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Young voters faced problems at polls

It was great to see the column by Ray Martinez III and Avi Rubin on voting problems nationwide ("Voting system still needs fixing," Opinion Commentary, Nov. 28). But it should be noted that the problems here in Maryland were almost as severe.

In Maryland, many young voters began experiencing problems well before they reached the polls.

The voter registration forms require an ID number. While many voters use their driver's license number, the form says a voter can also use the last four digits of his or her Social Security Number as identification - and many students who do not have a Maryland driver's license do so.

The state, unfortunately, did not process some of the forms that used the last digits of the Social Security Number in time for the election.

The state sent hundreds of letters to students, informing them that their registrations were in "pending" status, and that they might not be able to vote on Election Day.

For the students who tried to vote, the process was frustrating and disempowering.

Those in pending status had to fill out provisional ballots, while many whose registrations should have been processed found they were not on the rolls when they got to the polls.

In College Park, students experienced three-hour lines.

In Somerset County and other parts of Prince George's County, some poorly trained poll-workers did even not offer some students provisional ballots

According to most student accounts, Baltimore City and Baltimore County did a much better job processing student voters. But many still felt disempowered by their provisional-ballot voting experience.

If our state wants to continue to have a strong democracy, we need to learn to treat our first-time voters with dignity and respect and make their first voting experience an empowering one.

Julie Handa

College Park

The writer is director of Maryland Votes, a nonprofit organization that works to register young voters.

Factor VII saves injured soldiers

In a recent series of articles, The Sun mischaracterized our use of recombinant Factor VII in Army combat hospitals ("Dangerous Remedy," Nov. 19-21). This does a disservice to our doctors and their commitment to injured soldiers and their families.

A significant portion of combat deaths occurs as a result of uncontrolled hemorrhaging from injuries to the chest and abdomen.

Factor VII is used on a case-by-case basis, in specific circumstances as ordered by a physician, to control life-threatening bleeding. It often saves the lives of our most severely injured troops.

A randomized, controlled study published in 2005 demonstrated no increased risk attributable to Factor VII and our analysis of cases at Landstuhl Regional Medical Center has also shown no increase in complications attributable to this drug.

The Sun also alleges a lack of record keeping. However, we do have records and can identify patients who have received Factor VII, although in the Iraqi theater of war, we do not at the present time have an electronic patient record capability that enables us to track the long-term outcomes of each soldier who receives this drug.

But Sun readers need to know that we take our responsibility to save the lives of our injured troops very seriously.

Our efforts to save lives will continue and we will use all available technologies to provide the best trauma care possible.

Lt. Gen. Kevin C. Kiley

Falls Church, Va.

The writer is the surgeon general of the U.S. Army.

Banning spanking just isn't enough

In "We don't hit animals; why do we hit children" (Opinion

Commentary, Nov. 22), Susan Bitensky backed laws banning parental use of corporal punishment on children.

I agree that legislation would be a great first step. It would also create much-needed public discussion on this issue.

However, many parents erroneously feel that corporal punishment plays an important, even indispensable, role in child rearing.

Others may regret that they resort to this tool, but feel that they lack effective alternatives. And for still other parents the use of physical punishment is simply a manifestation of the struggles and frustrations in their own lives.

Unless all of these issues are addressed, legislation would be little more than a symbolic gesture.

And if a ban is to be truly successful, it must do more than decrease the use of physical punishment. It must also lead to an increase in the quality of parenting and the mental health of children.

For this to happen we would need at the same time to conduct a national effort to educate all parents on alternative methods of discipline.

And parents who feel the alternatives to corporal punishment are failing them must have ready access to assistance.

As always, prevention can be more successful and more cost-effective than treatment.

We need to work to make sure that future generations of parents have correct information on discipline before they have their children.

This should be done through our schools. There is no job more common to the future of students than that of parent.

A curriculum on parenting skills should be part of every high school student's education.

Most people hit their children because most people were hit as children.

But we can break that cycle if our young people are armed with alternatives and taught the negative consequences of our society's bad habit.

Dr. Pasquale Bernardi

Baltimore

The writer is chief of pediatrics for the Johns Hopkins Community Physicians.

Preservation serves everyone's interest

Too often, The Sun's coverage of issues regarding safeguarding our historic built environment lapses into mention of the interests of "preservationists" ("Houses stripped of protection," Nov. 26).

