

OPINION

EDITORIAL

Cheney’s moment to remember

In politics, certain unplanned moments can suddenly – and often unfairly – crystallize a vague and unformed public impression into a lasting stereotype.

Vice President Quayle’s misspelling of potato that he wasn’t too bright; President Ford’s stumble that he was a buffoon; President Carter’s encounter with a swamp rabbit that he was a wimp.

And now it has happened to Vice President Cheney.

While shooting quail on a Texas ranch, Cheney peppered Harry Whittington, a 78-year-old lawyer, with bird-shot. The wound was serious enough that the victim had to be medevaced, and the hospital says it will keep him at least another week. Local law enforcement officials are satisfied it was an accident and regard the case as closed.

It is hardly closed in the rest of the country. Cheney jokes are all over the Internet and the comedy shows, and they distill the impression that he is a remote, arrogant and even sinister presence in the Bush administration.

Standard Washington practice is that incidents involving the presidency are announced immediately and fully. Yet the White House deferred to the vice president’s office on when and how the shooting would be disclosed, and it’s clear that the vice president’s inclination was to say nothing.

Presidential press secretary Scott McClellan, the chief information officer of the administration, didn’t find out about it until 12 hours after it happened. The public found out 24 hours later still, and then only because a private citizen called the Corpus Christi Caller-Times.

With the vice president’s office in stonewall mode, it was left to McClellan to try to spin Cheney’s way out of the mess, which he loyally tried to do in several contentious briefings. Asked about the delay in disclosing the incident, he offered the non-answer that “the first priority” had been getting medical care for Whittington.

Cheney defender former Sen. Alan Simpson of Wyoming predicted to The New York Times that the incident will be “all through after a few days.” But we have a feeling this story will follow Cheney for his lifetime.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Help Book By Book become a success

Since February is Library Lovers Month, I thought it would be a good time to write a letter about why I support the Book By Book campaign for the new Fairfield Cordelia Library.

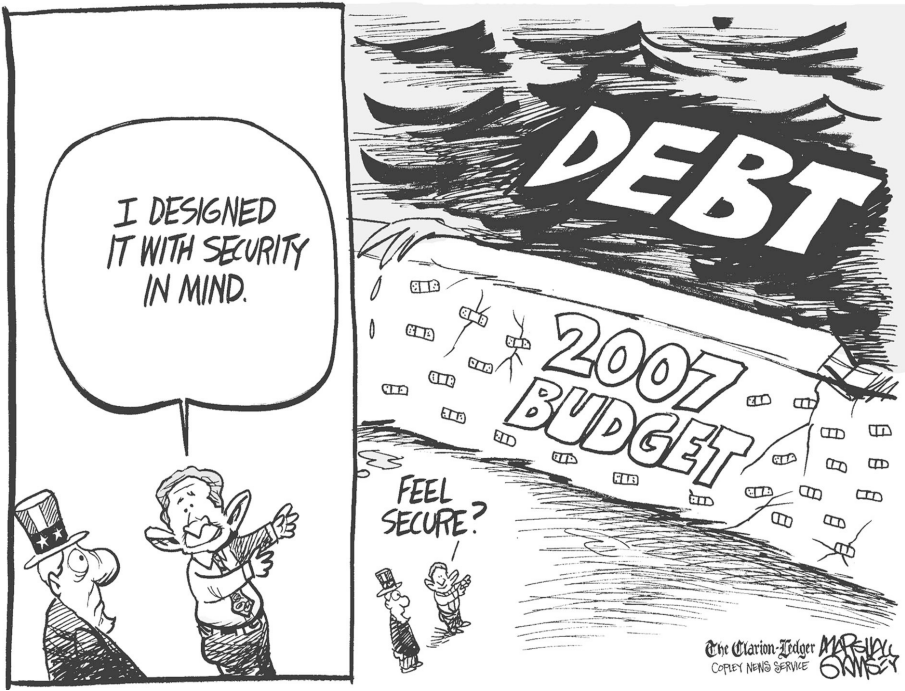
The library, funded by a partnership among the city of Fairfield, the Fairfield-Suisun Unified School District, Solano County and the state of California, is scheduled to be completed in December 2006. It is receiving a 65 percent grant (\$4.1 million) from Proposition 14, the Library Bond Act and a local match of 35 percent from the city of Fairfield and Solano County.

