

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Young students should be heard

TO THE EDITOR:

I salute the young students across the country who staged a school walkout March 14. A month earlier in Parkland, Fla., students fled from their school after another mass shooting.

There were plenty of warning signs the shooter was an individual at high risk of carrying out such a shooting. Had appropriate actions been taken, perhaps this massacre could have been avoided.

In the aftermath, some of the students in Parkland determined to start a movement to demand action be taken to attempt to prevent such tragedies from happening elsewhere. Sadly, we live in a time where people are determined not to take any action to prevent more mass shootings.

If a person speaks out that elected officials should address any solutions, they are quickly labeled against the Second Amendment and want the government to take all guns from all people. I am a firm believer in the Second Amendment.

I have no problem with a reasonable person having a gun which is handled with responsibility. But I refuse to believe these mass shootings are the price we must pay. There are answers to prevent these tragedies and still be supportive of the Second Amendment.

As I have watched the young people speaking out, there is an important message they are addressing. Elected officials are elected by the people to represent the interest of the people. When they fail to do so,

it's up to the voters to hold them accountable.

Special interest groups have sought to buy the allegiance of our elected officials. The NRA isn't the only such group that contributes millions of dollars upon candidates and elected officials in an effort to influence government. We end up with too many elected officials beholden to these groups instead of seeking to serve the people they are chosen to represent.

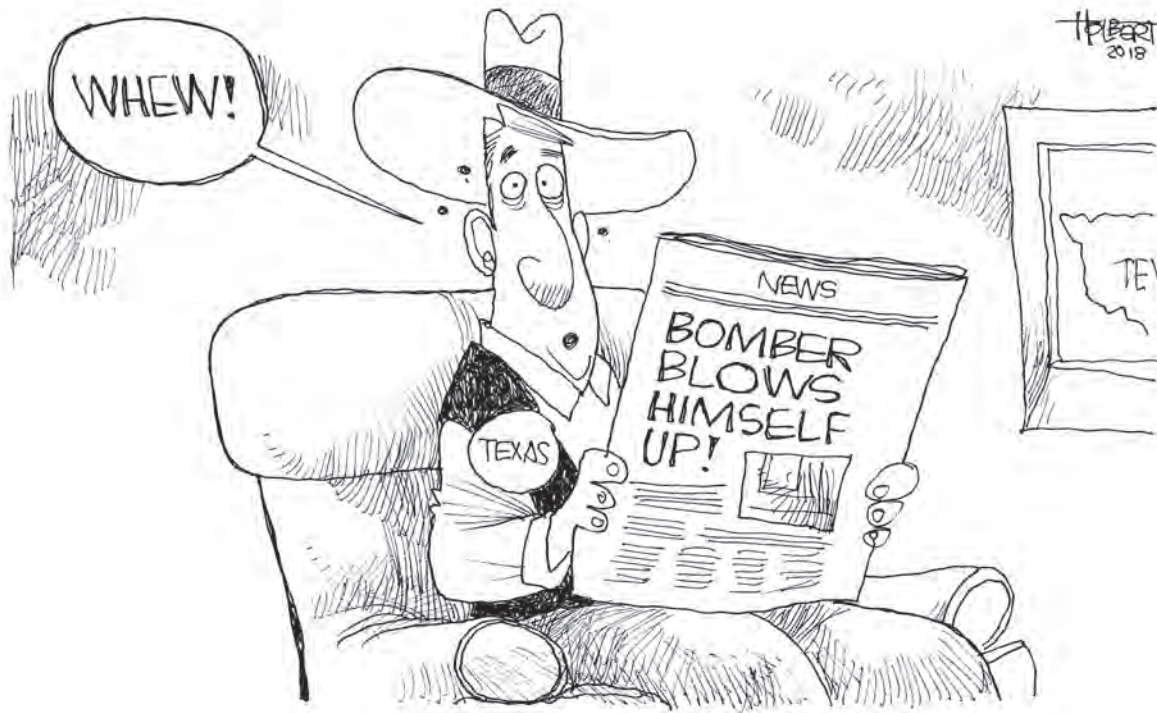
In the last couple of years, it was proposed to the County Commission to allow citizens the opportunity to address the commission at its monthly meetings. The first time the proposal was defeated. Later, the commission voted to allow a citizen to address the commission if one was willing to jump through the hoops required to get put on the agenda.

