Raising teacher salaries will head off disaster Series: LETTERS

[CITY Edition]

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Editor: Failure to raise Florida teacher salaries to the national average this legislative session would be akin to ignoring the O rings before Challenger launched. Florida has a chance now to head off a disastrous shortage of teachers only if it acts now - while there's still time.

Cosmetic increases like `incentive pay` just won't cut it. Attend, right now, to the 3- to 5-year career teacher about to leave. Reach, right now, the teacher who has 15 years in Florida and is being wooed to take their math skills to industry. Catch the attention, right now, of the graduating high school senior who envisions the lucrative offers of a career in business.

There is no need in Florida greater than education for all its citizens, from preschool to retirees - education for every other endeavor this state faces during unparalleled growth. Competitive pay for its teachers is

Florida's first step, or the second step will end in a tumultuous tumble into a quagmire of problems that will drown us all. Beatrice Griswold, president Pinellas Classroom Teachers Association, Largo Articles `infuriating'

Editor: Re: the two articles by Maria D. Vesperi on Terry and Carol Lynn Fergerson and the cocaine charge. I have never read anything that infuriated me so much. I'm mad as hell. I have never read anything that was so completely biased and totally in favor of two ``nice`` people selling a ``little`` cocaine.

I can see only one point of any merit in these articles, and that is our justice system is not the best - but it is the only one we have.

I do not think three years in jail is too harsh a sentence. This couple seemed well aware that they were breaking the law. I have more sympathy for the all-out bad guy drug dealers - at least they make no pretense and are fully aware of what they are doing.

First-time offenders are the ones who should receive the harsh sentence. Would not the Fergersons still be selling cocaine if they had not been caught? Are we all entitled to sell a little cocaine to meet our bills? Did the Fergersons expect a slap on the hand - don't do that again? All major drug dealers were at one time first-time offenders.

Every day there is a battle waging on drugs, etc. Are the Fergersons helping this movement? I should like to know who they sold drugs to and who were the users of the drugs. And where they got them. Also, did it never occur to them that their child will have to say in later life, I was born in prison while Mom was serving time on cocaine charges?

I doubt that the Fergersons will ever sell drugs again. Isn't that what we're trying to do - and have done? Parker E. Ballew, Largo

Editor: Re: Cold justice.

Well, the most liberal publication in town has sunk to a new low. Do you really expect anyone to feel sorry for these drug peddlers? How many times did they have to get caught selling cocaine to make prison time okay with you? Once is generally sufficient. Once is enough for a child to overdose. Once is enough for a person under the influence to kill innocent people with his automobile.

Let's be grateful that they were caught before it got to be gainful employment, and we didn't end up reading about their dealings with a child or a killer (as above). Especially these days when some degenerates are making a living dealing drugs to children.

It's about time the justice system started doing something right. Criminals belong in prison, even first-time offense

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criminals. They will serve as a deterrent to other fools who think they can beat the system for a buck. Cold justice indeed.

Pinellas County is taking a step in the right direction. Who knows, if the Fergersons hadn't been caught this time, there may have been another, and so on. My sincere congratulations to the state attorney's office and the judge who did their jobs. Joseph C. Casler, St. Petersburg `We're being outfoxed'

Editor: Re: The folly of a nuclear first strike, by I.F. Stone, May 2.

First, I dispute the idea/belief that the Soviets want Western Europe even if a parking lot is all that's left. If possible, they want Western Europe intact. If Europe is cleared of missiles, the Soviets could either deliver from Soviet Asia without anyone knowing until the warheads were halfway home, or deploy some of their mobile launching systems back into Soviet Europe, with the obvious consequences. Don't tell me about a treaty, not with their history of repeated, brazen violations.

Second, I dispute the idea that a limited nuclear engagement is impossible, that any strike must necessarily escalate into an all-out nuclear war. What's to stop Moscow from launching one single-warhead missile on Paris or Bonn, and turning around at the last minute to notify everyone of the ``regrettable error``? Could we really go all out against a verified single missile? I doubt it. I suspect the Soviets do too. But Western Europe would know otherwise.

Western Europe is already outgunned, and they (and we) are being outfoxed. If nuclear disarmament of Europe goes through, we're handing them Western Europe. We all know this, so we've decided to stick our heads in the sand while the clock strikes eleven. Mark McCarty, Clearwater Things to do in New York City

Editor: Re: The preppie murder, May 1.

I was upset to read that Susan Taylor Martin believes ``the case shows how hard it is to rear teen-agers in a place like Manhattan, where there are no malls, no beaches, not many places except bars and discos for young people just to hang out.``

I was born in Manhattan and have raised two boys in New York City. There are many interesting and educational things to do in New York, especially for the rich. Let me list just a few:

- 1. Health clubs which feature large indoor Olympic pools 75 feet long, exercise equipment, steam rooms, sauna and milk bars.
- 2. Indoor and outdoor tennis, indoor racquetball.
- 3. Numerous leagues to join, such as soccer, softball, bowling.
- 4. Museums Metropolitan Museum of Art, Museum of Natural History (my son was 5 when he fell in love with dinosaurs), and dozens of others too numerous to mention.
- 5. Dozens of Broadway shows and many off-Broadway shows, ballet, opera, concerts daily.
- 6. Restaurants. You can get food from any part of the world: Polynesia, Indonesia, Russia, Hungary, Poland, Germany.
- 7. The beaches of Long Island are easy to reach from Manhattan and are among the best in the United States.
- 8. Long Island has fine boating and some of the best fishing in the world.

