

Views of The Capital Times

Welfare reform: the moral challenge

The great development in the sphere of politics and policy last week was not Bill Clinton's jingoistic call for drug testing of inmates, nor was it Bob Dole's feeble attempt to convince Republicans that he is a viable presidential candidate.

What mattered last week, above all else, was the decision of a pair of Washington bureaucrats to stop lying about the welfare reform plan that the United States is about to implement.

Welfare reform has been a political football for more than a decade now, since Tommy Thompson and other opportunists decided to use it as a tool to divide the American people. The scam was never a partisan endeavor, because Democrats such as Clinton were only too happy to jump aboard the bandwagon — so long as the promise of votes was in the offering.

Despite Clinton's cynicism, however, he assembled a capable staff to deal with welfare issues within his Department of Health and Human Services.

But Clinton did not listen to HHS Secretary Donna Shalala or her staff during the critical final stages of this summer's debate over whether to sign the welfare reform bill. Instead, he turned to pollster Dick Morris who, between romps with a prostitute, advised the president to sign the bill.

In the days following Clinton's collapse of principle, there were indications that the administration still intended to try to maintain the 60-year-old social "safety net" that guarantees food, shelter and health care to America's poorest children. At the Democratic National Convention, Shalala promised Wisconsin delegates that the administration would not allow the implementation of GOP plans to gut the food stamp program, undermine Medicaid and eliminate the pledge of universal protection for our children.

Now, however, as the implementation of the welfare reform plan begins, it has become clear that Shalala's own staff no longer has faith in her promises.

Last Wednesday, the Clinton administration's senior advisers on welfare reform, HHS Assistant Secretaries Peter Edelman and Mary Jo Bane, resigned their positions in protest against the process being used to implement welfare reform. Their message was summed up in a memorandum that Edelman, a longtime friend of the president, sent to his staff.

It read: "I have devoted the last 30-plus years to doing whatever I could to help in reducing poverty in America. I believe the recently enacted welfare bill goes in the opposite direction."

Coming on the heels of the resignation of HHS analyst Wendell Primus — whose research has shown that the welfare reform bill will push 1 million additional children into poverty — the signal from the people who best understand welfare reform is this:

The current plan will not work. It will destroy families. It will drive children into poverty. It is morally wrong.

It is so morally wrong, in fact, that principled members of the Clinton administration have now quit in protest.

Now, President Clinton and Secretary Shalala — along with Bob Dole and Jack Kemp, both of whom earlier this year expressed reservations about this plan — face a blunt choice.

They can continue the political charade. They can continue to lie to the American people and claim that this welfare reform will work. Or they can step back from the precipice of disaster and form a new approach.

The hour is getting late. The question, put clearly and without equivocation by Edelman, Bane and Primus, is this:

Will our politicians continue to place their own careers above the good of the nation? Will they sacrifice our children on the altar of political opportunism?

The views in this space are provided by The Capital Times, Dane County's afternoon newspaper.

Congressional candidates share environmental views

Back in July, the Wisconsin State Journal asked the two candidates for Wisconsin's 2nd Congressional District seat to write a series of six columns on issues confronting southern Wisconsin voters in this election year.

A week ago, Scott Klug and Paul Soglin described what they believe Congress can do to improve the economic health of cities and rural areas.

This week, Klug and Soglin respond to the question: "What are the most important

pieces of environmental legislation passed by Congress in the past five years? What environmental bills should have been passed, but weren't? If you're elected, what will be the most important thing you can do at the federal level to protect the land, water and air of the of the 2nd Congressional District?"

Answers to the next four questions — on the federal deficit, taxes, campaign finance reform, and family values — will appear in the Sunday Forum section each week through Oct. 13.

On Friday, Oct. 18, Soglin and Klug will appear at a citizens forum sponsored by We The People/Wisconsin, to be broadcast live in the Madison area by WISC-TV, Wisconsin Public Television and Wisconsin Public Radio.

Sponsors for We The People/Wisconsin are the Miller Brewing Company, Wisconsin Education Association Council, Wisconsin Power & Light Foundation, Blue Cross and Blue Shield United of Wisconsin and the Pew Center for Civic Journalism.

Records reveal what opponent believes

By Paul Soglin

House Resolution 280 is an attempt to cull the National Park System of cultural and historical parks, as well as national parks near cities. I oppose it; Klug voted for it. It was opposed by the Sierra Club, the League of Conservation Voters, and the National Parks and Conservation Association.

