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To Build A Better World, Start In Your Own Community

EDITORIAL

Spending to trim an unneeded expense

City leaders don't need to spend \$150,000 to figure out which municipal services are least essential.

It's bad policy to spend that kind of money to revamp the budget process or hire a consultant to help make cuts — especially when tax revenue didn't live up to expectation this year and leaders are staring down a tight 2008 budget.

The municipal government needs to shrink to fit its funding. Tossing as much as \$150,000 out the window is a bad way to start.

Leaders already have talked about dropping the equivalent of 19 full-time city jobs next year. How many full-time employees will get to keep their jobs next year if leaders decide not to splurge on staff time, consultants or some other method to review the budget for waste?

City Council members are elected to make tough decisions, and department heads are paid to know their areas. Trimming the budget is one of those decisions. Pawning off bad news on a consultant or a special study is not good leadership.

Leaders can do their own homework as they consider the budget problems in the coming weeks' meetings. They'll save taxpayers some cash and might save some jobs or valuable programs in the process.

Views from the Nation's Press

Left behind in Iran

From the moment Haleh Esfandiari was arrested and imprisoned by the government of Iran in May, her friends in high places in Washington rallied to her defense and demanded that she be released. Most notable among them was former Rep. Lee H. Hamilton, president of the Smithsonian Institution's Woodrow Wilson International Center, where Esfandiari is head of the Middle East program. She is known for championing dialogue between Iran and the United States. The accusation of "crimes against national security" by the Iranian Intelligence Ministry was bogus. She endured solitary confinement, endless hours of interrogation and pressure to confess to a plot to help spark a "velvet revolution" in the theocratic nation.

Esfandiari was released last month and arrived back at her home in Potomac, Md., last week. We celebrate her return and can imagine the relief and joy her family must feel. But our concern remains with the three people who have yet to return. Ali Shakeri, a California businessman, and Kian Tajbakhsh, an Open Society Institute consultant and social scientist, are being held in Evin Prison, where Esfandiari was jailed. And missing since a March visit to the Iranian duty-free zone of Kish Island is former FBI agent Robert A. Levinson.

Their plight must not be forgotten. ...

— The Washington Post

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The Daily Times-Call encourages its readers to share their views. Letters must be 300 words or shorter. Short letters, about one typewritten, double-spaced page, on timely topics get preference. We will print as many letters as space allows.

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Guest Opinion

Program saves children

By Linda Leary

Special to the Daily Times-Call

If our kids are our future and the crime rate among youths is steadily increasing in frequency and severity, wouldn't you agree that saving our children is saving our future?

Teaching Peace, a Longmont nonprofit and parent organization of the Longmont Community Justice Partnership (LCJP), believes firmly that our kids are our future and is passionately committed to providing a program that "saves" our children, not abandoning them to a system that is overburdened, costly and statistically prone to failure.

The Five R's of respect, responsibility, relationship, repair and reintegration are the guiding principles for Teaching Peace's restorative approach to breaking the cycles and crime and violence among our community's troubled youths. For many youthful offenders, participation in this process is the first and only opportunity they have had to be supported in a way that allows them the space to make more positive choices. The restorative approach is a place of hope, a place where we can catch kids at the beginning phases of criminal activity and guide them back to a more constructive path. Here, in a circle of respect and safety, kids who have made bad choices have the opportunity to reintegrate

Our youths get a second chance with teaching peace

back into the community as functional citizens. They do this by accepting full responsibility for their actions and engaging in constructive dialogue with the victims, family members and selected members of their community to come up with solutions that repair the harms. It is a magical process to witness. No one is unmoved when an offender "gets it;" when he or she realizes that he is not being judged as a "bad person;" that everyone in the room, including the victim, really wants him or her to succeed. This realization is the foundation for their agreement to take direct action to repair the harm of their crime. In this moment of awareness and acceptance of personal responsibility, the human capacity for forgiveness is abundantly visible, and it is not unheard of that victims and offenders hug each other after the conference is complete. That's transformational and certainly not something one might experience in a courtroom!

