

THE STATE
Journal Register
“The Journal paper was always my friend...”
— A. Lincoln, June 18, 1864



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“We want the Register to be the people’s paper.”
— Publisher’s statement June 19, 1881

OUR OPINION
Why have death penalty?

TWO WEEKS AGO a Chicago jury found Juan Luna guilty of the 1993 murders of seven people at a fast-food restaurant in suburban Palatine. It was an unimaginably cold-blooded and needless crime — victims pleaded for their lives and offered no resistance before being shot or stabbed to death in the restaurant’s walk-in freezer.

This was a textbook case for supporters of capital punishment. A crime this heinous is exactly why the death penalty is still on the books in Illinois.

So when the same 12-member jury that convicted Luna convened last week to decide whether he was deserving of the death penalty, the odds seemed overwhelmingly to favor Luna being sent to death row.

But that is not what happened. A lone holdout prevented the jury from reaching the unanimous decision required for a sentence of death in Illinois. By a vote of 11-1 in favor of the death penalty, Juan Luna’s life was spared, and he will spend the rest of his life in prison.

We have long been skeptical of the fairness and efficacy of capital punishment in general, and especially in Illinois, which has a disgraceful track record of condemning innocent people. After the decision in the Luna sentencing, we believe the state — its prosecutors, its lawmakers and its citizens — must ask itself a fundamental question about capital punishment in Illinois: If this case was determined by a jury to not warrant a death sentence, what case should?

CAN ILLINOIS ever believe that justice is being served if, at some point in the future, a convicted murderer of five people — or six, or four, or three — is put to death while the killer of seven remains alive on a life sentence?

The statements of the jurors after the Luna sentencing were telling. The lone holdout was a female juror who also needed coaxing to find Luna guilty the previous week. But after just two hours deliberating in the sentencing, the other 11 jurors decided to not attempt to persuade her to change her vote.

“We didn’t gang up on her because that’s not right,” juror Tim Beltran told The Chicago Tribune. “You don’t want to force her into anything.”

In other words, while the other 11 felt death was the appropriate sentence, they also believed it unjust to make someone else complicit in that death. In the previous week’s deliberations, the other 11 could cite evidence presented by the prosecution to make fact-based arguments with their colleague to decide guilt or innocence. Attempting to persuade her to vote for Luna’s death would have amounted to an argument based largely in emotion, and the other jurors were not willing to take that step. Inflicting another person with a lifetime of a guilty conscience would have added another victim to Luna’s crime.

YET THIS same scenario will present itself over and over again for as long as Illinois continues to sanction capital punishment. And it will be impossible to argue the justice of capital punishment for defendants accused of lesser crimes than Luna’s.

In early 2000, Gov. George Ryan placed a moratorium on executions in Illinois. At the time, 13 condemned prisoners had been exonerated. Even a political pragmatist like Ryan found the decision to uphold an execution of a convicted killer a horribly wrenching experience. Ryan’s moratorium remains in place, and we shudder to think of the uproar that will come when Illinois revives the system that nearly killed 13 innocent people.

The Luna jury deserves praise for not trying to coerce a fellow juror into adding to the death toll of Luna’s crime. We think it’s time that Illinois act to ensure that no other juror ever be forced to make such a choice.

WRITE TO US

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THE STATE JOURNAL-REGISTER

CHRIS BRITT



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LETTERS, FAXES & E-MAIL

Praise, don’t criticize, Benedictine for UA efforts

The closing of Ursuline Academy marks a sad final chapter in the history of this venerable institution, which has served so many Springfield families over the years.

But it is flat wrong to blame Benedictine University for its demise. Without a generous subsidy from Benedictine, Ursuline would have been forced to close its doors a couple of years ago.

Benedictine should be praised, not criticized, for its good-faith effort to revive the institution.

Don Fouts
Springfield

Let’s have a thorough probe of Jones, utilities

To us mere civilians with little or no knowledge of how electric companies do business, the definition of “delivery charges” Ameren assesses customers seems vague.

Since Ameren sought a \$200 million increase in their delivery charges, it seems to me they owe their customers an explanation and definition of what those charges are for. How is power delivered and what does that money fund? I mean, our power lines have no moving parts to wear out, so what are those delivery charges for anyhow?

Since they received a huge profit the first quarter of 2007, it would seem all their costs are covered and then some. This whole thing smells too much like a conspiracy with payoffs and conflicts of interest.

