

December 27, 2008

VERMIN TO STAR

Now that the body of little Caylee Anthony has apparently been found, the vermin start coming out from under the rocks. They aggrandize themselves by claiming to be experts, and they are, at making themselves the focus of the crime. Their main purpose is to obfuscate the crime in a sea of minutiae until they can confuse at least one juror to buy their paid for "facts," thus getting the defendant a hung jury if not an outright acquittal. The judges in these high profile cases allow anything less than aliens from other galaxies claimed by these alleged experts to be reasons for the crime. Trials that should be open and shut take months as lawyers pick and choose which of the minutia would be most interesting to argue without being at all important to the crime. The final outcome never satisfies a claim of justice the community deserves because the system has allowed this vermin to "star" before, during and after the crime is adjudicated. We deserve justice; what we are getting is entertainment.

DOUGLAS CHANDLER GRAHAM, Holly Hill

TAX-AND-GROW ECONOMICS

December 19, 2008

How is it that so many people do not understand that paying taxes is the price we pay for living in a civil society? John Byers seems to suggest that cutting taxes all around is the only way to prosperity ("School taxes," News-Journal, Dec. 14).

No one wants to pay excessive taxes, but to suggest that cutting school taxes would have a positive effect on our economy is totally misleading. In order to have long-term prosperity in our state, we need to be willing to educate our children well so that they will qualify for good jobs, and so that stable companies will want to locate in our state, making those jobs available to our citizens. I would like to suggest that having a statewide school district could be a step in the right direction to educating our children in the best way possible. That would delete disparities in the tax base among our communities. Our present system favors children who grow up in wealthy districts.

I do not agree with Candy Sargent that those with children in school, teachers and administrators and others closely connected with schools "are the only citizens concerned" with the condition of our schools ("Beyond school taxes," News-Journal, Dec. 14). I can vouch for the fact that there are a lot of us out here not in that category, including retirees, who are interested enough in the future of Florida and of our citizens that we are for almost anything that would improve our public school system.

MARTI KING, Ormond Beach

DECEMBER 6, 2008
CITY ISLAND OASIS

Regarding Mark Lane's "Theatrical planning" column (News-Journal, Nov. 16): There are many reasons people come to Daytona Beach. Three reasons stand out: the beach, the Intracoastal Waterway and the City Island Tennis Courts. When I hosted a local radio talk show, "the report from the court" would be a regular feature. The "report" would generate the most calls.

One call came from California from a former resident, Bob Kawka, who was listening online and remembered with fondness playing on those courts in the 1950s. Perhaps that is why he has purchased a second home in the Daytona Beach area where he also enjoys the fishing. News about what is going on at the City Island Tennis Courts is now delivered to the friends of City Island by Vinnie Abbalao's entertaining and informative e-mails.

While my family and I were living in the Washington, D.C., area, we would vacation in Daytona Beach. Before boating or the beach, we would go to play tennis at City Island where we met old friends and made new ones. I was happy to hear the loud applause when I would get the ball over the net, even though I knew it was for a Cub hitting a home run. Have the city planners been to the City Island courts? You can find courts like this in many cities, but City Island is the most inviting, no matter what your level of play. When I go on the weekends, the courts are full and people seem to be enjoying the wait, watching the matches and socializing.

It was sad to see the shuffleboard courts destroyed. So many people enjoyed playing there. Where do they go now? It would be devastating if our town lost the tennis courts. Where would we go? What would I do with my outfits that boast the City Island tennis logo? I doubt we would go to the amphitheater. As Mark Lane said, "City Island is within sight of the News-Journal Center and within a two-mile radius of the Mary McLeod Bethune Performing Arts Center, Peabody Auditorium and the Ocean Center." If the planners still think we need an amphitheater, they should consider sharing the amphitheater adjoining our courts, the Jackie Robinson Ball Park.

BARBARA WAITE SANDBERG, Ormond Beach

November 30, 2008

EASE INTO SPECIAL FUEL TAX

Regrettably, the United States never instituted a federal transportation fuel tax dedicated to independence from foreign fossil fuel sources. Some suggest we do

that now, to the tune of \$1 to \$1.50 per gallon, to create a fund and discourage excessive demand when adequate supplies diminish prices. Such a tax is Draconian and politically impossible. It took years for the current dependence and imbalances to develop, and they won't be cured overnight.

My suggestion is for Congress, without delay, to initiate a dedicated federal tax starting at 2 cents a gallon of fuel and increasing at the rate of 2 cents a gallon per month over a four-year period, at the end of which the tax would be 96 cents a gallon. The monthly increases would amount to a nearly imperceptible 1 percent or less of the retail price of fuel. It would be collected from the entire population -- directly from noncommercial users and indirectly passed on to consumers by commercial users.

EDWARD FLANAGAN, Ormond Beach

November 23, 2008

WHAT LIGHT IN YON....

I enjoy holiday lights, especially in Florida where we don't have snow for decoration, but can we be reasonable this year for economic need? The extra use of electricity drives up energy prices for heating. Think of your friends and relatives in colder climates and your own wallets. Skip the decorations or find some solar ones. Save your money and your conscience. That goes for you, too, city governments!

GAIA DAVIES, Ormond Beach

WHERE'S SOLAR COMMITMENT?

Re Kurtland Davies' commentary on renewable energy: Florida Power & Light Co. holds the coveted honor of being rated as a Socially Responsible company. Wouldn't you expect -- as an FPL consumer -- that this company would show more generosity toward solar rebate programs, net-metering and other solar incentives, leading to lower costs for us? Or that its promising Sunshine Energy Program would be devoted, beyond the quoted 20 percent left over after administration and marketing costs, to solar programs -- to sunshine?

Regarding the action plan from our state government: How serious can this be when the present fund provided for \$500 rebates is depleted long before these

rebates are paid out? Does the old paradigm -- profit over people -- still guide our utility companies and our government?

