

FINGER LAKES TIMES

PAUL M. BARRETT / Publisher

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"The First Amendment ensures that all points of view may be heard; it does not ensure that all points of view are equally likely to prevail."

— Michael McConnell, U.S. appellate judge, 2006
Community Media Group

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Romulus citizens group frustrated by school board

To the Editor:
First, let me say that I am a proud member of the Romulus Citizens for School Accountability, along with 23 other members. I read with interest and concern Bob McCann's letter in the *Times* May 24. I first met Bob in the fall of 2007 when we both ran for the Varick Town Board and my impression of Bob was positive, and that he was an independent thinker.

What Bob fails to grasp from the fier he mailed is our frustration with the present RCSB Board of Education. Our board has not exhibited dedication, commitment and selfless service as Bob states, by the simple fact that for the last year, each meeting has only averaged less than an hour, two meetings per month. As a total board, they never worked on the budget, regardless of what we were told at the budget hearing. This is backed up by board minutes. As a former board member, I can tell you that previous boards spent many hours from late January until April working on the budget. The fact that this budget was opposed by a board member, Kristine Somerville, and the overwhelming defeat, also demonstrates the frustration of the taxpayers.

Bob says he would have responded with a rebuttal, but rebut what? Every fact stated in our fier is backed up by board minutes and news articles. If some felt blindsided by the truth, so be it. I have brought our concerns to the board; that they don't ask questions, study the issues or listen to the taxpayers. We felt Bob would help bring change, ask questions and not be a part of the status quo. That is why we supported him.

JOHN SAELI
Geneva

Lyons has risen to challenge of multiple crises

To the Editor:
I have lived in Lyons most of my life and have always enjoyed being part of such a close-knit community. Though we are a small town, we are a very committed one as well and more than willing to help our neighbors when hard times call.

This year alone, Lyons appears to be hidden beneath a dark cloud. The new year has brought the deaths of a promising young man, a beloved hometown benefactor, the major sickness of another young person who had been poised to

graduate from high school as well as a devastating fire that left a family homeless.

Through everything, the small community of Lyons has come together through fundraisers, a variety of drives and simply supporting one another through these difficult times.

There are no words to describe how proud I am to be able to say that I am from Lyons, and I have full confidence that soon the cloud will pass and we as a community will emerge stronger for enduring it together.

MEREDITH HENRY
Lyons

Family satisfied with Ashton Place

To the Editor:
Our family believes that Ashton Place is a blessing for senior citizens who need to be in a safe, comfortable environment and would like to share our enthusiasm for what we believe to be a jewel of a retirement community.

We moved our 88-year-old mother and some of her favorite furniture to Ashton Place in Clifton Springs in January 2009 from her home in southeastern Pennsylvania. We knew people who had lived at Ashton Place including the late Joe Felice and the Rev. Jane Brown.

They were positive in relating their residential experience at Ashton Place. We appreciated the fact that there was no entrance fee, and we found that the monthly charges provided great value compared to what was available in southeastern Pennsylvania.

Mother appreciates help with organization and personal care provided by the enriched services program at Ashton. This is a personalized service which allows residents to live in a community in a dignified manner.

The staff is great! Mother loves the attention and raves about the food, this coming from a woman who loves to cook and feed people herself. Entertainment, programs and exercise are all part of the daily program as well as limo service to appointments. Mother constantly comments about how nice everyone is to her and how quickly the days pass with all the planned activities.

Our family is thankful to have Ashton Place taking care of our mother!

DONALD WERTMAN
Hall
LOUISE GERDLEMANN
Souderton, Pa.

Fresh air vs. a bunker

WASHINGTON — Which reality do you inhabit, Obama World or Cheney World? If it's the latter, remember that storm clouds are always gathering. Don't forget your umbrella.

In Obama World, it's always morning. The sun is shining, the birds are chirping and the pollen count is low. In Cheney World, it's perpetual twilight. Somewhere in the distance, a lone wolf howls at the rising moon.

In Obama World, human beings are flawed but essentially decent and rational. Most will behave in a way consistent with enlightened self-interest. In Cheney World, humanity's defects are indelible and irredeemable. Absent evidence to the contrary, evil should be assumed to lurk in every heart. Better to do unto others before they have a chance to do unto you.

In Obama World, choices are artifacts of reasoning and thus are only as valid as the logic underlying them. Security and freedom, for example, do not have to be seen as an either-or proposition. The nation never came to a fork in the road with one path labeled "torture" and the other labeled "disaster." In Cheney World, choices are binary and absolute. There's no wiggle room, no gray area, no time for second thoughts and no debate about how our options are framed. It's my way or the highway, citizen.

In Obama World, objective fact matters. The failure to find any weapons of mass destruction in Iraq is significant. The absence of any link whatsoever between Iraq and Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks is relevant. In Cheney World, facts are based more on conviction than evidence. If it's possible to imagine "nuclear-armed terrorists," as Cheney did in his speech the other day, then they "exist" at least as a concept — and this conceptual existence justifies torture, among other abuses.

In Obama World, some "threats" can be recognized as no threat at all. Since there has never been an escape from the federal "super-max" prison in Colorado, and since it already houses plenty of terrorists, spies and other miscreants, there's no real reason to be concerned about transferring any of the Guantanamo inmates, even the worst of the lot, there. But in Cheney World, no threat, however remote, can be definitively ruled out — especially if there's political hay to be made. And anyway, it's fun to scare people.

