

Letters to the editor

To the Editor:

During the week of 04/27/09 to 05/01/09 I had the privilege of spending time with the local Army JROTC cadets from the four corners area, and beyond. The week was spent at Camp Williams in Utah and the course of instruction was leadership. The cadets spent a physically grueling week putting into practice those leadership skills they are taught in JROTC class throughout the year. Each cadet was given opportunities to overcome personal as well as team challenges through physical and mental task. Cadets from one school were able to intermix with students from throughout the four corners area and beyond, forging friendships and promoting unity among the different Army JROTC programs.

Many citizens that students interacted with commented on how respectful and pleasant the cadets were. The parents of the cadets from Farmington high school, Piedra vista high school, Aztec high school, Kirtland high school, Fort Wingate high school, Chinle high school, Gallup high school, Albuquerque high school, and Moriarty high school, can stand proud with the example and positive impression your cadets left on the people of Utah. Each cadet is to be commended for their exemplary behavior as are their parents for raising such great young men and women.

I would like to say thank you first to all the JROTC instructors for putting in the time and effort to make this camp possible, especially Major David Stock from Farmington High School. Without these instructors the students would not be as well trained to shoulder the responsibility leadership as they demonstrated they were at this camp. I would also like to thank the cadets for the respect I received, despite being a civilian, and for all the fun I had spending time around such a high caliber of young person. I look forward to working with the JROTC cadets in the future and thanks again for a great week.

Richard Robinson
Farmington

To the Editor:

Over the past years and more recently when the economic times have gotten rougher, we are seeing an increasing number of Navajo voters expressing concern about the decisions and actions taken by the Diné Nation Council under Speaker Morgan's leadership.

It would be interesting if a poll were taken asking Navajo voters if they would rather have someone else or have Mr. Morgan continue as leader of the Council.

It is safe to suggest; we all realize that the position of the Speaker carries a lot of influence and has a major impact on what gets accomplished and what doesn't on behalf of Navajo voters.

The short answer for the current set-up with the power(s) concentrated in the Speaker's Office and with the Diné Nation Council, is at the very least not an effective set-up.

That question might not get answered unless a poll was taken to get a pulse of what Navajo voters are feeling. What's obvious, though, is that Speaker Morgan needs to show Navajo voters that he can master this powerful job. Instead, he has ceded too much power to his former colleagues in the Council. He should be leading that crew, not trying to blend in with it.

If the Council were willing to listen to the concerns of the Navajo voters, as some claim to be, they would move swiftly to implement the recommendations that called for a reduction in the number of delegates, implement strict measures that would hold them accountable, an institute an independent commission to oversee the government reform initiative.

Unfortunately, the only response we see from Speaker Morgan is more attempts to give more power to the Council's Legal Advisor and thus veto anything they don't agree with and do whatever they wish to protect their own interest. Any option to listen to the wishes of the Navajo voters is the least of his concerns. To the observers who were in the chamber at the time the motion was introduced this was a clear signal of the lack of seriousness and political will of the Speaker and his followers to do what is right and just for Navajo voters.

This same lack of concern is unfortunately exhibited by the Councils lack of resolve for fiscal accountability and lack of planning for the future. There have been moments when the Speaker seemed ready to take a forceful stand on hard issues then too quickly crumbled. It is hard to imagine what the other elected tribal leaders on the Council of Large Base Tribes, who think enough of the Speaker to have him serve alongside them, would think if they knew that his prime goal is to undermine a sitting President's leadership, openly introducing legislation to strip authority away from the President, all interested to further his own self interest.

Aside from the Gaming initiative no member of the group who support Speaker Morgan has offered any ideas for generating new revenue, other than toying or saying yay or nay to recommendations presented by the various standing committees for spending funds that they do not have.

Granted, finding new sources of tribal revenue is an issue tribes everywhere are grappling with, but we have been historically underfunded, and while the Council and the speaker keep proving themselves trained and learn how it is done in the real world? And does their lack of bold leadership point to a fundamental flaw in how the Diné Nation Council is led?

Wallace Hanley
Window Rock

The right to DNA testing

The New York Times said in editorials for Tuesday, May 19:

A vast majority of states have laws making DNA available to prisoners who want to challenge their convictions. But in a disturbing number of cases, prosecutors have been blocking inmates, including ones on death row, from doing DNA tests. Courts and legislatures need to do more to ensure that prisoners have access to DNA that could help prove their innocence.