Teaching Peace believes in the success of LCJP, but an analysis by

the National Research Center, or NRC, has statistically confirmed it. The four main variables identified by NRC to represent the main outcome of LCJP's restorative program were: agreement completion (numbers of youths completing their contracts/agreements as set forth to repair the harms), offender satisfaction, victim satisfaction and recidivism. With more than 10 years of successful operation, LCJP has enough data over three timed data sets — 2001/2002, 2003/2004 and 2005/2006 — to observe the emergence of any trends, especially those that reflect how the program has held up over time. In a total of 352 conferences servicing 650 offenders, 352 crime victims and 1,737 support and community members, the recidivism rate has remained low, averaging 10 percent; contract completion is high at 95 percent; and satisfaction level with the process has maintained a high average of 95 percent for all participants. In its executive summary, NRC concludes, "LCJP is to be commended for its record of performance."

Teaching Peace and LCJP commend the kids for their record of performance — their trust and willingness to make new choices for themselves and their futures. And it is all about our kids, right?

Linda Leary is a Teaching Peace volunteer.

Parents, do your job

On Sept. 5, I attended a work session of the St. Vrain Valley School Board that included a demonstration from a Planned Parenthood representative on how to put a condom on a model. The presentation went on to discuss many forms of artificial birth control. The presenter notably did not realize, when questioned, that the pill works in multiple ways, including preventing an embryo from implanting in the uterine wall, not just by preventing ovulation.

After this, the board went into a discussion of the pros and cons of the two presentations that had been given. Both presentations included a "demonstration." A school district employee stated that he had contacted other school districts in the area and could find only one that included such a demonstration in its curriculum: Boulder Valley.

As I listened to the discussion, I thought that we parents had put the board in a terrible position. The board was discussing whether or not to add an opt-in "how to put a condom on a penis" demonstration to the health curriculum, because too many of our high school students are having sex, getting STDs and becoming pregnant. The board was in a terrible position, because we parents are not doing our job. This subject should be taught at home, and the statistics should show clear success. We parents need to know what our kids are doing. We need to know where our kids are. We need to know who their friends are. We need to instill values. We need to do our job.

TERRY MEDEARIS
Longmont

Include God in life

Seeing the flag causes strong emotions, whether in a ceremony honoring a great event, leading a parade on Independence Day or

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draped over a coffin as a sign of our mourning for a hero or a loved one.

The unfurled banner symbolizes the love and pride for God and country.

It is America's strength in honor as dignified in the stars and stripes of the flag that helps to establish the moral character of our national foundation upon the Bible, God's word, one nation under God, with liberty and justice for all.

No wonder there is crisis in America when we have left God out of so many of our public schools, our homes and lives in general. We could begin by praying for our president, citing the Pledge of Allegiance, reading the Bible and praying.

I agree with you — no flag should take precedence other than the U.S. flag anywhere in our country. America's Founding Fathers believed that a widespread faith in God was the true source of America's survival as a free nation.

Freedom without moral commitment and respect is aimless and self-destructive.

IDA MAE RAY
Longmont

Unhappy with mayor

I wonder if anyone else in Longmont is as upset at Mayor Pirkack as I am.

You don't:

■ Push publicly for the ruination of Union Reservoir after pushing the agenda through City Council.

■ Exhibit yourself as a voting participant at City Council as anything but neutral.

■ Understand the age-old political adage of church versus state, i.e., City Council.

■ Understand that the entire situation hinges on water and, if

LifeBridge doesn't do the deal in Weld County, it's because water costs too much.

■ Give water to powerful religious interests.

JIM JOCHEMS
Longmont

Watch how she votes

Recently, Marilyn Musgrave guided her dog-and-pony show through eastern Colorado towns in her district, the 4th Congressional District, trying to reshape her image. But let's not be fooled by the wolf in sheep's clothing.

We need only to review Musgrave's voting record to determine who holds the leash to her pocketbook and, more importantly, her votes.

In 2007, Musgrave voted against allowing stockholders to vote on executive compensation. So, how many people in her district benefited from that vote? Musgrave also voted against an increase in the minimum wage to \$7.25. Is she not familiar with her own district's population and median income? Musgrave also voted against restrictions on no-bid defense contracts. Now, how did that help the people in the 4th CD?