We need a thorough investigation into this affair, including Emil Jones’ relationship to Ameren and ComEd. I would like to see a thorough investigation into his less-than-ethical conduct while in office.

David Pence
Hillsboro

‘Miles per dollar’ a more accurate E-85 standard

I purchased my 2007 Ford F-150 Flexible Fuel Vehicle (FFV) pickup truck on April 21. After filling my gas tank with gasoline for the first few fill-ups, I started filling the tank with E-85 fuel as an experiment in cost, efficiency and green-mindedness.

My owner’s manual and the vehicle’s in-

voice explained the use of E-85 fuel well, so I was prepared to carry out the experiment. My vehicle is EPA rated to deliver 14 and 18 miles per gallon in the city and on the highway, respectively, while using gasoline. The E-85 assessment is slightly lower at 10 and 13 miles per gallon, respectively.

After some initial concern, I arrived at the following conclusion: Miles per gallon might not be the best consumer index given the spiraling price of gasoline.

Since I drive mostly highway miles, my vehicle has been averaging between 16 and 17 miles per gallon. Since filling up with E-85, I have been averaging 14.5 miles per gallon under the same driving conditions. Conventional wisdom would indicate poorer performance with E-85 fuel ... until I apply my new metric: miles per dollar.

With gasoline, I have been averaging 4.9 miles per dollar. With E-85, and admittedly it is early days, I have been averaging 5.4 miles per dollar. Clearly, with a gallon of E-85 costing about 60 cents less than gasoline, I should be spending considerably less overall to drive the same number of miles. I suspect as market efficiencies continue to improve for delivering E-85 fuel to local filling stations my miles per dollar rate should continue to rise.

Corey Kirschner
Chatham

Cutting state retirees’ benefits not a solution

While The State Journal-Register should be praised for acknowledging the crisis facing Illinois Public Pension systems (“There must be pension reform,” May 9), your recent editorial mistakenly labels employees and retirees as the source of, and hence solution to, Illinois pension problems.

Employees have always paid their required pension contributions. Commission after commission has concluded that our public pension benefits in Illinois are about average — where we are below average is our funding level. There is universal agreement that the underfunding of our pension systems was caused by the state, not public employees.

To alleviate this unfunded liability, your editorial suggests cutting employee benefits. Under the Illinois Constitution, this could only be done for new hires, and therefore would not save any money in the short run. Plus, there is no justification for lowering retirement benefits even for new hires.

The average annual benefit offered to

Illinois state and local government employees and public school teachers at retirement is \$17,112. This is only \$3,422 away from the federal poverty level for a family of two.

Additionally, 78 percent of Illinois public employees and retirees do not participate in the federal Social Security System. Their public pension is the only secure retirement program they have.

The recent report issued by the Illinois Retirement Security Initiative lays out the crisis facing Illinois and the misdirected attempt at labeling retirees and active employees as the cause. Your editorial dismisses this report based on the organizations supporters; however, what is irrefutable are the data and conclusions drawn in the report.

Simply slashing already minimal benefits for retirees will not solve the state’s pension problems while leaving taxpayers to sustain our aged population when they are left relying on the state for support.

Jourlande Gabriel
Director of the Illinois
Retirement Security Initiative

Lawsuits that slow ethanol push hurt everybody

There’s an old story about a dispute over the ownership of a cow. One farmer pulled on one end of the cow and another pulled on the other end, while the lawyer milked her.

There are about 5,000 more lawyers in Illinois than there are farms. Like everybody else, farmers need a good lawyer now and then. Happily, most of them are good.

I’d rate those lawyers that are constantly suing business people, entrepreneurs and others as “not good.” They claim they are protecting the consumer but I think they are harming us all. Farmers, as businesspeople and consumers, need innovative and new outlets for their production.

American consumers need the home-grown energy. The questionable lawsuits that slow building new ethanol facilities hamper almost everybody.

Recently, The State Journal-Register reported that a suing lawyer couldn’t understand why an ethanol plant should be built in the middle of a corn field. Coal mines are built on coal fields. Doesn’t logic say the cornfields are the place for ethanol production?

Mick Bray
Modesto

Dynamics of welfare states

WASHINGTON — Arson is a form of commentary favored by the French left, so at least 1,000 vehicles were torched by disappointed supporters of the Socialist presidential candidate Segolene Royal after she was defeated 53-47 by Nicolas Sarkozy. Last spring, rioting was the left’s economic argument when the government proposed, then retreated from, legislation that would have made it somewhat easier for businesses to fire younger workers in the first two years of employment.