DNA testing has proved to be a remarkably effective check on mistakes in the criminal justice system. These tests have exonerated more than 200 people postconviction — some on their way to being executed.

When DNA tests took off in the 1990s, states began to pass laws allowing prisoners access to biological material found at crime scenes. Forty-six states now have such laws. But as Shailla Dewan reported in The New York Times, they have not solved the problem. According to one

analysis of 225 DNA exonerations, prosecutors opposed DNA testing in nearly one in five cases.

Prosecutors are particularly likely to balk where a DNA test might not definitively rule out a defendant but could point to another suspect, said Barry Scheck, a co-founder of the Innocence Project, a New York legal advocacy group that uses DNA to help the wrongfully convicted. For example, if blood is found in the general vicinity of a crime scene, a non-match would not prove that a defendant was innocent the way a non-match of skin from under the fingernails of a stabbing victim might. But if DNA from the blood were checked against a database, it could point police to someone else, who could turn out to be the real perpetrator.

The Supreme Court ruled unanimously in 2006 that defendants have a constitutional right to introduce evidence of this sort of "third-party guilt" — the suggestion someone else committed the crime.

Not enough on guns

The New York Times said in an editorial for Tuesday, May 19:

Both as a senator and as a candidate for the White House, President Barack Obama rightly urged repeal of the so-called Tiahrt Amendment that constrains efforts by the police and other authorities to combat shady gun dealers and gun traffickers. Regrettably, Obama's budget proposal does not call for full repeal of these laws.

On the plus side, the president's budget calls for eliminating a provision that restricts police access to trace data involving guns used to commit crimes. Right now, the police can access that data only for investigations of particular crimes, making it harder to construct a portrait of the criminal networks behind gun crimes. Lifting this restriction has been a goal of the national public safety coalition, Mayors Against Illegal Guns, which

Mayor Michael Bloomberg of New York City helped to organize.

On the downside, the budget contains new language that would prevent police departments and other law enforcement agencies from disclosing data about crime guns and gun trafficking obtained from the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms and Explosives. That would muzzle public discussion about a serious issue. A local police commissioner should not feel constrained about testifying before the city council about such matters.

The budget leaves untouched an indefensible Tiahrt restriction that prevents the federal government from requiring gun dealers to conduct inventory inspections to see whether they may have lost and stolen guns. It also retains a rule requiring the FBI to destroy the federal background checks required for

gun buyers within 24 hours, ostensibly for privacy reasons. Both make it harder to correct errors and detect improper dealings, including illegal straw purchases of guns.

The White House says Obama is opposed to the Tiahrt restrictions and chose to recommend changes with a realistic chance of surviving opposition from the National Rifle Association. What he's really doing is perpetuating bad rules, while sending another discouraging signal that he is not willing to stand up to the gun lobby.

Obama chooses not to fight to revive the assault weapons ban. Nor has he tried to strip language allowing people to carry loaded weapons in national parks from the credit card reform bill. We hope he will be more aggressive about pressing for the worthy if limited Tiahrt reforms included in his budget.



Obama can't turn the page on Bush

By Frank Rich
New York Times News Service

To paraphrase Al Pacino in "Godfather III," just when we thought we were out, the Bush mob keeps pulling us back in. And will keep doing so. No matter how hard President Barack Obama tries to turn the page on the previous administration, he can't. Until there is true transparency and true accountability, revelations of that unresolved eight-year nightmare will keep raining down drip by drip, disrupting the new administration's high ambitions.

That's why the president's flip-flop on the release of detainee abuse photos — whatever his motivation — is a fool's errand. The pictures will eventually emerge anyway, either because of leaks (if they haven't started already) or because the federal appeals court decision upholding their release remains in force. And here's a bet: These images will not prove the most shocking evidence of Bush administration sins still to come.

There are many dots yet to be connected, and not just on torture. On Sunday, GQ magazine is posting on its Web site an article adding new details to the ample dossier on how Donald Rumsfeld's corrupt and incompetent Defense Department cost American lives and compromised national security. The piece is not the work of a partisan but the Texan journalist Robert Draper, author of "Dead Certain," the 2007 Bush biography that had the blessing (and cooperation) of the former president and his top brass. It draws on interviews with more than a dozen high-level Bush loyalists.

Draper reports that Rumsfeld's monomaniacal determination to protect his Pentagon turf led him to hobble and antagonize America's most willing allies in Iraq, Britain and Australia, and even to undermine his own soldiers. But Draper's biggest find is a collection of daily cover sheets that Rumsfeld approved for the Secretary of Defense Worldwide Intelligence Update, a highly classified digest prepared for a tiny audience, including the president, and often delivered by hand to the White House by the defense secretary himself. These cover sheets greeted Bush each day with triumphal color photos of the war headlined by biblical quotations. GQ is posting 11 of them, and they are seriously creepy.