LANI VAN PETTEN, Ormond Beach

COMMUNITY VOICES

RENEWABLE ENERGY, NOT NUCLEAR, BETTER COURSE for STATE

By KURLAND DAVIES

October 17, 2008

Gov. Charlie Crist has promised that Florida will be producing 20 percent of its energy from renewable resources by 2020. At present, we are producing about 2 percent. I applaud Gov. Crist's goal; however, I am very concerned about the lack of any action plan to accomplish such a big change in our renewable energy production.

On the bright side, the state offers a good incentive for commercial and residential solar photovoltaic systems. The present rebate of \$4 per watt, along with the Federal Solar Tax Credit, works out to an approximate 50 percent savings for the consumer. There is also a rebate of \$500 for the installation of a solar water heating system. The program has proven so popular it has been difficult to keep it adequately funded. It seems that more Florida residents have decided it is better to produce their own energy, than to rent it from the utility company.

Utility companies are in business to make money for their shareholders and are reluctant to encourage individuals and businesses to use renewable energy sources because that reduces their profits and political power. Regardless, many utility companies are supporting solar installations, and, in some cases, offering rebates to customers who install solar water heaters.

Some of the more progressive utility companies offer solar water heating rebate programs. Others, including our area's largest provider, Florida Power & Light, don't encourage the installation of solar water heating systems, in spite of the fact that homeowners can reduce their monthly utility bills by 20 percent to 30 percent. This single step would go a long way toward reaching Gov. Crist's energy initiative.

FPL may have a better environmental record in other states, but its record in Florida is dismal. FPL fought net-metering in Florida until forced to comply with new regulations by the Public Service Commission. FPL promoted coal, the most polluting energy source there is, until the governor said, "No more coal plants." The utility was fined thousands of dollars because of a security breach at a nuclear plant. The final insult to its home state was the "Sunshine Energy

Program." FPL scammed its Florida customers into giving it \$11.4 million by promising to spend it on developing clean, green energy. From an audit, it was discovered that only 20 percent of this money was actually used for green energy, the rest of the money used for FPL "administration and marketing."

We are not going to make any progress in the use of renewable energy unless our utility companies are forced to get with the program to reach 20 percent renewable resources. What is the utilities program? The bigger utility companies are planning to build three new nuclear power plants. The Legislature, the governor and the Public Service Commission have all but given these utility companies a green light. They have reduced the restrictions and paperwork to make the permitting process easy. Also the utility companies are in a position to bill a surcharge to all utility customers to help pay for these expensive plants, even if we disagree with this nonrenewable source of power. This will add about \$10 to each of our bills each month for the next 10 years to pay for these nuclear plants, even before the first kilowatt hour is produced.

Why would Gov. Crist promote renewable energy and then turn around and encourage nuclear power? It is possible that Crist will declare nuclear power a "renewable energy source" -- which is nonsense. Nuclear plants use uranium. It's not renewable. And most of it comes from our good friend Russia! Worse, nuclear plants create waste that cannot be made safe and we have nowhere to store. In addition, there is the added expense of security from the threat of terrorist attacks.

I know that some people will say, "We have to use all power sources that will make us energy independent and we can't do it all with renewable energy." This is not true. For example, there is enough wind potential in North Dakota, Kansas and Texas to provide all the energy needs in this country. This was provided by an energy study done in 1991 by the U.S. Department of Energy. In Florida, there is enough solar energy potential available in one given day, to power the entire state for a year.

The governor and state legislators have not bothered to investigate wind, solar and conservation. If they did, they would discover that these three alternatives could not only meet our energy needs, but would also create jobs for the middle class. Do we want big expensive, dangerous nuclear plants consolidating power for the utility companies or do we want to reduce our individual utility costs while creating jobs for the middle class?

Arguments about solar and wind technologies being intermittent are invalid because the current utility grid is there to furnish supplementary energy during periods where backup to renewable energy is necessary.

Please write or call your legislators and Gov. Crist to express your concerns and wishes to promote and develop renewable energy. Or go to <http://members.greenpeace.org/action/start/87/> to sign a petition to stop the

promotion and subsidization of nuclear power by the U.S. government. Our future and the future of generations to come depend on the energy decisions we make today. Let's use some common sense and take advantage of our abundance of free, environmentally friendly energy.

Davies lives in Ormond Beach.

October 15, 2008

SUGGESTIONS FOR SACRIFICE

During the Obama-McCain debate there was an interesting question posed regarding how Americans might sacrifice during war times. I don't remember the exact wording, but believe the sentiment could also be applied to financial hard times. I would like to express a few suggestions concerning such possible sacrifice.

Might corporate CEOs manage to get by with only six mansions and/or vacation villas rather than seven or more? Perhaps they could keep just one yacht and give the rest to the Navy, Coast Guard, or Drug Enforcement Agency. Let's require all members of Congress and executive branch officials to spend one month per year in a currently active war zone in which the American military is involved. They could be required to perform helpful duties according to their abilities, ranging from KP duty and cleaning latrines to administrative matters.

DAN KENNEDY, Ormond Beach

October 13, 2008

THE REAL EVILDOERS

As I was flipping channels, a story captured my attention. It was a story about the 1960s. At first, I thought I was watching the History Channel. But to my surprise, it was that fair and balanced channel, better known as Fox News. The story was about Bill Ayers, the so-called domestic terrorist and his activity of that era. Then there was the association of Barack Obama with this so-called criminal. I find it ironic for this to be relevant to our times and our upcoming election, particularly when Obama was only 8 years old at the time of Ayers' involvement with the Weather Underground. Fox News, as well as other news organizations, could have done some investigative reporting on the Wall Street bailout crisis. But somehow that story was not quite as sexy.