Fortunately, the city board customarily sets aside time where citizens are allowed to address the board.

Also in recent time when an issue was before the city board, an elected official suggested he wasn't really interested in how people felt on issues. His reasoning was that we elect those we think are smart enough to make any decision regardless of public opinion.

As the young people across the nation demand accountability from our elected officials, it's important we all do the same. Those young people are the future of our country and we owe them no less.

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Lamb shows Dems the way

Democrats are strongly united around their fear and loathing of Donald Trump. Party loyalists give him a 7 percent approval rating in the latest Gallup poll. But focusing on the president's flaws masks serious splits that could limit Democratic chances of recapturing Congress this fall, or defeating Trump in 2020.

Two recent statements graphically illustrate this division. Hillary Clinton analyzed her defeat in 2016 by saying, "If you look at the map of the United States, there is all that red in the middle where Trump won. I won on the coasts ... I won on the places that are optimistic, diverse, dynamic, moving forward, and his whole campaign, 'make America great again,' was looking backwards."

Compare that to Cecil Roberts, the president of the United Mine Workers in western Pennsylvania, who praised Conor Lamb, a 33-year-old Democrat running for Congress in suburban Pittsburgh: "He's a God-fearing, union-supporting, gun-owning, job-protecting, pension-defending Democrat."

Lamb narrowly won his election. Clinton lost the same Congressional district by 20 points to Trump, on her way to losing Pennsylvania by 44,000 votes, or less than 1 percent.

There's a reason Democrats have lost the presidency and both chambers of Congress. Clinton's sneering comment about "all that red in the middle" that was "looking backwards" by backing Trump reveals a profound lack of respect and understanding for voters in "flyover" country.

Trump's successful appeal to these disaffected voters was deeply cynical

and insincere. A thrice-married billionaire from Manhattan has nothing in common with voters in places like Pennsylvania's 18th district. He exploits their "antipathy to people who aren't like them" in a dangerously demagogic manner.

Yet religious observance was a key variable in the 2016 election. Voters who attend worship services at least once a week, 33 percent of the total, backed Trump by 14 points. Those who "never" set foot in a sanctuary, about 22 percent, went for Clinton by 32 points.

The union leader also stressed Lamb's "gun-owning" credentials. This is another critical fault line. About one-third of Americans own guns, and they backed Trump by 32 points. Non-gun owners supported Clinton by 35 points.

Only 26 percent of voters called themselves liberals in 2016, and yet an arithmetically challenged leftist, Bob Moser, wrote in *Rolling Stone*, "The America of the future looks absolutely nothing like the 18th District in Pennsylvania. And the future of the Democratic Party looks nothing like Conor Lamb."

That might be true in California, which Clinton won by over 4 million votes, or New York, where she led by 1.7 million. But many parts of America, "all that red in the middle," will continue to look very much like the 18th District of Pennsylvania. And more candidates like Conor Lamb are what the Democrats need to return to power. When you lose respect for your voters, you lose elections.

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JUST A THOUGHT

LISA
HOBBS



Calorie count on menus is helpful

I know this statement might bring some backlash, but I'm going to say it anyway: thank you federal mandate.

While I'm usually not a fan of all the state and federal laws that are handed down like Tic Tacs with each passing year to further restrict what law-abiding citizens can do, there is one that did receive my approval. Restaurant menu labeling laws now require some restaurants to disclose the amount of calories in each menu item. The rules apply only to restaurants with 20 or more locations, which is why you won't see calorie counts on each and every menu.

Now, while looking at the menu, it's impossible to ignore the calorie count. I've been more than slightly amazed at the calories in some items. It's completely understandable why some restaurant chains were not keen on doing this. I'm finding it difficult to eat certain things and almost impossible to eat others.