What The Sun and perhaps its readers, seems to miss, is that the city is the largest "preservationist" in town - or should be. An entire paid division of city government, the Baltimore City Commission for Historical and Architectural Preservation, is devoted to this issue, with a full slate of commissioners nominated by the mayor.

The city has designated thousands of buildings as historic, created dozens of historic districts and incorporated preservation strategies into numerous urban renewal plans.

By city law, preservation is not a "fringe group" activity, but should be integrated into the running of the city.

Would The Sun call those who demand from the city a better education for their children "educationists"?

Mayor-to-be Sheila Dixon has time and again shown her commitment to community-driven government and development.

I hope she will be Baltimore's first mayor to fully integrate preservation into the future development of this city.

Lance Humphries

Baltimore

The writer is chairman of the property stewardship committee of the Mount Vernon-Belvedere Association.

A win-win solution to rowhouse dispute

The battle between Mercy Medical Center and local preservationists over the row of historic buildings on St. Paul Place is one of those unfortunate disputes in which everyone is right: Mercy needs to expand and the rowhouses need to be preserved ("Houses stripped of protection," Nov. 26).

To take the focus off the City Council's quiet intervention in this dispute for a moment, perhaps the various sides should explore some different ideas to resolve the problem. Here are a few, in no particular order, to start the ball rolling:

Can Mercy incorporate the rowhouses into the final design of its office tower?

Architects have successfully pulled off such tricks on other projects. The contrast of the new rising up from the old could be quite dramatic, and would make a positive statement about Baltimore and its values.

Does this row of houses have to remain on its present site?

The buildings look well-maintained and a well-maintained row of residences would be a plus on any number of blocks in Baltimore.

Can you imagine what one of these townhouses would fetch in, say, Reservoir Hill?

I'm certain that with a bit of creativity and flexibility, the brilliant minds of our leading citizens can turn an ugly impasse into a win-win situation for all of us.

Don Akchin

Baltimore

One-sided coverage of a west-side story

The Sun's article about the Baltimore Development Corp.'s (BDC) first open meeting was somewhat revealing about BDC, but revealed even more about the press' ability to cover it ("A peek into Baltimore's open secret," Nov. 17).

The article reported on one person's (BDC President M.J. Brodie's) account of recent negotiations with the leadership of the Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Foundation regarding a portion of Baltimore's west side known as the "superblock."

I was astonished to see The Sun print a series of statements from the BDC leader as though they were facts - with no questioning of the comments, no effort to verify their substance and no effort to talk with the foundation's leadership.

Sadly, this disservice to the public and this misrepresentation of the Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Foundation follows on the heels of a woefully inadequate piece of editorial writing ("Move on," Nov. 10).

Here again The Sun's writer made no effort to talk to the foundation's leaders and failed to fully and fairly describe the circumstances of the foundation's efforts to advance the revitalization of the west side.

Baltimore's citizens and leaders deserve better journalism.

Regretfully, I have come to accept certain journalistic practices regarding matters in which I am involved. However, I believe that the insidious nature of these recent articles and the not-so-subtle innuendo put forth in Mr. Brodie's comments has crossed the line of decency.

The victim in this instance is a foundation whose sole purpose is charitable and, in particular, assistance to the poor and elderly.

The Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Foundation is one of the world's largest charitable foundations and the Baltimore region benefits not only from its presence, but from its generous local donations, which amount to about \$25 million annually.

In addition, the foundation has been a leader in launching the revitalization of the west side and has used its resources to assist in carrying out this plan, which includes the restoration of the landmark Stewart's Building.

The Sun has expressed its own disdain for the practices and closed door deal-making of the BDC.

In light of that, one would expect more care and thought in the paper's coverage of this issue.

This is especially the case when writers are being fed misinformation by a secretive public agency - an agency recently chastised by Maryland's highest court because of its flagrant abuse and violation of fundamental public laws.

Peter Angelos

Baltimore

The writer is chairman of the board of Westside Renaissance, Inc.

Back-in parking benefits bicyclists

As a member of the task force that has been working for three years to develop parking solutions in Hampden, I was disappointed in Jill Rosen's article "Facing parking problems backward" (Nov. 22).

While it can be expected that some people prefer front-in parking, the article misled readers by neglecting to explain that the reason back-in angled parking is being used is because it is safer for bicyclists and more compatible with Baltimore's Bicycle Master Plan.

