

Where credit is due



Cal Thomas

One can be sure that had things gone badly and Captain Phillips had been killed, or if the president had gone to the United Nations for a resolution condemning the kidnapping, or if the ransom was paid and the terrorists escaped, conservatives would have been all over the president, claiming they were right when they said during the campaign (as did Hillary Clinton) that Obama is too inexperienced to be in charge of America's national security.

Will conservatives now hide behind the excuse that it was the Navy Seals, the FBI and the bravery of Captain Phillips that were solely responsible for the success of the mission and that the president played only a supporting role, at best? One could make the same argument about Iraq; that the troops and not President Bush should receive sole credit for toppling Saddam Hussein and planting the first seeds of democracy there.

We have become so polarized in America that one side cannot bring itself to praise any job done well by the other. In fact, the idea of "sides" further divides us in ways that are not beneficial to the country. Polls will now be taken that will probably show a rise in public confidence about Obama's ability to handle our national defense. Would someone argue if he had failed and his numbers declined that somehow an improvement in Republican poll numbers would make us safer? The last I checked, terrorists were equal opportunity killers.

The hijacking of the merchant ship and the kidnapping of Captain Phillips are two more pieces in the much larger combat operation against terrorists (or as the administration has suggested calling it, "overseas contingency operation"). What comes next is equally important.

The United States should start calling these "pirates" by their true name. They are Islamic terrorists who make millions in ransom from ship hijackings and kidnappings. They don't buy fancy cars and big houses like members of some drug cartels. Instead, they

use the money to finance terrorism around the world. Our notion of pirates is of a "Peg-Leg Pete"-type with an eye patch, a parrot on his shoulder and a cup of rum in his hand; more of a character than a killer. That's not the profile of Somali pirates.

There is word from some of the terrorists that they plan revenge. On Monday, a few of them fired mortars at the Mogadishu Airport just as Rep. Donald Payne's plane was taking off.

Payne, (D-NJ), the highest-level U.S. official to visit Somalia in years, was in Somalia to meet with the country's prime minister and other Somali officials to discuss ways to combat the growing pirate-terrorist problem.

The Obama administration is reportedly going to help Somalia form its own Coast Guard so that it can defend itself from terrorists and lessen their threat to merchant ships. This, as well as a plan to put marshals on the vessels to deter future ship seizures, is a good start, but why wait for these goals to be accomplished? Right now Somali terrorists are believed to be holding more than 200 hostages from other nations. If they won't agree to release these people now, how about a little military intervention? Let us demonstrate in no uncertain terms that America is not to be trifled with.

There was a time when few would dare harm an American for fear of retaliation. In recent years, that fear has subsided and now some terrorists may think they'll get a free ride with President Obama and his party, which is too often seen as preferring dithering to decisiveness, hand-wringing to neck-wringing; U.N. resolutions to American resolve and purposeful action.

The best thing the president could do for the country — and himself — is to prove he is not a milksop. And if the president takes on the terrorists, he should have the full support of all Americans, conservatives included. We can argue about the Left's hypocrisy later. When it comes to combating terrorists, we are all in this together.

The ABA and judicial nominees

The New York Times said in an editorial Tuesday:

President Barack Obama has decided to restore the American Bar Association's traditional role in vetting judicial nominees. There is a real value in having knowledgeable lawyers who have firsthand experience with the justice system vetting prospective judges.

As the ABA resumes this role, a new study suggests that it may have a liberal bias. There is little support for this claim. Indeed, there are signs that the group has been cowed by conservative critics in recent years into approving less-than-qualified nominees. The ABA needs to ensure that its evaluators make assessments based on the nominees' merits, not on political pressure.

The ABA reviewed prospective judges at the White House's request for decades, until the Bush administration — responding to conservative charges that the group had a liberal bias — stopped asking for its input. The Senate Judiciary Committee continued to seek the ABA's evaluations.