Supporters of the bill argue there are too many parks and not enough money. For a federal government trying to balance a budget and preserve our natural heritage, there is a solution. I support House Resolution 2181, which raises admissions and concession fees so that our parks can be better managed financially and environmentally.

I oppose the so-called "Logging Without Laws" bill, House Resolution 1158, and always supported the repeal of the Salvage Timber rider. Klug voted for this bill, which a Wisconsin State Journal editorial called, "a destructive, expensive piece of legislation (that) opened these public lands up to environmentally disastrous clear-cutting."

Only after pressure from environmentalists, Madison newspapers and myself did Klug switch his vote belatedly. Klug publicized his repeal efforts, while concealing his original support. He did the same with the Northeast Dairy Compact. After voting for the worst blow to Wisconsin dairy farmers in years, Klug retracted and joined Republicans and Democrats to ask the president to stop the dairy compact. The others all had clean hands — they voted against the compact.

The provisions of the Contract with America were damaging to the environment. Klug supported them. I opposed them. Klug voted for House Resolution 9, a bill combining "takings," "risk assessment" and "cost benefit" legislation. In addition to passing each bill sepa-

Soglin, an attorney who has served as mayor of Madison from 1973-79 and 1989 to the present, is a Democrat.



Paul Soglin

rately, the House combined House Resolutions 925, 1022 and 926, making it difficult to enact new environmental regulations, while allowing the Office of Management and Budget to block health and safety protections. In voting for House Resolution 9, Klug advanced the radical right agenda to dismantle 25 years of environmental protections.

"The polls and our instincts tell us that Americans do not want to roll back the environmental gains of the past 25 years. To stop the assaults, we need to change the members of Congress," says Deb Callahan, president of the League of Conservation Voters.

The Republican Congress under former Senate Majority Leader Bob Dole, House Speaker Newt Gingrich and Scott Klug voted to cut environmental enforcement resources by 25 percent. Klug does the best job of describing his own environmental record as a "paler shade of green."

I am one of America's elected officials who believes we have responsibility to assure people that the air they breathe is pure, the water they drink is clean and the land they live on is safe from hazard.

Use 'green scissors' to trim spending

By Scott Klug

What type of environmental agenda attracts members of Congress from both sides of the aisle? It's a common-sense approach that looks at long-term benefits to both taxpayers and the environment. Here's my plan:

First: Eliminate government projects that are harmful to both the economy and environment. In Congress, it's possible to cut wasteful spending by wielding "green scissors."

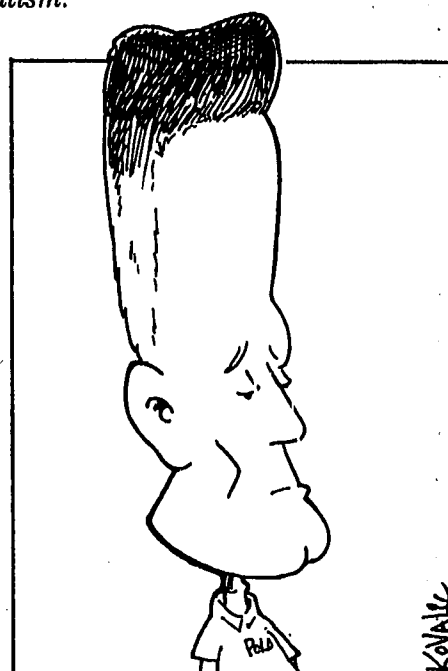
With environmental groups, including Friends of the Earth, the National Wildlife Federation and Sierra Club — and taxpayer guardians such as the Concord Coalition and National Taxpayers Union — we authored the Green Scissors Report, an Earth-friendly plan to reduce the deficit.

The Green Scissors Report has inspired some major legislative victories, including a number with which I was personally involved. In 1996, I successfully placed a moratorium on mining applications for public lands. With almost \$2 billion worth of minerals mined from federal lands each year — and no payment to the government in return — the moratorium temporarily halts a huge taxpayer rip-off.

Past Green Scissors reforms have put a stop to other pork-laden programs. In 1995, I eliminated a nuclear boondoggle called the Gas Turbine Modular Helium Reactor and in 1993, cut the wasteful Advanced Solid Rocket Motor program. Total savings: more than \$4 billion. The Green Scissors approach proves that deficit reduction and environmental protection can go hand-in-hand.