I could go on and on but I think this should give Ms. Taylor some alternatives to the bar scene. Ethel Albert, Crystal River Living Will can be overridden

Editor: Did you know that even though you may have signed a Living Will (Declaration), under the present laws of the state of Florida, you are not protected from being force-fed, even if you become terminally ill? The Department of Health and Rehabilitative Services (HRS) interprets current law so as to require that a nursing home patient must be given artificial sustenance, when necessary, or must otherwise be discharged from the nursing home, regardless of the patient's wishes, even doctor's orders, or the wishes of the patient's family. That's right, even though you may have signed a Living Will, you are not protected.

If you want the right to be free of these invasive feeding tubes, should you become terminally ill, please write today to our legislators and urge them to support bills now before them that would allow a Floridian who became terminally ill to refuse these and other forced feeding treatments.

The House Bill is HB 1387 and has (just barely) passed the committees and will go for a full vote by all representatives any day now. The Senate bill is SB 898 and is stalled in the HRS Committee (of which Senator William G. ``Doc`` Myers is chairman). Please write today. Letters addressed to these legislators at The Capitol, Tallahassee, FL 32399 will reach them.

History will surely remember with harsh words the 20th century American people who, blinded by new found medical science, shackled their dying elders to their beds and chairs, forcing tubes into their noses and stomachs, all in the name of keeping these people alive for a few more days or months.

Why do I care so much? I used to be a so-called ``care giver,`` participating in forced-feedings and tying alert people to their beds and chairs so that they couldn't pull out the tubes. How could I do that to gentle, innocent (usually elderly) people who were too weak to defend themselves? Pat Ellis, St. Petersburg Premium levels `intolerable'

Editorial: Orthopedic surgeons are among the physicians in Palm Beach and Broward counties taking individual action to alert the public to the need for liability insurance relief. A major insurance carrier has threatened to cancel policies of hundreds of physicians July 1, 1987 if a premium rate increase of 30 percent is not granted. For many physicians, premiums have reached an intolerable level. Yet without insurance coverage doctors cannot practice in most hospitals. Legislative measures to insure adequate protection at affordable rates are needed immediately. Our society, representing a majority of Florida's orthopedic surgeons, is in full support of these individual physicians in our southeastern counties. Albert A. Wilson, M.D., executive secretary Florida Orthopedic Society, Tampa.

Editor: I am writing in regard to Bill Gunter's cynical column, Cures for the crisis in medical malpractice, May 4. In his column, he seeks to justify high premiums of liability insurance companies because of a few incompetent doctors (never mind that the existence of a sufficient number of these doctors has never been identified and that their atrocities are sufficiently heinous to justify the outrages of the insurance industry).

Why should John Q. Public be concerned? After all, we're talking about doctors here - rich people who gouge the public. We should be concerned because this elitist group holds our life in their hands every time we go to the hospital - like it or not. Their problems soon become ours; we then pay the piper through higher health care costs.

Moreover, other businesses are involved besides the health care industry. Every small business that in any imaginable way could incur liability (a slip on the steps, a trip over a garden hose, a slip on a puddle of water, etc.) is currently a shakedown victim of the insurance "protection" industry. Remember the TV show The Untouchables? In numerous scenes we saw the gullible corner grocer being forced to pay protection money to a guy who might be called Louie-the-Lip, an ex-boxer who now makes his living threatening to break kneecaps. Now, according to Mr. Gunter, the carriers are threatening to stop writing insurance in Florida. Oh, really?

Summon up the guts to call their bluff, Mr. Gunter. They wouldn't dare give up such a lucrative market of patsies. They certainly shouldn't worry with a friend like you in office. Greg Hawkins, Spring Hill Straight is helping

Editor: I commend you on your article, Tremendous Problem: One in 3 burglary suspects in Florida is under age 18, contained in the April 19 St. Petersburg Times. Christopher Scanlan did an excellent job of relating his complex and in-depth study.

Straight Inc. was founded in 1976 in St. Petersburg in response to the existing problems of adolescent drug use and juvenile crime. Since that time, Straight has helped over 6,000 people in the Tampa Bay area and around the country.

There is much evidence to suggest that Straight has helped to reduce the incidence of drug use and crime. For example, in the first year of operation of our Greater Washington (D.C.) program, the burglary rate in the locale in which the program is located, Fairfax County, Va., fell by 12 1/2 percent. At that time, over 50 percent of our 200 clients had committed burglaries prior to their entering Straight. A follow-up study of Straight graduates indicated that none had been involved in criminal activity since entering Straight.

As a nonprofit agency with the interests of our country and its residents in mind, we pledge our continued efforts toward helping the young people of our nation. William L. Case, president National Board of Directors, Straight, Inc. Share your opinions

We invite readers to write to us. Letters for publication should be addressed to Letters to the Editor, P.O. Box 1121, St. Petersburg, 33731. They should be brief and must include the handwritten signature and address of the writer.

Letters may be edited for clarity, taste and length. We regret that not all letters can be printed.

[Illustration]

BLACK AND WHITE CARTOON, DON ADDIS; Caption: man condemming television and promoting reading while reading `The Vanna White Story'

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