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To Build A Better World, Start In Your Own Community

EDITORIAL

Take injuries seriously

Anyone involved with youth athletics has seen it happen.

Two young soccer players knock their heads together as they both go up for a header.

A basketball player smacks his head on the floor after tripping over another player's foot.

A cheer team tosses one of their own into the air, fully intending to catch her, but misses by inches.

Concussions result.

Unfortunately, these athletes return to the court or field the same game or, at most, the next competition. For many, that's too soon.

One in 10 youth athletes suffer concussions each season. The brain bruising that occurs takes time to heal — longer for kids than for adults.

Returning to competition too early can result in re-injury and sometimes permanent brain damage.

Because there is no simple way to diagnose concussions, brain injury experts are recommending that school districts and youth leagues begin to use computer cognitive tests. They recommend that all youth athletes complete a baseline assessment at the beginning of the season, then follow-up assessments if head injuries occur.

It's not a perfect science, but it's a whole lot better than guessing whether a concussion has healed sufficiently to permit renewed athletic activity.

Leaving this to chance risks permanent cognitive damage that the athlete will live with forever.

Precaution could pay lifetime dividends.

Open Forum

U.S. securing oil

Saddam Hussein may have come to a just end, but, as we have been slow to comprehend, Iraq is a difficult place to rule and we ourselves are responsible. In only four years, there have been more than 100,000 Iraqi deaths in that unfortunate, and perhaps misbegotten, country.

I expect that there are more than a few people who are hoping that our ties with Saddam during the times of his brutal reign when he was seen as an ally against Iran will be buried alongside him. Can the West admit to an honest and accurate history of our overall involvement in the Middle East?

And it is usually the small headlines and under-reported stories that carry more significance — the drift of Iranian and Saudi Arabian oil trading away from the petrodollar to the stronger euro, events which have evidently dispatched yet another aircraft carrier to the Persian Gulf. The nuclear issue and the spread of democracy and women's rights are only smokescreens for the real reasons for our military presence in the region, which is to secure the oil for our national corporate lifestyle.

The primary question is: Is the American public willing to pay the price of trying to do this?

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A nonpartisan military

By Rosa Brooks

Special to the Los Angeles Times

Buried in the news last week was one of the most potentially significant stories of recent years. The Military Times released its annual poll of active-duty service members, and the results showed something virtually unprecedented: a one-year decline of 10 percentage points in the number of military personnel identifying themselves as Republicans. In the 2004 poll, the percentage of military respondents who characterized themselves as Republicans stood at 60 percent. By the end of 2005, that had dropped to 56 percent. And by the end of 2006, the percentage of military Republicans plummeted to 46 percent.

The drop in Republican Party identification among active-duty personnel is a sharp reversal of a 30-year trend toward the "Republicanization" of the U.S. military, and it could mark a sea change in the nature of the military — and the nature of public debates about national security issues.

For most of U.S. history, issues of national security rarely divided Americans along sharp party lines: The old adage that "politics ends at the water's edge" generally held true. The military, while institutionally conservative with a small "c," was not closely identified with a particular political party. But somewhere between the end of the Vietnam War and the middle of the Clinton era, the U.S. military began to look like a wholly-owned subsidiary of the Republican Party.

The rightward shift was dramatic: In 1976, 25 percent of civilians characterized themselves as Republicans, while 33 percent of military officers were Republicans — a military-civilian "gap" of only 8 percent. By 1996, the military-civilian gap on party affiliation had grown to 33 percent; while 34 percent of civilians self-identified as Republicans, so did a whopping 70

Weaning the troops from the GOP

percent of military officers.

In Britain, the Anglican Church used to be snidely described as "the Tory Party at Prayer." In the United States over the last 30 years, the military became, to a significant extent, the Republican Party at War.

The Republicanization of the professional military came about for many reasons, some obvious, some less so. To some extent, it resulted from changing perceptions of how "pro-military" the two main parties were: In the wake of the Vietnam War, the Democratic Party became associated, in the popular mind, with antiwar, antimilitary policies. With the end of Vietnam-era conscription, which guaranteed a relatively representative military, a higher percentage of Republicans than Democrats may have opted to join the military (at least as officers), while many career military personnel transferred their allegiance to the political party they saw as "on their side."

But the Republicanization of the military was not just because of natural self-selection. It also resulted from changed recruitment and base-closing policies, combined with the steady Republicanization of the American South. The period since the late 1960s saw the closure of many northeastern ROTC programs and the expansion of those programs in the South.

For a time, the Republicanization of the military became self-reinforcing. The GOP has controlled the White House for all but 12 of the last 34 years and has made a determined effort to identify itself with the military and to court military

voters. By the turn of the millennium, the perception that Republicans were "pro-military" while Democrats were "soft" on defense had become an entrenched facet of American politics.

The latest Military Times poll offers the most telling evidence yet that this is beginning to change. Although the reasons for the recent military flight from the Republican Party can only be guessed, it's a safe bet that disgust at Bush administration bungling in Iraq is the single biggest factor.

The poll shows that only 35 percent of military personnel approve of the president's handling of the war, and three-quarters of those polled say that the military is "stretched too thin to be effective." Anecdotal evidence suggests that many career officers also are skeptical of the administration's approach to combating terrorism and unhappy with its undermining of the norms of the Geneva Convention.

The partial de-Republicanization of the military is a hopeful sign — and not just for Democrats. A politicized military presents a threat to democratic ideals of civilian control. Over the last 30 years, the Republicanization of the military also has had a deeply distorting effect on public debates about national security, making it almost impossible to question Republican national security policies without being labeled "anti-military."

As we struggle to move beyond the horrors of Iraq, we desperately need to develop fresh approaches to changing security threats. That requires a military that isn't partisan — and political leaders who won't make posturing in front of the troops a substitute for responsible policies.