Second: Support research for energy sources that protect air, water and wilderness. By reducing our dependence on fossil fuels, we also lessen the threat to public lands.

Republican Klug, a former TV journalist, has represented Wisconsin's 2nd District in Congress since he was first elected in 1990.



Scott Klug

The U.S. House recently passed my amendment to restore \$42.1 million to solar, wind and renewable energy programs. In the meantime, I worked to defend 5.7 million acres of Utah wilderness and Alaska's Arctic National Wildlife Refuge against mining and oil drilling. In the future, environmental protection must be matched with a search for renewable energy sources.

Third: Preserve environmental programs that have worked in the past. The Clean Water Act is one of our country's most successful environmental bills. When Congress tried to weaken the Clean Water Act last year, I said no. I voted against final passage of the Republican leadership's plan because it revoked too many important anti-pollution and wetland protection rules. This fall, as Congress moves toward the Clean Water Act's reauthorization, I will work with both parties to preserve it.

Future environmental protection will demand more hard work, common sense and bipartisan cooperation. When it comes to protecting the environment, I'll keep working with Republicans and Democrats to clean up the beach — rather than draw lines in the sand.

Two views on the success of minority students

Painting the outside won't fix the inside

By John Y. Odom

Madison is one of America's great cities — unless you're a black or Hispanic student, whose historic grade point average is "D." The dichotomy reminds me of a line from the show "Don't Bother Me, I Can't Cope" — "You say this breeze feels good and you turn your thermostat to 63. What feels good to you, feels like pneumonia to me!"

To its credit, Madison's leadership cannot be accused of apathy. There is a 30-year history of focus on minority student issues in Madison, and now the progenitors of the Schools of Hope project, bless their hearts, are re-focusing on the gulf between the achievement levels of white and black and Hispanic students. (Hundreds of people were involved in creating the Schools of Hope recommendations. Typically Madison, it is presumed that mass involvement produces better decisions — as if wisdom and effective educational strategies are influenced by popular opinion.)

Nonetheless, the project goals are worthy and they establish measurable outcomes and a timeline. The project's fatal flaw is a disconnect between those goals and their supporting activities. The objectives for students, teachers and administrators are directed toward human behavior modification rather than organizational transformation. Therefore, they do not lead logically to goal accomplishment.

For 30 years, district taxpayers have paid for answers. Before the total student population of color had reached 4 percent (it is now more than 25 percent), efforts were under way.

In the late 1980s, the (recently disbanded) Superintendent's Human Relations Advisory Council was formed and the district established its (recently disbanded) Department of Human Relations. In the mid '70s, Ald. Eugene Parks challenged the district to improve minority student achievement. The Human Relations Department determined that while overall minority student achievement fell far below white norms, Madison-born black students ranked lower than did district black students born elsewhere. Meanwhile, an alphabet soup of new programs were created.

After Lincoln Middle School was

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GUEST COLUMN

closed in 1980, parents in South Madison filed a civil rights complaint with the federal government. The district went into voluntary compliance and chose a paired-schools option over the objection of all of the people of color on advisory committees.

Three years after the paired schools were in operation, an evaluation demonstrated that paired schools had no positive impact on the grades of students of color. In response, the district chose to maintain the pairs and to add Minority Student Achievement funds to support school-based initiatives. (The backers of paired schools never understood that the most segregating aspect of American life is not who sits next to who in school but how literate and numerate one is as an adult.)

While all preceding efforts made contributions, they, too, were flawed. No program thus far has been expansive enough to affect every school in the district, let alone every classroom. Not yet has one initiative been taken seriously enough to inspire every principal to align behind it, let alone every teacher. No program thus far has sustainability — the ability to persist, among competing priorities such as budget cuts and contract negotiations.

Without profound structural changes that transcend the behaviors of individuals within the organization, change is dependent on the whims of people.

Without an impact on governance, certification, compensation, the calendar (why are we still dismissing kids to plant crops in the summer?) and the school day, recommendations for everyone to try harder is equivalent to improving a car's performance by re-upholstering the seats.

For many, the Schools of Hope recommendations sound innovative. For others, they are sound and fury; deja vu all over again. We are now to wait another four years before the mean grade point average of black and Hispanic high schoolers approaches "C" or until it's time to launch another ill-fated project.