They say ignorance is bliss. I beg to differ. Lack of knowledge is killing us. We can't keep ignoring what we are doing to ourselves. For that reason, I wish the law had gone a step further and included a carbohydrate count on menus. Carbs sneak into everything and we need to know where to make an informed decision.

I remember watching a whole day of "My 600 Pound Life" and thinking these people were, at one time, my size. How many of them wish they had changed their eating habits at 225 pounds? Probably every one of them.

Someone asked me when my weight issues started. My issues probably started as a child. We didn't get the luxury of a balanced diet. There was no picking and choosing what we ate. We ate what we had and more times than not, it was something cheap like bologna sandwiches – sorry Oscar Mayer, but I did love that little boy singing in the 1970s commercial. Adorable.

We did have more than bologna. I remember eating quite a few meals of pinto beans, homemade cornbread or flat bread (as my mother called it), and fried potatoes. We loved it when mom made chocolate gravy and biscuits. It didn't happen often. Fruits and vegetables were for families with money. If there was food available, we ate it. Period. We didn't complain or ask for something else for dinner. We knew this was it.

When I started working at age 16 and making my own money, I discovered a wide variety of food that I liked. None of it good for me. The weight scale started creeping up in my late teens and continued to do so until my mid-40s, and I remember thinking that I didn't know why. That is a lack of knowledge.

Today, I want to make an informed decision when it comes to food. I appreciate any help in that area. I don't always make the best choices, but nine times out of 10 I do. That's pretty good.

Standard reporter Lisa Hobbs can be reached at 473-2191.



Sexual issues and the church

After decades of fighting about sex and marriage, the world's 12.5 million United Methodists are still waiting for a final shoe to drop.

It's less than a year until a special General Conference that has been empowered to choose a model for United Methodist life after the Sexual Revolution – some path to unity, rather than schism. As the faithful watch and wait, Boston-area Bishop Sudarshana Devadhar composed a prayer for use among United Methodists in New England, one of the church's most liberal regions.

"God help us! Help us ... to take the next faithful step forward not based on doctrine, tradition or theology; judgments, fears or convictions; notions of who are the righteous and unrighteous," wrote Devadhar. "God help us! Help us ... to take the next small, faithful step forward that is neither ... right or wrong; good or bad; for or against; left or right; pro or con."

The problem is that ongoing battles among United Methodists have demonstrated that any realistic unity plan has to address this global church's doctrinal fractures, said the Rev. Thomas Lambrecht, vice president of the conservative Good News organization. He is a member of the Commission on a Way Forward that will make recommendations to the historic Feb. 23-26, 2019, General Conference in St. Louis.

A recent statement from the United Methodist bishops noted that two, maybe three, plans are being considered.

The first is a "one-church model" allowing each of the 56 regional "annual conferences" in the United

States – there are another 75 annual conferences in Africa and overseas – to make their own doctrinal decisions about same-sex marriages and the ordination of noncelibate LGBTQ clergy. Local congregations could decide how to handle these questions too.

A second plan, said the bishops, would be a "multi-branch" model creating three parallel UMC conferences, each "covering the whole country, based on theology and perspective on LGBTQ ministry – progressive, contextual and traditional branches."

The bottom line: There would be liberal and traditional conferences, with a "local option" conference in the middle. Conferences in other parts of the world would get to choose, as well. This raises all kinds of questions about how bishops, clergy and congregations relate to one another at the local level. And what about church agencies, seminaries and budgets?

Finally, Lambrecht confirmed that the Commission on a Way Forward has discussed a third "traditional" option that would maintain, and defend, the doctrines affirmed in the current Book of Discipline.

All three plans would allow dissenting local churches – on left or right – to leave the denomination, under terms still to be determined by UMC leaders.

"Lots of people are tired of fighting," said Lambrecht. "Many are tempted to throw up their hands in frustration and head over to a nearby nondenominational megachurch. ... But all of this is going to take time. We have years to go before this process is over."

Terry Mattingly is the editor of *GetReligion.org*. He lives in Oak Ridge.

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