Rosa Brooks is a professor at the Georgetown University Law Center. She is on a leave of absence while working on a book. E-mail Brooks at rbrooks@latimescolumnists.com.

The Castro era is ending

By Pat M. Holt

The Christian Science Monitor

ARLINGTON, Va. — On New Year's Day 1959, Fidel Castro's rag-tag guerrilla army marched triumphantly into Havana. Castro himself followed a few days later and began his half-century of work carrying out his revolution. This turned out to be a real revolution as distinguished from the coups d'etat that had previously characterized Cuban politics. By the time Castro turned over power to his younger brother Raúl in July 2006, he had ruled longer than any other current world leader.

We know that Castro is sick; we do not know his diagnosis.

The U.S. intelligence community thinks he has terminal cancer. A Spanish doctor who recently examined him says he does not have cancer and can return to work after rehabilitation. Either way, it is likely that his era has ended.

Castro has outlasted nine U.S. presidents: Eisenhower, Kennedy, Johnson, Nixon, Ford, Carter, Reagan, George H.W. Bush, and Clinton. A tenth president, George W. Bush, is halfway through his second term. All of these except Carter did everything they and their CIA directors could think of to bring Castro down — without success. (Carter took a step toward restoring diplomatic relations but did not follow through after Cuba intervened in the Angolan civil war.)

The United States would long since have come to terms with any other revolutionary Latin American government. That it has not done so with Cuba is due mainly to ideological bias in Washington and Havana as well as the baleful influence of hordes of anti-Castro refugees in Miami.

Was Cuba ever really a threat to the U.S.?

Castro has an efficient and ubiquitous secret police and has not hesitated to use it to quash opposition. But also, and somewhat paradoxically, he has had remarkable public support. In major part, this came from what he did to change Cuban society.

He improved healthcare and made it more widely available, despite a drain of skilled health professionals who streamed out of Cuba into Miami. He improved literacy — which was already good by Latin American standards — by forming "literacy brigades" to teach illiterate men and women how to read. Schoolchildren are clean and neatly dressed. They even wear shoes. They look well fed — no distended bellies, no spindly arms and legs.

The Mafia was thrown out of Cuba when Castro took power, and with it, the legality of gambling and prostitution.

The Castro regime attacked the housing shortage by obtaining land and building materials and organizing teams of workers who built apartment houses. Construction workers then had priority for living in the apartments.

The revolution got a big boost from the Soviet Union, which sold oil for less than the world price and bought sugar for more than the world price. This provided a subsidy of \$3 billion to \$4 billion a year, which ended with the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Obama's ties to Rezko are questionable

By Tom Fitton

Judicial Watch

Washington pundits are excited over a potential battle for the Democratic nomination for president between the "fresh-faced" freshman Senator from Illinois, Barack Obama, and the consummate political insider, New York Senator Hillary Clinton. However, new revelations about a new scandal involving Obama suggest he may have more in common with Hillary than he would like to admit.

In November, press reports surfaced regarding a questionable land deal between Obama and Antoin "Tony" Rezko, an indicted political fundraiser described by the Chicago Tribune as a man who "notoriously attaches himself to political figures, often parlaying friendships into business dealings that have attracted official suspicion for several years."

The long and the short of it is that Obama approached Rezko with the idea to simultaneously purchase adjoining lots in Southside Chicago. Rezko obliged. Obama obtained his lot for a reduced price. Rezko later sold a portion of his property to

Obama. All

of this took place while Rezko was the subject of a federal corruption investigation.

What do Obama's dealings with Rezko tell us, if anything, about Obama's ethics. Here are some thoughts.

First, Obama's dealings with Rezko reveal a politician oblivious to the expectations of at least the appearance of integrity for those in public office. At the time Obama entered into his dubious land deal, it was widely known that Rezko was the subject of a federal investigation for allegedly trying to collect nearly \$6 million in kickbacks from government deals. Obama and Rezko have been "friends" since 1990. Obama knew about Rezko's shady reputation and ought to have avoided the appearance of impropriety.

Second, Obama's dealings with Rezko suggest, at least, that Obama might be the kind of politician willing to peddle his influence. The Chicago Tribune reported that Obama purchased his land for \$300,000 less than the asking price, while Rezko's wife paid full price for the adjoining lot from the same owner. Did Mrs. Rezko partially subsidize the purchase of Obama's new home? And what of the subsequent sale of a section of the Rezko property to Obama shortly thereafter?

Press reports suggest Rezko has raised as much as \$60,000 in campaign contributions for Obama. What has he received in return for his generosity? New revelations surfaced this week indicating that Rezko was successful in persuading Obama to award a coveted internship in his Senate office to a Rezko business associate. (Incidentally, the business associate, John Armada, has donated \$11,500 to Obama's campaigns.) Is there more to this story?

Third, Obama's dealings with Rezko suggest that Obama may be willing to cast aside his professed sense of ethics for personal financial gain. Obama, through his dealings with an indicted political fundraiser, was able to purchase a luxurious home at a cut-rate price and expand his property. Obama acknowledged the deal was a mistake, but only after the media made hay of it.

Ironically, Democrats have appointed Sen. Obama the Democratic Party's point person on ethics and the culture of corruption.

In 1992, the Clintons came into the White House despite evidence of their shady real estate dealings in Arkansas, a scandal known as "Whitewater," setting the tone for what would be the most corrupt presidency in our nation's history. Is this Rezko land deal Barack Obama's Whitewater? Let's find out sooner than later.

Tom Fitton is president of Judicial Watch, a conservative nonpartisan educational foundation that fights government corruption. Judicial Watch does not support nor oppose candidates or legislation. Visit www.judicialwatch.org for more information.