians trapped in the country club problem, I grant them absolution after reflecting what a tough investigator could do with my own past. That fraternity excluded people for their sex, race and religion and once, so help me, debated excluding an otherwise flawlessly orthodox young man because his father did not wear a jacket at the dinner table.

Readers are acutely aware of what they don't like

By JOE MURRAY
Gannett News Service

ANGELINA COUNTY, Texas — It's a nice day whenever I find letters in the mailbox, whether they are nice letters or not.

Paul Winters of Maui, Hawaii, doesn't like my saying that gays are victims of prejudice.

Winters says he is not a gay-basher, but he believes what he reads in the Bible, noting various books, chapters and verses. Old Testament and, New, that declare homosexuals to be wicked: Genesis 18 and 19, relating God's destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah; and Romans 1:26-27, judging that men and women will receive "the due penalty of their perversion."

I never argue with Scripture. I even quote a bit myself at time:

■ In Leviticus 20:13, the Bible says the penalty for homosexual acts is death.

■ In Deuteronomy 22:13-21, the Bible says if a bride is discovered not to be a virgin, the judges shall take the girl to the door of her father's house where the men shall stone her to death.

Joe T. Stevens of Clifton, Texas, who read the story of the Egg Lady of Rocky Hill vs. the wild pig of the Pineywoods, sent a poem written by former Texas legislator Charles Ashley of Llano, Texas. It's all about Ole Spot, an outlaw now he'd tried to hunt down and kill on Cedar Mountain, but who outsmarted him and outfought his dogs at every turn.

Here's what finally changed his mind about Ole Spot:

"Well, the Fall froze into Winter, And the Winter thawed to Spring; April watered hill and valley; Maytime painted everthing.

"Ole Spot was trailin down the hill, And right behind her trotted, Ten baby pigs not ten days old, And ever one was spotted.

"I stopped and stared; she studied me; My eyes filled like a fountain; And there I gave Ole Spot a deed — A deed to Cedar Mountain."

That's just an excerpt. Too bad there's not room to print it all. You don't see that many nice poems about pigs.

I wrote something nice about doctors, and Jack F. Clark of Mesa, Ariz., wrote to tell me at length the problems a poor man can have trying to find treatment. He concludes:

"That's why maybe some of us are so down on doctors and the way they run their business. I would never make it as a doctor as I could not treat people the way I got treated."

Mrs. James A. Glascock Jr. of Richmond, Va., liked the Easter story from Sweet Briar College in Virginia, with this exception.

"I must call to your attention, however, that Sweet Briar is a college for women, not a 'girls school,' as you described it."

I had to go back through my files and check the story before I could believe I wrote such a thing. I still can't believe that I did, but I did. No excuses, just my apologies. I will try harder to do better.

Ms. Billie M. Reese of Longview, Texas, said I shouldn't have punished my dog John The Dog for biting my friend the congressman when he stopped by the house to visit.

"Dogs are smarter than we people are. Sensing this man was a politician, he soundly bit him. That dog should be given a medal. ... Hurrah for all dogs everywhere. Please stand up and bite for human rights or lift you leg."

The address is Rural Route 10, the Settlement, Oak Valley Box 108, Angelina County, Texas 75901. Write what you like, or don't like. I answer all mail and read most of it.

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