Obama World buzzes with information overload — hundreds of cable channels, zillions of Web sites, constant "tweets" from Twitter. In Cheney World, it's pretty much

EUGENE ROBINSON

eugenorobinson
@washpost.com



Fox News and Rush Limbaugh, all day, every day. It's like the saying, "I like both kinds of music — country and western."

In Obama World, Americans have a sense of community and shared purpose. Those upon whom fortune has smiled — through accident of birth, educational opportunity, career-enhancing connections or any other kind of "right place, right time" serendipity — recognize that extending a hand to those who do not enjoy such advantages is not just morally right, but ultimately beneficial to all. They believe that Henry Ford was right to pay his workers the shockingly high sum of \$5 a day — so they could afford to buy the cars they were making.

In Cheney World, sharing is for saps. Obtaining great wealth and power has nothing to do with being "fortunate," whatever that means. It's all about preparation, focus and hard work. The idea that luck or connections could possibly have anything to do with, say, becoming the lavishly compensated chairman and chief executive of a mega-corporation such as Halliburton? Preposterous and un-American.

In Obama World, America exerts its leadership not just through force but through example. Our nation's exceptionalism lies in its ideals of freedom, justice and opportunity for all, in its decency and generosity, in its commitment to the rule of law and its zeal for self-improvement, in its willingness to examine its own flaws and work to correct them. These intangibles are backed up by the world's most powerful military, but it's the ideals that matter most. When we lose sight of them, we head down the path of inevitable decline.

In Cheney World, ideals are nice and all that, but might makes right. We do what we want. Because we can. You got a problem with that?

Obama World is an exciting place to live right now — not perfect, to be sure, but full of energy and hope. If Dick Cheney wants to stay in his bunker, that's his business. Others might want to come up some fresh air.



Crime does rise with hard times — but there's a lag

The economy is a wreck, and crime is down. Does that mean hard times and lawbreaking aren't linked?

Two weeks ago, Los Angeles crime statistics came out for the misery-filled first 4½ months of 2009, and they were, to me, a weird ray of sunshine.

Nationally, crime has been up in some places and down in others. But overall? Dramatically down. In Los Angeles, the drop is particularly stunning. According to the Los Angeles Police Department, compared with the same period in 2008, homicide is down by 32 percent; rape 12 percent; robbery 3 percent; burglary 6 percent, and grand theft auto 18 percent.

What gives?
As it turns out, it's not all that easy to figure out why crime goes up and down. There are a lot of factors and even more theories. Chief William Bratton probably would say it's all about his police force and his style of policing, and he gets a fair amount of credit for a job well done.

"Smart, effective policing seems to be keeping a lid (on crime)," said George Tita, a professor in the University of California, Irvine's criminology, law and society department, in a *Los Angeles Times* report in April. But that isn't the whole story, and it doesn't mean that

BY GREGORY RODRIGUEZ LOS ANGELES TIMES

unemployment, home foreclosures, financially battered school systems and public services don't and won't have an effect on wrongdoing.

I called Mark A.R. Kleiman, who teaches public policy at the University of California, Los Angeles. He started by telling me that "crime rates are not actually linked to economic cycles."

He pointed out that the 1950s were a time of slow economic growth and low crime rates, while the booming late-1960s saw a boom in criminal activity. He noted that no Great Crime Wave emerged to match the Great Depression. I then asked him why most people seem to think that economics and crime are related. He said that it's logical and even to some degree true, but it's all in the way you define "link." Ripple effect might be a better image.

As Los Angeles' most recent crime data suggest, high unemployment doesn't necessarily translate directly into high crime rates. But that's because the specific eco-

nomie pinch in itself is not the immediate cause of criminal activity. What does seem to translate into crime is long-term economic trouble. One theory holds that the motivation toward criminal acts increases with prolonged social strain. Strain is the pressure people feel between their goals and their means to achieve them. One consequence of unrelieved strain is that the desire to achieve one's goals leads some to use illegitimate means to get where they want to go.

"Long-term material conditions are important," UC Irvine criminologist Elliott Currie told me. "They can affect values and the belief in what kinds of conduct are acceptable or not. If you put people in really lousy conditions, they'll begin to think differently about school, drugs or gangs."

Another way to think about all this is to fit it into the basic left/right analysis of crime and social dysfunction. Liberals contend that society's negative or unfair structures are the main impediments to individuals' success. Conservatives tend to blame bad personal behavior for bad outcomes. In the battle between what might be called structuralism and behavioralism, the truth is that if you step far enough back, the whole thing is a big

feedback loop.

Economic and social conditions affect how people see their futures and how they choose to see and interact with the world around them. In other words, left and right are both correct, if we wait long enough. Just as behavior and culture create conditions, conditions shape culture and behavior.

That means that, even after the recession ends, the bad economic statistics that have described the past year still could turn into bad crime statistics. It's especially likely if, as some economists fear, the recovery fails to recoup hundreds of thousands of jobs that have been lost in such industries as car manufacturing and financial services.

That will mean the discrepancy between what many of us want and what we can get will deepen, social strain will increase and maybe not today, maybe not tomorrow, but someday, the other shoe will drop.

In the meantime, count your crime statistics blessings, but don't fool yourself: Crime and hard times do go hand in hand.

Rodriguez is director of the California Fellows Program at the New America Foundation. E-mail him at grdriguez@latimescolumnists.com.