Musgrave is a social conservative who is anti-gay, pro-big business and a Bush supporter.

She has been called one of the worst U.S. congresspeople because of her extreme social conservative views, as well as her continued blind support of President Bush and his administration's failing agenda.

Musgrave's vote this month on the Iraq conflict should be revealing. Will she listen to her constituents who want our soldiers to come home, or will she vote with Bush and keep funding Halliburton? My bet is on the latter.

BRIDGET CASSIDY
Loveland

Secrecy and corruption go hand in hand

By Tom Fitton

Judicial Watch

The Bush administration and Hillary Clinton are rarely on the same page. However, both appear in total agreement on one subject: keeping government secrets.

The Bush administration recently argued in court documents that the White House Office of Administration is exempt from the Freedom of Information Act. Never mind the fact that the White House's own Web site lists the Office of Administration as one of six entities subject to FOIA. Or the fact that the office responded to 65 FOIA requests last year alone. The Bush administration now says these documents are for their eyes only. Why? Because it is politically convenient.

The administration doesn't want to have to divulge information about a slew of "missing" e-mails related to the Bush administration's dismissal of nine U.S. attorneys in 2006.

Sen. Clinton, meanwhile, continues to hold tight to Clinton White House records related to her tenure as first lady. As the Los Angeles Times noted recently, "Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton cites her experience as a compelling reason voters should make her president, but nearly 2 million pages of documents covering her White House years are locked up in a building ... obscuring a large swath of her record as first lady."

Archivists at the Clinton Presidential Library said recently they won't release the records until after the 2008 presidential election. All information requests filed with the archives are to be processed on a "first-come, first-serve" basis, and requests for Hillary's documents, archivists say, are "further back in line" of those dealing with other Clinton-era activities. While the public remains in the dark about Hillary's potential involvement in a range of serious scandals, open-records requests involving flying saucers and the full name of the pastry chef that made Chelsea's birthday cake have been fulfilled.

Over the past 13 years, Judicial Watch has filed literally hundreds of FOIA and other document requests with the Clinton and Bush administrations. Both have fought, at great expense, to keep documents hidden from scrutiny.

Our group went all the way to the Supreme Court in an attempt to obtain documents about Vice President Cheney's Energy Task Force. Cheney used the courts to prevent us from accessing many key documents, but the Bush administration ultimately disgorged tens of thousands of task-force documents because of our lawsuits.

Earlier this year, the Commerce Department paid Judicial Watch \$842,500 in attorney's fees and costs related to the Clinton administration's attempts to conceal its scheme to sell taxpayer-funded trade mission seats in exchange for campaign contributions. When Judicial Watch began investigating the scandal, Clinton administration officials deliberately withheld and destroyed records regarding the trade missions to avoid releasing them to Judicial Watch.

Nolanda Hill, a business partner and confidante of then-Clinton Commerce Secretary Ron Brown, testified at a dramatic court hearing during the litigation that the Clinton White House "instructed (Brown) to delay the (Judicial Watch) case by withholding the production of documents prior to the 1996 elections, and to devise a way not to comply with the court's orders."

I find it somewhat fitting that if Hillary is successful in withholding her White House records from the public, she will have President Bush to thank. In November 2001, the president signed an executive order that virtually gutted the Presidential Records Act — a mandate that all presidential papers are the property of the government and must be released (with some exceptions for national security) within 12 years of the end of a presidential term.

Under Executive Order 13223, signed by Bush, U.S. presidents — sitting and former — can veto the release of these presidential papers. An incumbent president, a former president — even the family of a deceased president — all have carte blanche authority to withhold documents that might be incriminating or embarrassing, and there is no appeal process.

The reason Judicial Watch fights so aggressively for access to government documents is the same reason why the Clinton and Bush administrations have fought so aggressively to keep them hidden. The battle for clean government is ultimately the battle for open government. Without transparency, politicians can continue to do whatever they want, whenever they want, without accountability.

Tom Fitton is president of Judicial Watch.