A study by a University of Georgia professor and two other political scientists reviewed those ratings from 1985 to 2008 and found that President Bill Clinton's nominees were 14 percent more likely than the Republican presidents' choices to receive a "well qualified" rating.

Rather than being a result of bias, this disparity may reflect the degree to which recent Republican presidents put ideology ahead of excellence in selecting judges. Based on the last eight years, it is especially hard to argue that the ABA has been a liberal force on judicial selection. The group regularly gave "well qualified" and "qualified" ratings to some of President George W. Bush's most deeply flawed nominees.

The ABA gave its highest rating to Leslie Southwick, a nominee to the New Orleans-based U.S. 5th Circuit Court of Appeals. As a state court judge in Mississippi, Southwick signed on to terrible rulings, including one in favor of a white social worker who was fired for calling a black colleague a "good ole nigger" and one that berated a bisexual woman for having a homosexual relationship and took her child away.

Letters to the Editor policy

GALLUP — The Independent encourages letters to the editor, which are published twice weekly — Wednesdays and Saturdays.

Letters must include writer's name, address and phone number although only the name and community of residence will be published.

Letters may not exceed 500 words. Letters may be edited for space and clarity. The Independent may choose not to print any letter for any reason.

Anyone may submit a letter, and there is no charge for publication.

Letters may be mailed, delivered in person, faxed or e-mailed to: Editor, The Independent, P.O. Box 1210, Gallup, New Mexico 87305, (505) 722-5750 (fax); editorialgallup@yahoo.com (e-mail).

Thank you Cancer Center

To Editor:

I want to thank everyone at New Mexico Cancer Center for their expertise and kindness while I underwent treatment there.

Although Dr. Long is in the process of relocating from Gallup, I thank him for his compassion and expertise — you're the best, Dr. Long! Thanks also to Paul, Ronna, Earline, CJ, Shirley, Emery and Richard. You all helped me to the best of your ability, and some! I appreciate every one of you.

The residents of Gallup and the surrounding area are very fortunate to have such a wonderful facility available to them, if the need arises. The employees at New Mexico Cancer Center are amazing and I'll never forget them. Thank you so much!

Marcia Heifner Gallup

Uranium not DOA

To Editor:

Thanks for your article dated March 26 ("Is uranium DOA? Official: HRI's Churchrock uranium project on hold"). The article presented a very good overview of the current situation, but never really answered the titular question. The answer is "No. Uranium's not DOA."

My company Uranium Resources, Inc. (URI) is committed to the renewal of uranium mining in New Mexico because it will produce good jobs at good wages, contribute substantially to the state's economy, and can be done with safeguards to protect workers and the natural environment.

We have been working diligently — and will continue to work — toward future operations in New Mexico. Ending the joint venture with ITOCHU will not further delay our project. We are still waiting to receive a decision from the 10th Circuit Court in Denver regarding our New Mexico projects and we continue to watch the uranium market very closely.

We also continue to make every effort to work with community leaders. We respect the Navajo Nation's ban and understand why it is in place. The uranium mining industry has a long history in New Mexico and not all of that history is good. While the companies interested in pursuing mining today are not the

Letters to the editor

same companies that created past issues, we understand that we have an obligation to help make amends for those mistakes. We hope that we are given the opportunity to do so, and to demonstrate the significant safety and environmental measures that are in place today to prevent such issues in the future.

URI is a responsible corporate partner in the communities in which we operate. We believe in open and transparent communications and encourage residents to learn more about our operations by visiting www.uraniumresources.com.

Rick Van Horn URI

What glimmer of hope?

To Editor:

After reading the April 11 editorial in the Independent I was reminded how the more things change the more they stay the same. The editorial counted failings of the present city administration and staff while seeing a glimmer of hope for the future.