The task force - which included representatives of the Hampden Community Council, the Hampden Village Merchant's Association, Baltimore Main Streets, the Mayor's Office of Neighborhoods and the city Parking Authority - worked with the city's Department of Planning and Department of Transportation to develop parking solutions that satisfy a variety of interests.

While initially concerned about the idea of back-in parking, Peter Little, the executive director of the city Parking Authority, fully supported the idea after finding that it has been used quite successfully in bicycle-friendly cities such as Seattle and Washington.

And as a resident of Baltimore, I appreciate the fact that the Parking Authority and Transportation Department are willing to learn from successes in other cities and try new approaches instead of simply responding, "We don't do it like that in Baltimore."

Tom McGilloway

Baltimore

The writer is a member of the Hampden Community Council parking task force.

Toxic waste sours 'nuclear solution'

Olivia Albrecht fails to address some important realities in her column advocating nuclear power as the solution to global warming ("The nuclear solution," Opinion

Commentary, Nov. 19).

Although nuclear power does not generate carbon dioxide, unless we conserve energy or develop alternative fuels, it would require a new nuclear power plant to come on line weekly between 2010 and 2050 to increase nuclear power production enough to meet our power needs and keep the fossil fuel sector's carbon production from increasing.

At present, we really have nowhere to put the spent fuel that the nuclear power sector has generated - and increasing the nuclear power industry enough to keep fossil fuel carbon production steady would just about double the rate of nuclear waste production.

There is Yucca Mountain, the proposed national repository for spent fuel. But the Department of Energy projects 2017 as the earliest year when it could be ready to open. And now it looks like Yucca Mountain may never open.

People in Nevada don't want the waste in their state and Nevada Sen. Harry Reid, the next majority leader of the Senate, may be able to stop the project in its tracks ("Yucca project may be buried," Nov. 25).

And whether the waste is stored on-site or trucked dangerously across highways and rails to some Yucca Mountain-alternative, the potential for it to be stolen and diverted into weapons production will grow as the mounds of waste grow.

Dr. Gwen L. DuBois

Baltimore

The writer is a member of the national board of Physicians for Social Responsibility.

Institutional care an outmoded model

The Sun has recently published several letters extolling the virtues of the Rosewood Center (e.g. "Care centers need better state support," Nov. 23 and "Rosewood dedicated to training residents," Nov. 25).

I am the parent of a 40-year-old man who has autism and intellectual disabilities.

I know from my advocacy work with state and national organizations that all parents and families are fearful that the quality of care that their sons and daughters receive will not be adequate. Our greatest fear is what will happen to our loved ones when we die.

But there is no magic in walls. The care and support our loved ones receive in such institutions is contingent on the commitment and dedication of their staff and management.

And any of the services mentioned by the letter writers who defend the Rosewood Center can easily be provided in the community.

As a matter of fact, this happens every day. The residents at Rosewood have disabilities similar to those many people now served in the community face.

And my experience has convinced me that a person with a disability, whether severe or moderate, is better

protected from abuse and neglect by being part of their communities.

Nosy, concerned neighbors, friends and families in the community can be an asset.

The truth is that institutional care is an outdated service model.

Research demonstrates that moving people from institutions to the community has been extremely successful and that outcomes for people who are treated in the community are better than for individuals segregated in institutions.

Recent research has also found this to be true for people who face very serious challenges.

No one is suggesting that the Rosewood Center be closed tomorrow, but rather that the state find a way to offer the most supportive and cost-effective services possible to each individual in the community.

Lorraine Sheehan

Baltimore

The writer is public policy director for the Maryland Disability Law Center.

Electoral rebuke may shorten war

As the savage killings in Iraq continue to escalate, can President Bush or anyone from this administration today look the American people in the eye and tell us that the war is going well, and that we are marching toward victory - however he chooses to define victory ("Top lawmakers urge Bush to push Iraqis toward peace," Nov. 27)?

It has become clear that not only is there an all-out insurgent-terrorist war in Iraq against the United States - which has come to be seen as an oppressive, occupying power in Iraq - but that the long conflict between the Shiites and the Sunnis, which we have inflamed, is consuming the nation.