Twenty years ago, my family and I had our lives turned upside down as we were victimized by the savings and loan crisis. I can't believe it but the same thing has happened again. At that time, many of the politicians of both parties, including

John McCain, were involved with that breakdown. But because of the involvement of both Republicans and Democrats, little was done to investigate who was responsible for that fiasco. It puzzles me that we have millions of cops around the country patrolling the streets and highways to capture petty thieves or traffic violators, trying to put them in jail.

But there are no cops on Wall Street to oversee the true criminals and the illegal activities they commit that, in turn, impact as many as 95 percent of the American public. I think the news media in a representative democracy has the responsibility to inform and many times protect its citizens from the "evil-doers," to quote President Bush. I do believe the Muslim fundamentalists are not the only evildoers. There are many here at home, particularly on Wall Street, who have put us in the most difficult and dangerous situations in many aspects of life, including national security.

PANOS STROUPIS, Daytona Beach Shores

October 13, 2008 Daytona Beach News-Journal
COMMUNITY VOICE
MARRIAGE A STABILIZING INSTITUTION
By CHARLEY BARCELO

I notice that several of the proposed amendments for the November ballot have been invalid and will not be included on the ballot. There is still one amendment that lurks behind. It is a concerted effort of some to outlaw "gay" marriage. They have called it the defense of marriage amendment.

There are several misleading elements contained within this amendment. One is that it speaks to any and all living arrangements which are not sanctioned by the state. This would include common law marriages, co-habitation, including the security arrangements entered into by senior citizens who wish to spend their last days with a companion without interrupting their estate plans for their children.

There is however a far more serious unintended consequence of such an amendment. That is that it would place into jeopardy the single most stabilizing institution in public life. Marriage, that is.

The main object of marriage is to commit two individuals to the care and nurturing of each other. This encourages compassion, obligation, fidelity, a stabilizing relationship in which both partners know with as much certainty as we humans can muster that their partner will be there when needed.

It guarantees that when one or the other is ill and hospitalized, that the well partner has the unalienable right to visit and provide comfort and sustenance to the ill partner and will be able to be with that partner to the end.

Another factor in marriage is the legitimacy of human sexuality. Much too much is made of sex between individuals. Sex is one of the least important aspects of a long-lasting and loving relationship. Many substantial and long-enduring marriages contain little or no sex. Many marriages that fail early do contain a rather aggressive sexual relationship. The more significant and important aspects are the comradeship, the sustenance, the compassion, the caring, the consideration, the support, the very fact that each of the partners knows someone is there to trust and to depend upon throughout the relationship. It would be a travesty, a serious mistake, to deny any people the right to enter into this sort of relationship.

Of course, some people are uncomfortable with people of the same sex living together. I say to them you have such a right to be uncomfortable and if you are so inclined, do not marry someone of the same sex. Now we both can be comfortable, and society will benefit and be the stronger for it. Barcelo lives in Port Orange.

Charlie is a former member of UUSDBA

September 22, 2008
FOUL TASTE IN PUDDING

John McCain is an honorable and patriotic man who wants to do what he thinks is the right thing for the country. If elected he will be a great improvement over George W. Bush. The problem is, he's a Republican.

Maybe that is why he voted with Bush 100 percent of the time in 2008 and 90 percent of the time overall. Evidently, being a Republican means he subscribes to Republican policies. One often hears, from Republicans, eloquent and logical reasons why their economic policies are best. No matter, the policies just do not check out. The proof of the pudding is in the tasting.

Look at the harm done to the middle class during the Reagan and Bush presidencies. Both left mountains of debt. By the way, Reagan is McCain's political idol.

The middle class is worse off today than it was before Reagan started its decline. The current Bush really gave the middle class a kick in the rear and is leaving a huge debt for our children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Republicans are against increasing taxes but have no reluctance about this indirect tax on future generations. Is this not irresponsible and cowardly?

The best measure of a nation's strength is the size and well-being of its middle class -- not the size and equipment of its military.

CHARLES L. McDEARMONT, Daytona Beach

September 3. 2008

AN INSULT TO WOMEN

Sarah Palin: What a revealing choice by John McCain. The pundits say he is courting Hillary's supporters. To think for one second that women who love Hillary would be enamored by Sarah Palin is a patronizing insult to the intelligence and wisdom of women everywhere, be they conservative, liberal or in between. So what variety of "family values" does a mother have who is willing to campaign for national office while caring for an infant with Down syndrome? And what does it say about John McCain for dangling such a "Sophie's Choice" before her?

LINDA KALAYDJIAN, Ormond Beach

September 3. 2008

SENATOR MCCAIN'S CHOICE

Since Sen. John McCain only met Gov. Sarah Palin once, who really chose her for his vice presidential running mate?

PATRICIA TUGAS, Ormond Beach

August 11, 2008

TREE KILLERS

Why are so many homeowners trying to kill their palm trees by extreme trimming? Why are so many tree-cutters encouraging this practice, which exposes the heart of the tree to weather extremes, serious disease and harmful insects? One conclusion is that many tree-cutters know little about the important service trees provide. Permits to cut and licenses to become a tree-cutter are too easy to obtain. One needs only to ride on Riverside Drive in Holly Hill or on South Beach Street in Ormond Beach to see the ugly results of the practice on cabbage palms.

These trees should never be trimmed to extreme. With help from nature, when the time comes, they will trim themselves. We need to take all kinds of trees

more seriously. They manufacture our life-essential oxygen, store away harmful carbon dioxide and affect our weather year-round. Trees are as important to human survival as air and water, and we should strive to have them considered legally to be common property. We need to encourage tree-cutters to become tree-planters. Let's face the fact that your trees are my trees and my trees are your trees.

GORDON WILLIAMSON, Holly Hill

August 4, 2008

STAND FOR RESPECT

Re "Under the Constitution":

I also agreed with John Ersland's letter but Patrick Sharp does a disservice to his son by undermining the young man's teacher and not encouraging him to show respect for the teacher and fellow classmates. When the parent does not stand behind the teacher, the student may be the loser. No one should be made to say the pledge to the flag. It should always be voluntary.