Unfortunately, I don't share that hope for several reasons, chief among them being that for some time Gallup elected officials have not understood that the purpose of that body is to develop policy and vision for the future of the city. Rather than the deep thought and citizen input that is required for a strategic type of city plan, and the confidence in the city manager and utilities manager to carry that plan out, the mayor and councilors consider themselves the "bosses" of the city and as such wish to oversee each and every action of the employees. Because of this they really do not wish to employ highly qualified managers that might demand salaries that may be embarrassing to their administration when the Independent, as it periodically does, storms into City Hall and demands pay information from finance.

The city of Gallup has so much potential and the joint utilities are one of its treasures. At some time in the past there were true visionaries that stepped up to the plate and provided leadership with the intent of improving Gallup for all of its citizens. Sadly those days seem to be long gone and whether they ever return is anyone's guess.

Robert (Buck) Monday Rio Rancho

Debt reflection

To Editor:

The financial crisis we are cur-

rently in was precipitated by the meltdown of the subprime mortgage market. Millions of Americans took out mortgages they could not afford to buy houses that in some cases they really didn't need.

But it's not just the sub-prime mess. The personal debt of Americans is at record levels, and everything from the war in Iraq to Katrina recovery is funded by borrowing. Both political parties are quick to promise specific "goodies," such as new entitlements or tax cuts or new roads, but they never say how they are going to pay for them.

Sad to say, but that is no different from the Diné Nation Council under the speaker's leadership have been acting, and not just during these hard economic times, but that is how they've been operating for decades and decades.

The answer, of course, is that the Council and the speaker haven't a clue, other than to continue to pull scarce funds from the reserve account and then stick our children and grandchildren with the bill for some future day.

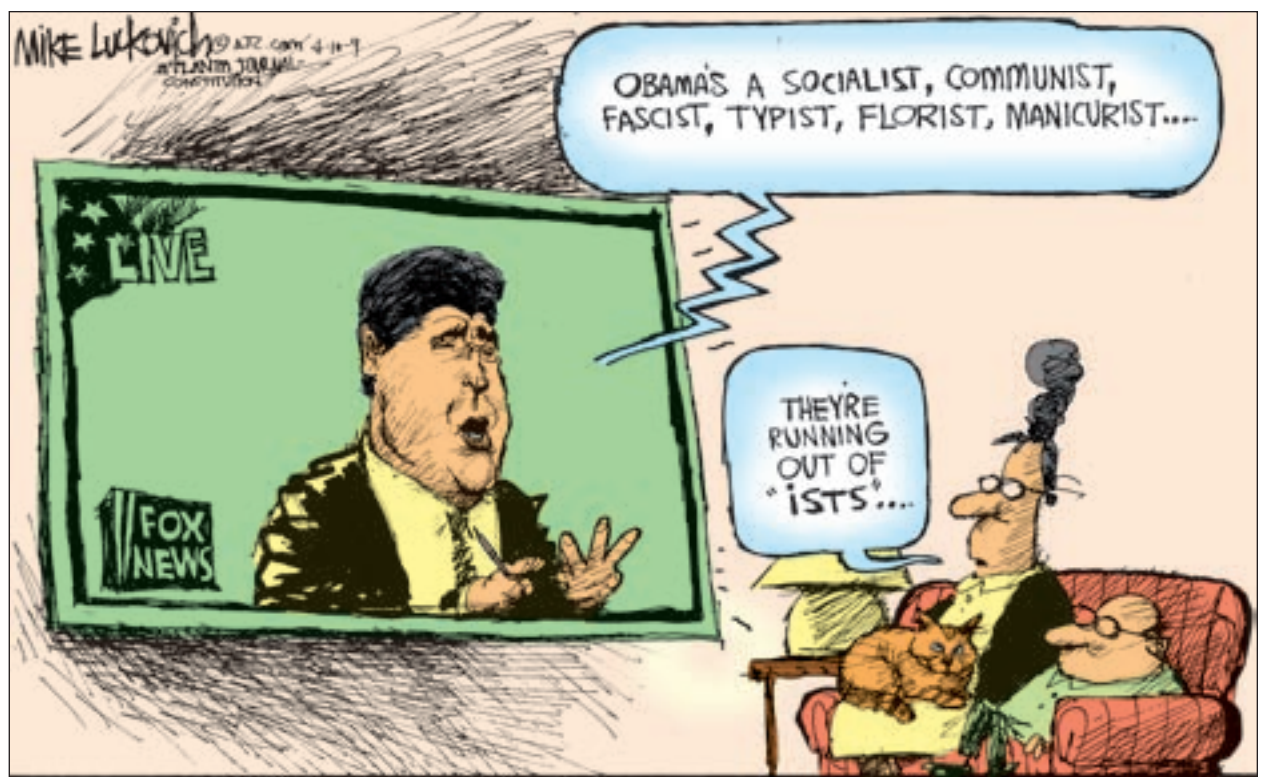
So what is a solution: First, we put our own houses in order. Next, we demand that our Council and speaker stop behaving like Santa Claus, or shopaholics in an outlet mall. In fact, I am tempted to say that we ought to be voting for the candidates who promise us the least goodies and tell us the hard truth: that we have to start acting responsibly and that the Council and the speaker have to set the example.