Because the grant covers only construction costs, the Solano County Library Foundation has launched the Book By Book: Let’s Build Our Library campaign to raise \$500,000 for books and materials needed to make it a functioning library. I have enthusiastically agreed to serve as an Honorary Co-chair (along with Assemblywoman Noreen Evans) for the Book By Book campaign because I am a lifelong library lover and supporter, and I appreciate the important role libraries serve in our communities.

Good things happen in libraries. And the Fairfield Cordelia Library will be a stellar example of what some of those good things are. The new library will offer spaces, programs and materials for everyone: computers and a computer training center, wireless Internet access, group study rooms, a student study center and a large meeting space are just a few of the amenities.

One of the things I love about libraries (besides the nostalgic smell of the books and the simple pleasure of browsing through the stacks to find hidden jewels of illumination) is how they have evolved to meet the needs of our changing population and environment. With their computer access, literacy classes, meeting rooms, book clubs, story times and myriad other programs, they have become community centers – gathering places for a broad spectrum of our local population.

The Fairfield Cordelia Library has the potential to be the new heart of the surrounding community. It will draw students into its study center, seniors in to learn to use computers



and enjoy the selection of periodicals, community groups in for meetings and young children and their parents to listen to story time. But none of this will happen without books, CDs, DVDs, books on tape, magazines and newspapers filling the shelves. The Book By Book campaign will provide the funding for those materials.

I invite all of you to join with me to make this campaign a success. Remember what libraries have done for you and support the Book By Book Campaign.

You can find out more about the Fairfield Cordelia Library and the Book by Book campaign as well as Library Lovers Month on the Solano County Library Foundation Web site, www.solanolibraryfoundation.org or call the Library Foundation office at (707) 421-8075.

Lois Wolk
Assemblywoman,
8th Assembly District

Dr. Norman Shumway was a great man

My name is Janet Hellmann Wright. On Feb. 27, 1959 Norman Shumway performed open heart surgery on me. I was told I was the first one in this area. I was 9 years old.

Dr. Shumway was a wonderful man. He was kind and gentle with me and always told me whatever he thought I would understand.

COMMENTARY

Time for us – the U.S. – to wise up

Mark Twain said “Don’t let your learning get in the way of your education.” Twain was a great wit and folksy philosopher, but he forgot to finish the sentiment. How about adding “and don’t let your ignorance and lack of mental and emotional training weigh down yourself, your loved ones and all of society.”

The lack of progress in literacy rates and inadequate education for life are a national disgrace that harms all of us. Ignorance, in this case, means literally not knowledgeable and mental and emotional training might mean reason and reflection. Rigorous addressing of both makes the world safer, richer and more joyful as our K-12 consumers become producers, innovators and creators.

So what’s the bee in my bonnet? Literacy and problem solving skills still stink. That affects you. Literacy is measured in terms of reading, writing and basic computational skills. Folks are often categorized into five levels. Level three is a minimum standard for success in today’s labor market and only half of those 16 to 65 years of age are at level three. It has not improved in at least 15 years and many suggest since 1971.

There is a huge increase in wages and a decrease in demand on social services as literacy and educational

level increases. One in three prison inmates is at Level 1 and rearrest rates are directly related to educational level and literacy. Health and longevity both improve with literacy and educational level.

Many a spiritual leader has said: “The poor – we will always have with us,” meaning not just poor in possessions, but poor in mind. Fair enough.

But there is a range of aptitudes and opportunities in this country, and the wealthiest nation in the history of the world can do a lot better than where we are in terms of literacy, problem solving skills and an understanding of the journey of man.

This includes knowledge of music, art, industry, science, mathematics, philosophy, natural history and effective communication, just to name a few.

There is no class in our lack of classical education just as there is nothing fit about our lackadaisical child fitness standards. Let me be clear – classical education does not mean creating a bunch of pencil-necked geeks citing the great works of poetry.

It is intense attention to fluency in our language, literacy in reading and writing, life skills based on mathematics and science, exposure to civics and the humanities and in-depth involvement of total fitness.



Kevin Ryan

One may argue the solution starts with family, as everything does. But that should not exonerate society from the stark reality of the problem. The finger is to be pointed at each and every one of us.

We are addicted to technology and depend on it to manipulate the world for us. We adore celebrities of typically easy virtue pretending to be what we are told we think we should be and we make gods of sports heroes. All has led us to where we are: mediocrity in a land of unparalleled opportunity.