From Mr. Sharp's letter, I believe that the teacher was not asking the student to say the pledge but only to respectfully stand. The classroom is not a democracy or a republic any more than the student's home. If the father tells his son to sit down at the table for dinner, the father should expect that the son would do just that and not call protective services.

As a teacher for more than 30 years, I believed that my first duty was the physical and mental safety of the student; my second duty was to foster respect and kindness in the classroom. My third duty was to teach the subject matter, which is not possible if my first two duties were not met. In the U.K., I stood when everyone else did for "God Save the Queen," out of respect. I also expected my many students who were not citizens to stand for our pledge. When a teacher asks a student to stand, the student should stand. When the teacher asks the student to have a seat, the student should have a seat. As a former mayor said, "It's about respect."

BARBARA WAITE SANDBERG, Ormond Beach

Editor's note: Sandberg was Teacher of the Year in Maryland in 1993.

July 31, 2008

AS ANY GOOD TEACHER CAN TELL YOU, YOU'LL FIND YOUR CHILD ON A CURVE

By DAN KENNEDY

COMMUNITY VOICE

For some time now articles have been appearing in the News-Journal discussing

various educational issues. Several of these have related to educational testing. As one who has had career interests in educational and psychological assessment and measurement, I'd like to express a few thoughts.

Concerning the capacity for learning -- not all students are created equal. Sometimes this is pretty obvious; thus the category of exceptional student education. But, in addition to this, the bell-shaped curve is a reality. Students, when compared with one another, show more or less by way of academic aptitude, as any observant teacher will tell you.

In recent years the concept of academic aptitude has been either ignored or significantly played down in American education. For example, setting fixed and rigid FCAT (Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test) standards for the bulk of student populations ignores this concept.

So, what is academic aptitude? It is defined in terms of the interaction between one's inherent cognitive ability (e.g. genetically related central nervous system wiring efficiency) and environmental influences (e.g. health and nutrition; parents showing interest in their child's education; emotional well being) which in combination provide a potential for academic learning. According to this concept, some students would be expected to achieve below average, some at an average level, and some above average. The history of education has certainly supported this as being a valid concept.

The traditional definition of academic aptitude along with traditional achievement standards, and measurement of these, indicate that about 20 percent of students would be expected to achieve below average. (The higher the achievement standard set, the greater the number below average.) Is this predicament inevitable? This question raises another important question. To what extent can academic aptitude be improved? People in the areas of social philosophy and theoretical and applied psychology have been debating this question for a long time.

To the extent that genetic variables are seen as dominant, the answer is that attempts to improve academic aptitude are likely to be quite limited. (Perhaps research in the neurosciences could change that in the future.) To the extent that environmental influences are important, the likelihood of improvement becomes much greater. Since at this point in history it appears there is a greater potential for controlling certain environmental influences as compared with genetic factors, this is the category that is likely to provide the greater potential for reducing the number of low-achieving students. So, what environmental influences may we be capable of controlling?

How about the health and nutrition of children and youth? Official national and state government figures indicate that about 20 percent of U.S. children live below the official poverty line. It is estimated that almost 2,000 Volusia County

school children are homeless. Can poverty be reduced? The Head Start-type educational programs that have been shown to have the most beneficial effect on academic achievement have included parent education as an important component. In short, social programs that reduce social ills are what would seem most likely to improve the academic aptitude of low-achieving students.

I should add that I am a proponent of educational testing. That is, testing used appropriately. For several decades now nationally standardized achievement tests have done a very good job in general of measuring the academic progress of our nation's students. However, grading schools according to achievement test scores and rewarding or punishing them accordingly is very unlikely to be of any fundamental or lasting help to American education. Money used for school bonuses and private school vouchers should go to the general public school coffers. A strong public school system is essential for the maintenance of a democracy.

Kennedy, Ed.D., lives in Ormond Beach.

Letter to the editor for July 14, 2008

SWIFT JUSTICE DEATH PENALTY'S ONLY DETERRENT

The problem with the death penalty, so it is claimed, is that it costs so much more than life in prison to execute someone. Is it any wonder when you think of the endless appeals on trivia that have nothing to do with the guilt or innocence of the defendant?

All businesses I know have some way of putting the things that are important ahead of things that aren't. If a store is on fire, the manager doesn't start looking for the stock clerk to see whether he is working. The fire is the most important thing and has to be dealt with immediately.

Not so in the "justice" system. If someone gets the death penalty, it is an automatic appeal and instead of the court jumping on this, it sets it up for months or years down the road. In the meantime, all the other less important cases are being heard while the appeal slowly creeps ahead, delay after delay. Death penalties should get preference and priority in the courts and should be fully adjudicated in no more than five years. This is the only way it will ever be an effective deterrent. It's the only way justice will be served. But it will never happen because the system consists of lawyers protective of their incomes and that requires the status quo to be maintained.

In the meantime, we will continue to see death-row inmates spending 15, 20 and even 30 years awaiting their sentence to be carried out.

DOUGLAS C. GRAHAM, Holly Hill

May 31, 2008 Letters to the Editor

POLITICAL ADVERTISING

A recent letter to the editor about a misleading Democratic National Committee ad against John McCain has me concerned for the well-being of its writer. Are we to believe that in 2008, the letter writer is somehow still of the opinion that political ads placed on television and in print media are supposed to be truthful? Since when has the media cared one whiff whether the ads by Republicans or Democrats contained "the truth"? The bottom line for the media is that they are interested in selling more ads.

Consider how this strategy gives the cable news show producers a self-writing script, as they trot out the usual talking heads, split-screen style, and tout the ad and the letter in another round of "He said, she said." Pompous pundits will debate the nuances of who is nobler, by virtue of who can suffer the slings and arrows of this process and therefore deserve the prize. What a stage for our national discourse! And, of course, the price of admission to the contest is that we, the citizens who are consumers of the media, give up all trust in politicians and grow more desperate.