Once we get past the crisis, as it is I am not so sure we will on Navajo, we are still a long way from getting our economic house in order. The problem is that we-politicians and those of us who demand they deliver the goods- have lost the political will to make the choices necessary to live within our means.

Imagine if we had the leadership capacity in our Dineh Nation Council, someone could propose creating a commission that would identify the things we can afford and the things we can't afford. It would examine priorities and spending habits in a way that Council delegates seeking re-election dare not.

As it is, the Diné nation's economy is in for a rough ride. But we may also be in the midst of what is called a "teachable moment." We ought to take advantage of it and show the world that we have the civic courage to do what is right.

Wallace Hanley Window Rock



Not just a pirate movie

The Boston Globe said in an editorial Tuesday:

The freeing of Captain Richard Phillips from Somali pirates Sunday was like the end of a Hollywood thriller. The captain put his own life in danger to protect his crew. The pirates were deceitful, villainous, and rash. The authorization from the US president to use force was discriminating but justified. And the snipers who took down three pirates on a bobbing lifeboat with one shot each were perfect as they had to be.

But the end of this one episode hardly solves the problem of piracy in the waters off Somalia. There is even a danger that ships and crews passing through those waters will be at greater risk of violence than they were in the past. Phillips was rescued two days after a lethal French navy operation Friday to free French hostages aboard a sailboat; before that, seizures of ships and hostages had been resolved with-

out a resort to force.

Shipping companies have paid millions to ransom their ships, cargoes, and crews. That cost was preferable, they judged, to losing an oil tanker or having hostages killed.

Now that pirates have been killed, the rules of the game may change. They will still have an incentive to leave hostages unharmed, but they may be more likely to use force if they sense it will be used against them. And some hotheads may want to take revenge against American or French targets.

The ultimate cause of the pirate crisis in the Gulf of Aden and a swathe of the Indian Ocean was the collapse of the last effective Somali government in 1991. The civil wars and foreign interventions that followed have turned Somalia into the epitome of a failed state - and most of its people into paupers.

The pirate trade grew from two

sources: economic desperation and the anger of Somalis at foreign - mostly European - fishing trawlers taking \$300 million per year worth of tuna, shrimp, and lobster out of Somali waters. That anger only grew when the tsunami of 2005 washed leaking barrels of radioactive materials and other hazardous waste onto Somali shores, sickening the locals. To Somalis, it didn't matter that shady European firms may have paid off a warlord to dump the waste. The problem was that Europeans were exploiting Somalia's inability to protect its waters and its people.

Once initial harassing actions by local fishermen against foreign boats intruding in Somalia's waters were transformed into crimes of piracy, the anarchy of Somalia became a crisis of international law and order. The only long-term remedy will come through a stable government and economic development that can relieve Somalia's crushing poverty.

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