About the time the Schools of Hope recommendations were being made public, Dane County Circuit Judge Paul Higginbotham made a predictable (and probably constitutionally correct) decision on a transforming education initiative involving a similar Milwaukee student population. In it, Higginbotham reaffirmed the opinion that public funds cannot be allocated to support parochial choice options in Milwaukee.

As the gap between black and white achievement expands over decades, it is well past the time for public schools to prove that they can do this job, or to admit that they cannot. The admission will be in the results. Before more students of color are given up to the scrap-

Specialty schools can breed success

NEW YORK — Driving along the edge of East Harlem, Seymour Fliegel points to a public school building, says, "There's an interesting story," and tells it.

In 1934, when the city had three kinds of high schools — commercial, general and academic — an Italian-American politician named LaGuardia gave an elite academic high school to what was then an Italian-American neighborhood. In those days there were people who wondered aloud what Italian-Americans would do with such an institution. Never mind. For years it excelled, and not just for Italian-Americans, as a graduate named Pat Moynihan can attest.

But time passed, East Harlem changed, and by 1982 the graduation rate was 7 percent and attendance averaged 44 percent. But the school was the state basketball champion, so there was resistance to Fliegel's proposal that the building be given to the school district educators who specialize in creating alternative schools. Resistance was overcome and three schools sprouted in the building — an elementary school, a math-science junior high and the Manhattan Center for Science and Math, which four years later graduated every member of its first class, all of whom went to college.

What is the secret of such success? Fliegel is a former teacher and superintendent now associated with the Center for Educational Innovation at the nation's most fecund think tank, the Manhattan Institute. He says there is no secret. Just give a school autonomy in exchange for accountability and allow it to have a single vision embraced by pupils, parents and teachers.

Which brings us to Fliegel's destination today, a 11-story building on 106th Street, where the sparkling top three floors are the home of The Young Women's Leadership School. It opened two weeks ago to its first class, 50 seventh-graders, mostly black and Hispanic, immaculate in the uniforms they unanimously choose to wear.

Naturally the New York Civil Liberties Union and the National Organization for Women object to the city allowing a single-sex public school. Why have these organizations worked them-



GEORGE F. WILL

selves into a swivet? "That's what they do," is the scientific explanation of a laconic, young female science teacher at TYWLS, fresh from Berkeley.

Call that the Oscar Hammerstein explanation, which is correct: Fish gotta swim, birds gotta fly and the likes of NOW gotta litigate. Their organizational DNA dictates a damn-the-evidence, full-ideological-speed-ahead objection to single-sex institutions. (The theory is that they violate prohibitions on discrimination based on sex, and the Constitution's guarantee of "equal protection of the laws.") Never mind the abundantly demonstrated fact that many young girls are less reticent and more apt to flourish academically in a single-sex setting than in the hormonal hurricane of a coeducational high school.

Get this. About 91,000 of the more than 1 million pupils in this city's 1,095 public schools do not even have desks. Classes are being held in locker rooms. And what makes the civil liberties fetishists furious? A few parents and their daughters can exercise the freedom to choose TYWLS.

However, various little flowers like that are sprouting through cracks in the concrete — cracks, that is, in the bureaucratic slabs of public education. Fliegel and his fellow innovators have planted 52 imaginative schools in 20 buildings in East Harlem. And last week Mayor Rudolph Giuliani endorsed acceptance of an offer made five years ago by this city's Catholic archdiocese: Catholic schools will educate 1,000 public school students who are in the bottom 5 percent of their classes.

Because civil liberties groups object that any mechanism for using public funds for this would be unconstitutional "establishment" of religion, private funding may have to be found. If so, it will be, and the outcome will be (redundant) proof that public schools as traditionally configured and tenaciously defended by traditionalists are not producing the best possible results.

The 50 fortunate girls walking the pink hallways of their new school are a little platoon illustrating a large event — the end of an era of public policy. The assumption was that there can be national and material solutions to society's big problems, that the national government can supply what poor people need, which supposedly is a materially improved social environment.

The premise of people like Fliegel is that many big problems begin with a scarcity of inner resources in little people, a scarcity that can be cured only by bite-size programs. Glenn Loury, a black professor at Boston University who writes superbly about such things, titled his latest book "One By One from the Inside Out." That is the slogan of today's real reformers, and could be the motto of TYWLS.

Pulitzer Prize-winning columnist Will writes for the Washington Post.