The letter writer implied that Republicans would never take anything out of context. Can it be possible for any human being to be so certain of one side's infallibility after what we have witnessed in the past decade?

JIM BOSTROM, Ormond Beach

May 10, 2008 Letters to the Editor

NO TO ELECTIONS CHANGE

Re "Cities may combine elections," article, May 4:

Supervisor of Elections Ann McFall is urging Volusia County's cities to change the years they elect officials to coincide with the presidential and gubernatorial

elections. She cites great savings we would enjoy if municipal elections were switched back to even years.

However, as I recall, cities agitated for the separation because voters' attention centered on prominent candidates (for president, governor, etc.) with big bucks for advertising, and local hopefuls were overwhelmed.

In this case, change would not be positive.

NATALIE WILLIAMSON, Holly Hill

Letters to the editor May 4, 2008

FOR EARTH'S SAKE, LETS'S SAVE TREES

We need to face the fact that global warming is a serious threat to humanity. One of its many causes is the continued destruction of trees and other ground cover that are our major protectors from damaging carbon dioxide.

Tree loss in Florida is so severe that our weather is changing. Because Florida has a long warm season, regular rainfall is necessary for plant growth and human needs. Adequate ground cover and viable wetlands were the source of daily afternoon showers during warm months for eons. Today those showers are rare.

Most of our occasional rainfall now accompanies storm systems that have no regular patterns. Rather, they move across the surface as part of nature-destroying weather violence. Between these wet weather storms are periods of deepening drought. Green growth is stunted and becomes vulnerable to disease and parasites. Some wetlands are now so dry they don't regenerate plant life.

We must save tree cover to keep planet Earth from becoming barren like Mars. Trimming must be the alternative to destruction. Downed trees should quickly be replaced and nurtured. Trees and wetlands are so vital to planetary survival that laws must be enacted to protect them as common societal assets -- like parks, air, water and sunshine -- because ground cover belongs to all of us.

Look at it this way: Your trees are mine and my trees are yours.

GORDON WILLIAMSON, Holly Hill

May 01, 2008

WHY THE EVOLUTION VS. RELIGION ROW REPLAYS AGAIN AND AGAIN

By REINHOLD SCHLIEPER

COMMUNITY VOICE

The "evolution vs. intelligent design" debate seems to be marred by a most fundamental misunderstanding of how scientific reasoning works and what it is trying to achieve; in other words, the distinction "religion" and "science" is really not very clear, except by way of the belief on both sides that we'll know it when we see it. But that's too simple to be accurate.

What advances science is the willingness on the part of a large community of persons to revise its judgments. What advances a religion is the willingness on the part of large communities to hold on to judgments and not to revise, despite evidence to the contrary. To find out whether a person belongs to the one or to the other community is to simply ask for the minimal evidence necessary for the person to change his or her mind about any issue. If the person acknowledges no conditions under which s/he will retract, then that person is of the religious community. Ironically enough, some scientists belong into that category. If the person can say clearly and unambiguously that, if X conditions were to obtain, then the person would change his mind, then that person is clearly in the scientific community.

Interestingly enough, some religionists also belong into that category. I strongly suspect the Dalai Lama, for example, to be part of the scientifically thinking community when he cautions against violence in the "Free Tibet" movement because of the harm that violence has done and will do; I strongly suspect the former Cardinal Ratzinger and present Pope to be of the religionist community when he insists on avoidance of birth control in the face of suffering imposed by overpopulation and poverty.

Let me illustrate with a simple example. We know that if litmus paper is dunked into acid, it will come out red. If I think about this matter scientifically, I will not get my knickers into a twist by simply acknowledging that if I ever were to dunk what really is litmus paper into what really is acid and come up with some other color than red, then the original rule would be wrong. I'd have to revise my rule in accordance with the new findings.

Suppose I believe that a god handles the affairs of this world in a benign manner. Under what circumstances will I change my mind? Thinking scientifically, I conclude that with the death of millions in pogroms, genocides, imbalanced economic distributions, or terrible health-care systems, that ruling god is either not ruling or not good, since goodness would require moral intervention of one capable of moral intervention without great harm to him-/herself. Scientifically thinking, I should reformulate my view of the deity. Religiously thinking, I am going to pad my theory with a lame excuse such as god's transcendence of my

understanding -- never mind the very obvious fact that, in that case, I shouldn't even talk about something I have acknowledged not to understand.

I think that intelligent-design theory is or could be a viable theory if the adherents to it show clearly an alternate universe where they would be willing to abandon the theory. I suspect that they will not do so. The evolutionist, on the other hand, is not insistent on the truth of the theory; the evolutionist finds the theoretical framework pragmatically adequate for new evidence. Once evidence to the contrary comes in, I am sure that no evolutionist will cling to the theory. If a parasite manages to swim up a urine stream to live on and in the body of a man or if a worm munches on the heart of a dog, then these are all sufficient to give evidence of, at best, "stupid design" or "malicious design" while the evolutionary framework can handle those phenomena just fine.

If we were to reflect about this basic fact, namely that religionist thinking seeks certainty and truth without sufficient evidence and without acknowledgment of falsifying characteristics and that scientific thinking seeks probabilities with acknowledged falsifying conditions, then we probably could bury this silly debate about evolution vs. design quite quickly. Let's hope that our schools will also teach the rudiments of inductive reasoning so as to help students develop their own judgments properly no matter what legislators with limited intellectual horizons are trying to do to them.

Schlieper, Ph.D., a philosophy professor, lives in Palm Cost.

Letters to the editor for April 17, 2008

FLORIDA FOREVER

Re "State land-buying program may face uncertain future," article, April 9:

In spite of our "massive financial problems," Florida cannot afford not to invest in more conservation lands. One reason we are now in severe financial distress is because the former administration and other state officials have helped to strap the state financially by refusing to truly reform the tax code. Another is, of course, the general economic stress around the country. However, the downturn in our economy may actually be an ideal time for investment in environmental preservation.