Take the one dated April 3, 2003, two weeks into the invasion, just as Shock and Awe hit its first potholes. Two days earlier, on April 1, a panicky Pentagon had begun spreading its hyped, fictional account of the rescue

of Pvt. Jessica Lynch to distract from troubling news of setbacks. On April 2, Gen. Joseph Hoar, the commander in chief of the U.S. Central Command from 1991-94, had declared on The New York Times Op-Ed page that Rumsfeld had sent too few troops to Iraq. And so the Worldwide Intelligence Update for April 3 bullied Bush with Joshua 1:9: "Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go." (Including, as it happened, into a quagmire.)

What's up with that? As Draper writes, Rumsfeld is not known for ostentatious displays of piety. He was cynically playing the religious angle to seduce and manipulate a president who frequently quoted the Bible. But the secretary's actions were not just oily; he was also taking a risk with national security. If these official daily collages of Crusade-like messaging and war imagery had been leaked, they would have reinforced the Muslim world's apocalyptic fear that America was waging a religious war. As one alarmed Pentagon hand told Draper, the fallout "would be as bad as Abu Ghraib."

The GQ article isn't the only revelation of previously unknown Bush Defense Department misbehavior to emerge this month. Just two weeks ago, the Obama Pentagon revealed that a major cover-up of corruption had taken place at the Bush Pentagon on Jan. 14 of this year — just six days before Bush left office. This strange incident — reported in The New York Times but largely ignored by Washington correspondents preparing for their annual dinner — deserves far more attention and follow-up.

What happened on Jan. 14 was the release of a report from the Pentagon's internal watchdog, the inspector general. It had been ordered up in response to a scandal uncovered last year by David Barstow, an investigative reporter for The Times. Barstow had found that the Bush Pentagon fielded a clandestine network of retired military officers and defense officials to spread administration talking points on television, radio and in print while posing as objective "military analysts." Many of these propagandists worked for military contractors with billions of dollars of business at stake in Pentagon procurement. Many were recipients of junkets and high-level special briefings unavailable to the legitimate press. Yet the public was never told of these conflicts of interest when these "analysts" appeared on the evening news to provide rosy assessments of what they

tended to call "the real situation on the ground in Iraq."

When Barstow's story broke, more than 45 members of Congress demanded an inquiry. The Pentagon's inspector general went to work, and its Jan. 14 report was the result. It found no wrongdoing by the Pentagon. Indeed, when Barstow won the Pulitzer Prize last month, Rumsfeld's current spokesman cited the inspector general's "exonerated" to attack the Times articles as fiction.

But the Pentagon took another look at this exoneration, and announced on May 5 that the inspector general's report, not The Times' reporting, was fiction. The report, it turns out, was riddled with factual errors and included little actual investigation of Barstow's charges. The inspector general's office had barely glanced at the 8,000 pages of e-mail that Barstow had used as evidence, and interviewed only seven of the 70 disputed analysts. In other words, the report was a whitewash. The Obama Pentagon officially rescinded it — an almost unprecedented step — and even removed it from its Web site.

Network news operations ignored the unmasking of this last-minute Bush Pentagon cover-up, as they had the original Barstow articles — surely not because they had been patsies for the Bush PR machine. But the story is actually far larger than this one particular incident. If the Pentagon inspector general's office could whitewash this scandal, what else did it whitewash?

In 2005, to take just one example, the same office released a report on how Boeing colluded with low-level Pentagon bad apples on an inflated (and ultimately canceled) \$30 billion air-tanker deal. At the time, even John Warner, then the go-to Republican senator on military affairs, didn't buy the heavily redacted report's claim that Rumsfeld and his deputy, Paul Wolfowitz, were ignorant of what Warner called "the most significant defense procurement mismanagement in contemporary history." The Pentagon inspector general who presided over that exoneration soon fled to become an executive at the parent company of another Pentagon contractor, Blackwater.

But the new administration doesn't want to revisit this history any more than it wants to dwell on torture. Once the inspector general's report on the military analysts was rescinded, the Obama Pentagon declared the matter closed. The White House seems to be taking its cues from the Reagan-Bush 41 speechwriter Peggy Noonan.

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The desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose.

— Isaiah 35:1