GEORGE WILL

The idea behind the legislation was that employers would be more likely to hire workers if it were not a legal ordeal to fire them. The rioters were, of course, mostly young.

France’s unemployment rate is 8.7 percent, nearly double the U.S. rate of 4.5 percent. Among persons under age 25, a cohort that supported Royal, the rate is 21.2 percent, and is apt to stay there unless Sarkozy can implement reforms that irritate rioters.

Sarkozy has a mandate from an 84 percent turnout. Seen, however, in the flickering glow of smoldering Peugeots, his chances of fundamentally reforming France seem fragile, and his idea of fundamental reform — he remains an ardent protectionist — seems pallid. Nevertheless, his attempt merits Americans’ attention because he is confronting, in an especially virulent form, a problem that is becoming more acute here. The problem is the cultural contradictions of the welfare state.

Two decades ago, the sociologist Daniel Bell wrote about “the cultural contradictions of capitalism” to express this worry: Capitalism flourishes because of virtues that its flourishing undermines. Its success requires thrift, industriousness and deferral of gratifications, but that success produces abundance, expanding leisure and the emancipation of appetites, all of which weaken capitalism’s moral prerequisites.

The cultural contradictions of welfare states are comparable. Such states presuppose economic dynamism sufficient to generate investments, job-creation, corporate profits and individuals’ incomes from which come tax revenues needed to fund entitlements. But welfare states produce in citizens an entitlement mentality and a low pain threshold. That mentality inflames appetites for more entitlements, broadly construed to include all government benefits and protections that contribute to welfare understood as material well-being, enhanced security and enlarged leisure.

The low pain threshold causes a ruinous flinch from the rigors, insecurities, uncertainties and dislocations inherent in the creative destruction of dynamic capitalism. The flinch takes the form of protectionism, regulations and other government-imposed inefficiencies that impede the economic growth that the welfare state requires.

So welfare states are, paradoxically, both enervating and energizing — and infantilizing. They are enervating because they foster dependency; they are energizing because they aggravate an aggressive (think of burning Peugeots) sense of entitlement; they are infantilizing because it is infantile to will an end without willing the means to that end, and people who desire welfare states increasingly desire relief from the rigors necessary to finance them.

Sarkozy wants to lower taxes, including inheritance taxes, and eliminate the tax on overtime work. That tax, along with government snoops patrolling companies’ parking lots to detect anti-social industriousness, enforces the 35-hour workweek. He wants to do what Margaret Thatcher did after she was elected in 1979 because Britain was weary of being governed less by parliament than by unions.

During the 25 years that the French left and some right-wing nationalists have spent reviling “cold, heartless impoverishing Anglo-American capitalism,” France’s per capita GDP has slumped from seventh in the world to 17th. Sarkozy’s task is to persuade the French that their government’s solicitousness on behalf of their security and leisure explains the work they must now do to reduce their insecurity.

George Will is a columnist for the Washington Post Writers Group.

\$500 tax credit doesn’t constitute ‘double-dipping’

I’d like to respond to a letter in Friday’s paper from Irvin Smith regarding the “double-dipping” Wilhite family that sends their children to Catholic schools.

I didn’t read the article in which the Wilhites were interviewed, and I’m at a loss for how Smith came up with the \$16,000 figure he offered. I take issue with his final sentence in which he questions whether the state should subsidize private/parochial education when health care and public education needs money.

The K-12 Education Expense Credit was first offered in 2000. Two of my children attended Catholic schools from kindergarten through 12th grade. Since 2000, the K-12 Education Expense Credit reduced my state tax liability by \$3,385. During that same period, I paid \$21,054 to School District 186 through my property taxes in addition to more than \$35,000 to the Catholic school system for tuition.

A \$3,385 tax reduction versus \$21,054 for services never rendered. In this light would Smith accuse parents of children attending public schools of being “double-dippers”?



Jonathan Kirshner/The State Journal-Register

All Kids provides Matthew Wilhite and his wife, Erin Sullivan, with comprehensive health insurance for their four children for \$80 a month.

Springfield is very fortunate to have outstanding public and private schools staffed by dedicated professionals. It’s the Wilhites’ choice to educate their children the way they are but to suggest

they’re “double-dippers” because of a \$500 tax credit is ludicrous.

David Simmons
Springfield