In the past, one exceptional choice the people of Florida made was to develop and support the Florida Forever program, which has helped to preserve natural resources and valuable habitat.

However, the program is due to expire in 2010. As of yet, the state budget proposed by the House for this next fiscal year does not contain any funding for it. However, Senate Bill 542, attached to the Senate's proposed budget, does. Funding should be at least \$300 million in bonding -- the amount that has been appropriated every year.

Because the funds would come from bonding, the money can be borrowed and available today and paid off in the future, when Florida recovers from these challenging economic times. The \$900 million in existing Florida Forever bond authority could be used as soon as possible to take advantage of current lower prices for land.

Our current real estate slump provides historic opportunities for land conservation, but it will not last. We need to fully fund Florida Forever now and also develop a successor program to continue to realize these opportunities.

There may be no tomorrow for many of Florida's endangered natural areas. We should protect them not just because they are beautiful, but also because they actually add to the wealth of our state in so many ways, not the least of which is the possible aid to economic recovery and renewed tourism. If we fail to take advantage of the opportunities available now, much of Florida's lands and waters will be fragmented and lost forever.

CAROLYN WEST, Ormond Beach

APRIL 13, 2008

STUDENT'S WORK IS EXCEPTIONAL

The freely done line drawing self-portrait by Timbercrest Elementary fourth-grader Aaron Walley, as it appeared in The News-Journal on March 30, is exceptionally good. Many an adult would be proud of doing so well. He appears to be quite talented.

My hope is that he continues to be given free rein to draw as he wishes and receives excellent guidance.

WANDA CASSIDY, Ormond Beach

The following Appeared March 12,2008 in the Letters to the Editor of the Columbus, GA Columbus Ledger-Enquirer
I am a frequent visitor to Columbus and an avid reader of the Columbus Ledger-

Enquirer. If you are satisfied with the current socioeconomic policy that protects and nurtures the wealthy, that is, socialism for the wealthy - vote Republican.

If you are satisfied seeing the U.S. drift closer and closer to an oligarchy government of some South American countries, vote Republican.

If you are satisfied with exporting jobs and industries off shore then giving tax breaks to those guilty corporations, vote Republican.

If you believe the strength of a nation is measured by the size of its military instead of the size of its middle, vote Republican.

If you believe a first-class education for every citizen is not possible, vote Republican.

If you think Bush-Cheney did the right thing by going into Iraq, vote Republican.

If you are satisfied with the current national health system, vote Republican.

If you are satisfied with unfettered capitalism, vote Republican.

If you are satisfied with the worldwide lowering opinion of the U.S. in recent years, vote Republican.

If you are satisfied with the fact that as of this date a U.S. dollar will bring only 66 cents when converted into the European euro, vote Republican.

CHARLES L. McDEARMONT Daytona Beach

March 9th, 2008

Cameras in traffic

Many a person objects to the cameras proposed at street crossings in Palm Coast and, I understand, also in Orlando. However, perhaps one should think about such objections more carefully.

Having driven also in Europe, I know that the traffic culture there is different from ours. In Europe, I stop when the light turns yellow. The signal means for the intersection to clear, not for traffic to speed up through the intersection before the red appears. Red means I will crash into someone since the other side has green at that time, unlike in Florida where we get a red that signals a last-second speed-up option for traffic. Having been the victim of one such "it's the kind of red one should speed up for" driver, I know that such settings are asking for trouble.

Speeding in Europe likewise is governed by cameras. Such procedures are going to put an end to any high-victim and high-speed chases by police. A bill in the mail from your local traffic court with image of driver, license plate and clocked speed or status of the traffic light will be all that is necessary for conviction.

The camera is not functioning on an arbitrary and capricious basis; the culprit triggers the event, so no one's privacy is unduly invaded; proper driving will make sure of noninvasion. Europeans also hear of camera placements on the radio. The intent is to make traffic safe, not to siphon off money. The traffic fines are reasonably small because they may be relied on to happen. Compare that to our system where staggering amounts encourage gambling instead of safe driving.

In fact, Europeans signal each other when they know of a camera in use somewhere. However, Europeans also seem to agree that they will not signal the egregious speeder and all-around dangerous driver. Besides, I'm going to be very happy if unbiased cameras manage to catch some of the speeders from the various police agencies that would normally hide behind the blue/green walls of silence.

So, cameras in traffic? I'm all for them, no holds barred. As long as the culprit triggers the event him-/herself, no one's privacy has been invaded.

REINHOLD SCHLIEPER, Palm Coast

COMMUNITY VOICES March 7 2008

Bruce Johnson ("Something New Under the Sun," Community Voices 2/28/08) first seems to ridicule the FPL "Sunshine Energy" program, which requests customers to voluntarily give FPL \$9.75 extra each month with the vague promise to produce 1000 kwh of cleaner electricity in Florida and other states. But he ends by saying to count him in! Why on earth would anybody do that? Well, count me out!

I resent the insinuation that only the "brightest" FPL customers will accept this "offer." I am one of the brightest of FPL's customers because I have no intention of voluntarily paying them over and above their present profit-greedy, inflated fees. Did the "brightest" not notice that the clean electricity will not even necessarily go to our state? That their voluntary contribution of \$120 a year will not lower their energy costs one iota?

Proof of FPL's insincerity is its lousy green record. The energy systems running Florida are predominately oil, coal and nuclear. No wind and less than 2% solar. Until Governor Crist declared a moratorium on coal, FPL applied for 3-5 new coal

power plants. Coal provides about 40% of the world's electricity and 70% of its pollution, killing over three million people a year.

