

Standard online reader survey



Q: Do you think the Olympics will take place without incident in South Korea?

YES or NO

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GUEST EDITORIAL

Shadows are among spectacle of Olympics

The winter Olympics this year is set against the looming menace posed by one of the world's most dangerous regimes — North Korea. Whether Pyongyang and the U.S. continue to trade threats of nuclear destruction is a challenge for politicians, diplomats and military strategists.

That's one shadow cast across this Olympiad. The other transcends international conflict and boundaries, and stretches far beyond the world of elite athletes. That is the still-festering scandal of Lawrence Nassar, the U.S. gymnastics team doctor who sexually abused scores of young female gymnasts over two decades. More than 250 girls and women, many of them former Olympians or hopefuls, told their harrowing stories of abuse and betrayal. Nassar was sentenced to up to 175 years in prison in that case.

We hope the millions of viewers, many of them youngsters (and their parents) who harbor their own Olympic dreams, heed the lessons of those gymnasts. The Nassar victims spoke about how they trusted Michigan State University to protect them. And its leaders failed.

And how they trusted team coaches and trainers. Those authority figures, too, failed. And how they trusted their parents. And they,

Chicago Tribune

too, failed to suspect, to heed signs — failed to imagine that a trusted and famed doctor could be a monstrous predator.

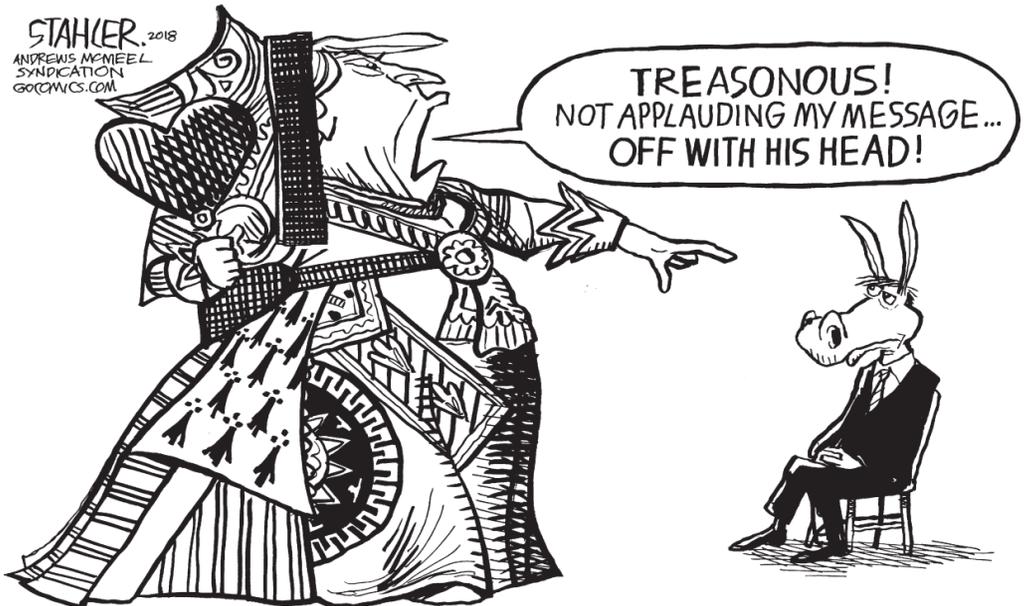
The scandal's tally — careers ruined, lives haunted — is immeasurable. Investigations continue, as do civil court cases. The legal fallout isn't over, not even close.

Let these, the first Olympic Games in the #MeToo era, open a million conversations among children and parents and with other adults, be they troop leaders, coaches, counselors or clergy. Let these games deter predators who might believe they, too, can abuse young athletes — in the guise of treatment or leadership or authority because no one is watching.

Youngsters around the world eagerly watch the Olympics. They dream of performing on those slopes, on that ice, in those stadiums before ecstatic crowds.

But also remember that in the shadows, predators can lurk. Not just in the gym, but in every organization, club and after-school activity where children play and learn. Stopping these predators isn't just a team effort. It is every individual's duty.

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Disgrace belongs to Trump

"I think it's a disgrace, what's happening in our country," President Trump declared recently. "A lot of people should be ashamed of themselves, and much worse than that."

The president was attacking the FBI and the Justice Department, headed by people he appointed. But the biggest disgrace is Trump himself, a president who continually proves he knows nothing about how the American system of government works.

In particular, the president completely misunderstands the nature of the legal and law-enforcement community. Yes, he appoints the chief officers of that community — the attorney general, the FBI director, federal judges and prosecutors — but in a basic sense, they don't work for him. They work for the country.

The president's political interest is secondary to the national interest. The rule of law trumps the tantrums of Trump. But he cannot grasp or accept this point. He demands personal loyalty and when he doesn't get it, he berates or even fires them.

"We have a president who seems to have no understanding of the professional ethos of the Justice Department, who has no understanding of how these people think about their jobs," law professor David Strauss of the University of Chicago told *The New York Times*.

There is a broader pattern here. Trump is taking aim at any institution, not just the Justice Department, that can independently check and balance his actions.