I am around community college kids every day whose fund of knowledge of the world is a piggy bank without pennies. There is no lack of talent or intelligence. They are ill-prepared. The men and women who brought light to the world and gave ideas flight did not do so without education. Suggesting otherwise is a myth.

My mom, an 86-year-old retired master educator says, “If we take the question mark out of grammar and for that matter, life, and if we stop asking, like a wide-eyed wonder-filled toddler, ‘Why?’ – society is doomed.”

Let’s smarten up, America.

Kevin Ryan is a retired Colonel, physician, musician and author who lives in Fairfield. Reach him at ryan_k@comcast.net.

COMMENTARY

It only gets worse

The worse it gets for the Bush administration, the harder the executive branch seems to be stretching to make it even worse still.

Last week produced some of the most stunning public-relations disasters on record for the Bush boys (as in, “good ol’”). And this speaks volumes for an administration that mishandled the Katrina response, prevaricated about weapons of mass destruction in Iraq and has done its darnedest to run us into impossible debt.



Bonnie Erbe

Opposition Democrats were joined by a chorus of the most loyal of Bush Republicans on the latest faux pas. Both parties are urging the special counsel investigating the CIA leak of a secret agent’s name to find out whether Vice President Dick Cheney authorized his former chief of staff to leak this classified information.

So it wasn’t torturous enough that court documents disclosed last week revealed that Cheney’s former chief of staff, the now-infamous Lewis “Scooter” Libby, claims he was told to leak the information by his superiors.

It wasn’t disastrous enough that even the most conservative of conservatives, Sen. George Allen, R-Va., told “Fox New Sunday” he doesn’t think anybody should be releasing classified information and Libby’s charges deserve a full airing.

Guess the White House wasn’t reading last month’s Gallup poll, which showed: “A majority of Americans say that George W. Bush’s presidency has been a failure, rather than a success, so far.”

What better time, then, to do something even less popular than running up billions of dollars in debt and sending honorable American servicemen and servicewomen to be maimed or killed in Iraq? The San Francisco Chronicle’s Web site reports that “the Bush administration identified Friday more than 300,000 acres of national forest, including about 85,000 acres in California, that could be sold to pay for services in rural areas across the country.

“National Forest Service officials said they want to sell about 200,000 acres to raise about \$800 million over the next few years to pay for schools and roads in rural counties hurt by logging cutbacks on federal land. The Bureau of Land Management has said it also plans to sell federal lands to raise an estimated \$250 million over five years.”

Guess those boys didn’t “pay no mind” to Gov. Robert Ehrlich, R-Md., who suffered months of political backlash against attempts by top aides to market large tracts of environmentally sensitive land to developers. The Washington Post reported: “In one deal, the Ehrlich administration tried to sell 836 acres of woodlands in St. Mary’s County to a Baltimore builder, despite strong resistance from experts in the state’s land preservation unit. In another, Ehrlich’s allies on the University System of Maryland Board of Regents were advocating a plan to sell off portions of an 840-acre environmental research lab . . .”

Ehrlich’s gang is still backpedaling and excuse-making to try to regain Marylanders’ support after that stunt – a thinly disguised sop to his financial backers. Guess the Bush administration wasn’t paying any attention. Nor was it watching when hundreds of thousands of voters opened a fire hose of protest onto members of Congress last year, preventing the opening of Alaska’s Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to oil drilling.

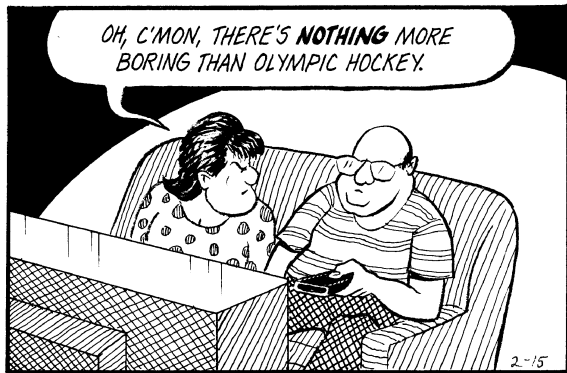
Americans have spoken loud and clear. The administration isn’t listening. Preservation of precious open space is popular. Destruction of it isn’t.

Bonnie Erbe writes for Scripps Howard News Service.

DOONESBURY



STATE OF THE UNION



BY GARRY TRUDEAU

BY CARL MOORE