FPL proposes "clean coal" which is very misleading because that technology won't be available for decades, if ever. Investors are abandoning coal altogether. In Europe, most of the coal plants have been phased out entirely. Next, FPL submitted two permits for nuclear plants. Nuclear is extremely expensive, requiring billions in subsidies, which come ultimately from us, the taxpayers. Nuclear plants are also very vulnerable to terrorist attacks. Finally, these plants produce the worst possible pollutants with impossible storage problems.

FPL has suggested to the governor that he consider nuclear as a "renewable energy source" so if they built one nuclear plant they would meet the governor's goal to reach 20% "renewable energy" by 2020! It would not have to produce one single watt of solar or wind energy!

FPL fought net metering in Florida until forced to give in to a recent ruling of the Public Service Commission. Today, if a homeowner with solar on his roof produces more power than they use and returns that power to the grid, FPL pays him five cents per kwh, while charging the same customer over 13 cents per kwh. When the Public Service Commission Rule is adopted, FPL will be forced to pay out the same as they charge, making solar energy more cost-effective for individual customers.

Ironically, for years, our "Florida Power and Light" has been forced to do this in almost every state - except Florida.

The truth is that FPL is a huge conglomerate, part of big oil and coal. They have no intention of giving up any power or profit. If more individuals opt to put solar on their roofs, FPL loses power, both electric and political.

FPL flaunts their wonderful 250-kilowatt solar array in Sarasota, serving 20 homes, as an example of where they are investing the \$4,329,000 they conned from their customers since 2004. If that money was used to install solar water heating systems, it would provide FREE hot water for over 1000 homes, saving families over \$350,000 per year in utility costs. I ask you, what seems the brightest to you?

People are unaware that solar technology today is highly efficient and durable, offering 20-30 year warranties. Solar is affordable due to state rebates and federal tax incentives, together covering about half the cost. These investments pay for themselves in less than 10 years, after which solar owners are producing completely free energy for their use. Power groups such as FPL have worked diligently to suppress the facts. No wonder we have less than 2% of our electricity from solar in our Sunshine State.

The truly brightest customer of FPL will take his money and invest in solar panels on his own home, then go out and encourage the businesses, churches and schools to do the same. I belong to the Unitarian Universalist Society on North Halifax in Ormond Beach. We have just had a local company install a 9,984 watt solar photovoltaic system on our south facing roof, one of the largest solar installations in Volusia county, along with a solar hot water system and two solar fans to reduce the heat in the attic. Half of the total cost will be rebated by a state rebate. We were able to get an exceptional loan agreement from a local bank.

We will be saving about one half of our FPL bill. And as FPL rates go up and up, as they surely will, we will be saving more and more. Once our loan is paid off in 10 years or less, our panels will continue to produce free electricity for 15 to 20 more years.

We chose this project not only to save money, but to reduce our carbon footprint and to serve as a beacon for the rest of the community to see what is possible and right for our planet. The public is invited to a celebration and dedication of our solar installation on North Halifax Drive at noon on Sunday, March 30th. Come and see what can be done.

KURLAND DAVIES Ormond Beach

February 12, 2008

ANOTHER WATER GRAB

The developers of Halifax Plantation have requested a permit from the St. Johns River Water Management District to allow the extraction of 658,000 gallons more of surface water and groundwater a day.

Surface water and groundwater would come from the surficial aquifer, and groundwater from the Floridan Aquifer. It would serve a golf course, urban landscape and nursery irrigation. The withdrawals would come from functioning wells and 23 new wells, called "proposed wells" and a surface lake. The proposed project would also use Volusia County wells.

So the development games roll on. We are now near exhaustion of our water supply. We have severely affected nature's ability to replenish our supply, and serious unrelenting drought is likely in the future. Wealthy corporations and developers continue to fill their pockets at the expense and inconvenience of average citizens.

The Water Management District says if citizens want to look at this project's plans, we must go to its office in Palatka or some other unspecified location. Written objections must be received within 14 days

from the date of the newspaper notice Jan. 30. Comments must go to District Clerk, 4049 Reid Street, Palatka, Florida 32177-1429.

The original mandate of the water districts was to assure the preservation and conservation of our vital water supply. Instead, the district has spent most of its megamillion dollar budgets distributing our most finite resource to assure economic growth. This is more proof that such growth is a liability rather than an asset.

GORDON WILLIAMSON, Holly Hill

February 3, 2008

MEDICARE FOR ALL

Re "National health system," letter, Jan. 21:

Irene Neese states, "It was the American people" who killed HillaryCare in 1994. This bill would have required all employers to provide private HMO (health maintenance organization) coverage.

The public did become fearful, based upon the Harry and Louise ads that were paid for by the Health Insurance Association of America. HIAA spent \$50 million of our premium payments and averaged 1,000 contacts with each U.S. senator and representative to protect its members' profits.

Currently, HIAA has 1,300 member companies. It explains why I spent so much time as a (recently retired) registered nurse trying to reach customer "service" "gatekeepers" (not physicians), to ask which rules applied to which patient. Then there were those without insurance. HIAA Web site's suggestion: Have states subsidize the most expensive patients. That's corporate welfare. Private insurance would still be fragmented, not be taking the time to teach preventive care, excluding pre-existing conditions, and continuing to have 30 percent overhead costs. Medicare has 3 percent overhead.

I'm for Medicare for all. So are 14,000 physicians (including two previous U.S. surgeons general), at www.pnhp.org, and 80,000 nurses of the California Nurses Association, at calnurses.org.

BARBARA SCHABLIK, Ormond Beach

January 23, 2008

CHECK OUT FUNDRAISERS:

I recently received a call from a "U.S. Navy veterans" fundraising group. The obviously scripted, polite young man told me the group is sending care packages to the troops serving in Iraq and it wants "to do a professional job in fundraising."

I became immediately suspicious, as I always do when getting fundraising telephone calls, and I asked him to tell me exactly who it was who was doing this "professional fundraising" and how much of the funds actually go to the troops in Iraq.