Hundreds of thousands of Iraqis have been killed or maimed through a variety of violent means and the average Iraqi must today fear for his or her life wherever and whenever he or she travels throughout the country - a peril not present even under the ruthless rule of deposed dictator Saddam Hussein, who if nothing else exercised firm control over his nation.

Early in this conflict, supporters of the war and the president would assert as fact that Iraq and the world were better off without the presence of Mr. Hussein.

It is now plain as day that this hypothesis was wrong, as Iraq has spun out of control.

The United States now seems to have less influence in Iraq than terrorist icon Muqtada al-Sadr, to whom the government listens and kowtows.

By launching this elective war, Mr. Bush has created a multi-headed monster.

But he surely must know that the Republican Party electoral trouncing of 2006 came as a direct result of the people's feelings about what Mr. Bush and his administration have done in Iraq.

I have some level of hope that Mr. Bush will find a way to extricate us from this morass before the 2008 elections, as the president must know that the Republicans will be in even more trouble if this war without end drags on into another president's watch.

Oren M. Spiegler

Upper Saint Clair, Pa.

Our shopping spree ignores the carnage

After taking a look at The Sun's picture of happy pre-sun-up shoppers at one of the local electronics emporia, I wondered why I didn't get up at the same time last weekend to score a blessedly low-priced laptop ("Holiday shopping starts with a roar," Nov. 25).

Times are not so hot for everyone. So it's doubly good that we may yet partake in the shopping frenzy and, by doing so, achieve our just portion of this heaven on Earth we call the American Dream.

But I also can't help but think of the thousands of our best young people who are paying the price in Iraq, for God knows what purpose.

And of the horrendous number of Iraqi fatalities caused by devastation we have foisted on that country.

And most of the dead, like the happy shopping revelers in the picture, are not to blame for what's going on around them.

For in contrast to the blessings we as a people still share, in Iraq we've done nothing but stir up a caldron, which will probably keep boiling long after we've moved on to bigger and better projects to introduce democracy to countries we neither care deeply about nor understand.

Jack Eisenberg

Baltimore

Extending the right to marriage

I am a gay father with two wonderful, well-adjusted daughters, age 10 and 12. My partner and I share custody of them with my ex-wife.

We have been together for four years, sharing our home and life openly. My girls understand that, because of discrimination, my partner and I cannot marry.

We are a happy and healthy family but we feel the sting of discrimination.

My partner and I cannot be on the same automobile insurance policy unless we pay to have our vehicles re-titled.

Until my partner went to work for a company which offers same-sex partner benefits, we couldn't be on the same health insurance policy. I am unable to add my partner to the deed of my house unless I pay additional fees and taxes.

None of these things would be issues if the law recognized the life we share, in the same way the law recognizes heterosexual couples.

And these are just a few examples of the ways excluding same-sex couples from marriage protections affects my family.

I implore readers to open their minds and hearts to the idea that non-traditional families are still families worth protection in the eyes of the law.

And I think one critical misunderstanding many Americans have about this issue is the idea that same-sex couples are asking for the right to religious marriage. We are not.

We simply are asking for the right to legal marriage. While religion is an important part of some of our lives, we wouldn't expect a religious institution to perform a ceremony it didn't endorse.

We just want equal treatment under the law.

Jeffrey S. Owens

Baltimore

Tuesday's Sun featured a front-page article about a gay couple from Baltimore - Glen Dehn and Charles Blackburn - who are plaintiffs in a lawsuit attempting to force the courts to legalize gay marriage in Maryland ("Still standing up for rights, respect," Nov. 28).

As it happens, I know both men; I worked with one, and I have been a guest in their stunning, renovated townhouse in Bolton Hill.

Although I have always supported gay rights, as a practical matter I have previously argued that liberals ought to not push this issue for fear of alienating swing voters.

But when the story of gay marriage is personalized as it is in the story of Mr. Dehn and Mr. Blackburn, it becomes unacceptable to make such shabby political compromises.

Of course we should have gay marriage in America.

Devoted, loving couples like this one are precisely what we need more of in this society.

It is time liberals stopped equivocating on this issue.

It is high time we stood up for gay marriage. We owe it to Glen and Charles.

Larry DeWitt

Baltimore

GRAPHIC: PHOTO(S)

A couple holds hands during a rally last summer at the Clarence Mitchell Courthouse. The rally was a demonstration in favor of marriage rights for gay couples.

JED KIRSCHBAUM : SUN PHOTOGRAPHER

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