As John B. Bellinger III, a former

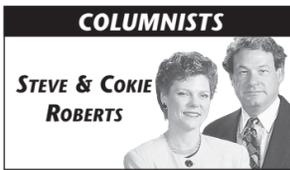
Justice Department lawyer under President Bush 43, argued in *The Washington Post*, "The president's attacks on the 'top leadership and investigators' of the Department of Justice and the FBI, like his attacks on the press and the judiciary, appear to be intended to undermine public trust in institutions that hold him accountable."

A favorite Trump target are the intelligence agencies, which stand accused of leaking information that's damaging to him. At one point, the president described their actions as being "just like Russia," and at another, he asked, "Are we living in Nazi Germany?"

Trump's latest tirade focused on congressional Democrats who refused to applaud during his State of the Union speech. "Can we call that treason?" the president ranted during a speech in Cincinnati. "Why not?" Right now the biggest threat to Trump is a legal system that includes the FBI, the Justice Department and special counsel Robert Mueller, who is investigating possible collusion between Team Trump and Moscow during the 2016 campaign.

Sen. John McCain, battling brain cancer and immune to Trump's ire, warns Russian leader Vladimir Putin is loving the president's assaults on constitutional order. "If we continue to undermine our own rule of law, we are doing Putin's job for him," said McCain.

The president is correct: It is "a disgrace, what's happening in our country." But the disgrace belongs to him. *Steve and Cokie Roberts can be contacted by email at stevecokie@gmail.com.*



STEVE & COKIE ROBERTS

The Bible and tragedy of Waco

The recording tape was rolling on Feb. 28, 1993, when Branch Davidian leader David Koresh called Larry Lynch at the McLennan County sheriff's office.

In the background, gunfire continued as Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms agents raided the 77-acre Mount Carmel complex near Waco, Texas. Koresh was wounded early in a two-hour firefight in which four agents and six civilians died.

Koresh kept talking about Bible prophecies. Lynch kept interrupting, trying to get him to stop the fighting.

For Koresh, everything hinged on Book of Revelation texts about the Seven Seals and "the Lamb," a mysterious figure who would open those seals in the Last Days.

The infamous Branch Davidian drama is now a six-part Paramount Network miniseries "Waco," which runs through Feb. 28. The complex community inside the compound kept trying to tell FBI leaders and their handpicked experts why they were doing what they were doing and why they believed what they believed.

In the end, federal officials saw everything through a "cult" lens. "Something dehumanizing happens when you start using the word 'cult,'" said John Erick Dowdle, who, with his brother Drew, spent four years creating the miniseries. "No matter what happened, no matter what anybody said, the FBI people thought it was just a matter of time before they would kill themselves."

Of course, no one living inside one of these faith communities "believes they belong to a cult," he added. Thus, one of the main goals of "Waco" was

to "try to show what all of this looked like on the inside, for some of the Branch Davidians."

The 51-day siege, which unfolded on TV news, ended in a still-mysterious firestorm ignited when nearly 900 soldiers and other law officials, with armed tanks, crashed into the shabby tinderbox that was the Mount Carmel complex. In all, 76 men, women and children died in the flames. Negotiators had arranged for 35 to exit, including 21 children.

The Dowdle brothers visited Baylor University in Waco, digging into archives from years of dialogues with Branch Davidian leaders. These contacts began long before the mid-1980s arrival of a young rock musician, biblical-prophecy savant and eventual polygamist who would change his name to David Koresh.

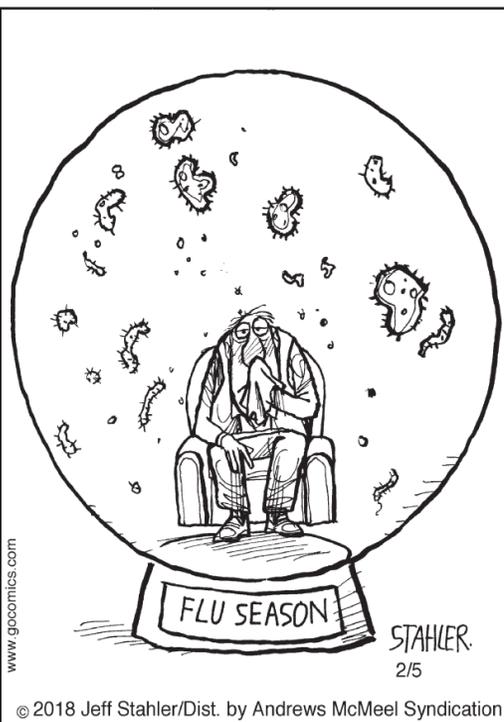
The Dowdle brothers said it was highly likely the Mount Carmel firestorm could have been avoided if federal officials had listened to scholars who truly understood the beliefs of the Branch Davidians. This included their convictions Koresh might be "the Lamb" and one of the Seven Seal prophecies predicted they would be tested by an invasion of hostile forces.

"The FBI was totally dismissive of what they called the 'Bible babble' of Koresh and his followers," said Drew Dowdle. "They felt that if you let them talk about that stuff they would just go on and on all night. ... In the end, they just didn't think that talking about the Bible had anything to do with what was happening at Mount Carmel. And that was that."

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ON RELIGION

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