I was immediately transferred to a supervisor, equally polite and scripted, who in answer to my repeated question replied that 20 percent of the funds go to the care packages! At that point, I told him this was ridiculous and fraudulent and hung up.

Amazed? Appalled? Angry? Please, readers, check every call and letter that you receive for fundraising. The majority these days are being done by professional fundraising telemarketers who take 50 percent to 90 percent of the funds raised. Very little gets to where you want it to go. Ask the callers the percentage question. Ask them to send you literature in the mail before you agree to contribute. Get the exact name of the organization and look it up on the Internet. Do not waste your money on these frauds.

GAIA DAVIES, Ormond Beach

January 14. 2008 News-Journal

CLINTON HAS SOLUTIONS

Most of the candidates -- all of the Republican candidates -- tell us what they believe. I believe in world peace and solving world hunger, and I believe that for every drop of rain that falls a flower grows. But that doesn't make it so. Only one candidate gives solutions to problems and reasonable, thoughtful, instant answers to questions: Hillary Clinton.

We know presidents can't just snap their fingers and get things done. We do know they can lie and get things done, but we certainly don't need another one of those. Building great expectations may just be inexperience, but the results would be the same as lying. We don't need that either.

I want to hear the absolute, plain, unvarnished truth, and that is how Hillary Clinton comes across. She knows change is incremental and that nothing is going to happen in one fell swoop. She has been tested, and we have seen she is a rock on which we may once again find respect in the world and lead by example. Let us not get led down the garden path again by someone promising something we long for, only to hear lies and excuses. Washington, and the professional politicians, will do anything to get a Republican or someone inexperienced elected so the war machine and health care will continue to be a cash cow for them and their friends. Hillary Clinton for president of the United States.

DOUGLAS C. GRAHAM, Holly Hill

January 6, 2008

SOCIAL SECURITY 'ASSETS'

In his Dec. 21 letter, David Mellon plucks a misleading sentence out of an AARP bulletin saying "that the Social Security trustees' report shows that the (Social Security) trust fund assets plus interest will pay full Social Security benefits until 2040." That would be nice, except that the "assets" aren't there. They've been borrowed and spent, year after year. What remains are IOUs from the U.S. Treasury, which earn interest, also in the form of Treasury debt. This debt representing the borrowed surplus and interest will pay benefits until about 2040, only when and as that debt is redeemed. And the redeemer is? You guessed it, the U.S. taxpayer, in the form of greatly increased federal tax revenue. Or, more money borrowed from China and others. Or, of course, benefits can be postponed and/or reduced. Whistling in the dark won't cut it. There's no free lunch.

ED FLANAGAN, Ormond Beach

The following appeared in News Journal Community Voices on Jan 6, 2008

EVOLUTION HAPPENS BUT SCIENCE UNCLEAR ABOUT MECHANICS

Evolution happens. That is clear. Just how it happens, at the molecular level, is not. Yet this important distinction is often blurred when evolution is taught or written about.

The first edition of "The Origin of Species" appeared in 1859, before Gregor Mendel's groundbreaking experiments with garden peas. In the 20th

century, there was a marriage between Darwin's original "descent with modification" thesis, and the advances in genetics. Though the impression is otherwise, science still understands precious little about the molecular mechanics of evolution.

Natural selection is strongly supported by evidence. Millions of species have existed through geologic time. A species is defined as a group of similar organisms that can breed and produce fertile offspring. To create something new, a given generation of Species X must produce offspring that are now Species Y, and can no longer successfully mate with members of Species X. To document that speciation has occurred is not the same thing as demonstrating the chemistry of how it occurred. The former has been done; the latter has not. The earliest single-cell organisms reproduced asexually. Male and female variants evolved, along with mechanisms for gamete production, fertilization and development of the zygote into a multi-cell adult. These variants would necessarily have evolved in tandem, compatible at every step along the way. The chemical details concerning this sexual saga are unknown.

Man's nearest relative is the chimpanzee. Chimps emerged 6.5 million years ago, while man appeared 4.5 million years later. In only 500,000 generations, pan troglodytes evolved into homo sapiens. Yet their differences are much more dramatic than between any other two most closely related species -- witness the uses of language and tools, and the ability to think abstractly. The molecular specifics for how this great cognitive and manipulative leap could be achieved in so short a span of time have not been shown.

The age of the Earth is 4 billion years. Within 200 million years, the first living cells arose, likely in the oceans. This period was devoted to molecular evolution, during which simple units bonded to form the more complex ones found in cells. Natural selection operates on populations of organisms. An explanation is needed for how it could have operated on populations of marine molecules. When A and B combined, why would AB have an adaptive advantage over AC, or AD, or AX, when the ultimate biopolymer would be an enzyme with perhaps 500 of these building blocks bonded in a specific sequence?

The polymer could not perform its function until the 500th unit was attached to the growing chain. And how would its function be defined unless it developed in concert with the several thousand such complex molecules present within the membrane of the simplest living cell? How could such delicate membranes even form in the tempestuous seas? These are crucial questions; they remain unanswered.

In 1953, Stanley Miller and Harold Urey sealed the presumed constituents of Earth's early atmosphere in a glass globe. They passed high-voltage sparks (simulated lightning) through this mixture for a week. Several amino acids, the sub-units of proteins, were produced. While intriguing, no biopolymers, and no living entities, were formed.

British astronomer Sir Bernard Lovell commented on the random assembling of organic molecules in the primeval seas: "The possibility of such a chance occurrence leading to formation of one of the smallest protein molecules is unimaginably small. Within the boundary conditions of time and space we are considering, it is effectively zero."

The present state of evolutionary theory is unable to satisfactorily account for its foundational molecular underpinnings. Glossing over these deficiencies misleads students and the general public. That is unacceptable and unworthy of the scientific enterprise.

DAVID E. LAWRENCE, Hampton, Va. (formerly of Port Orange) Was a member of our UU Sunday Discussion group.
