

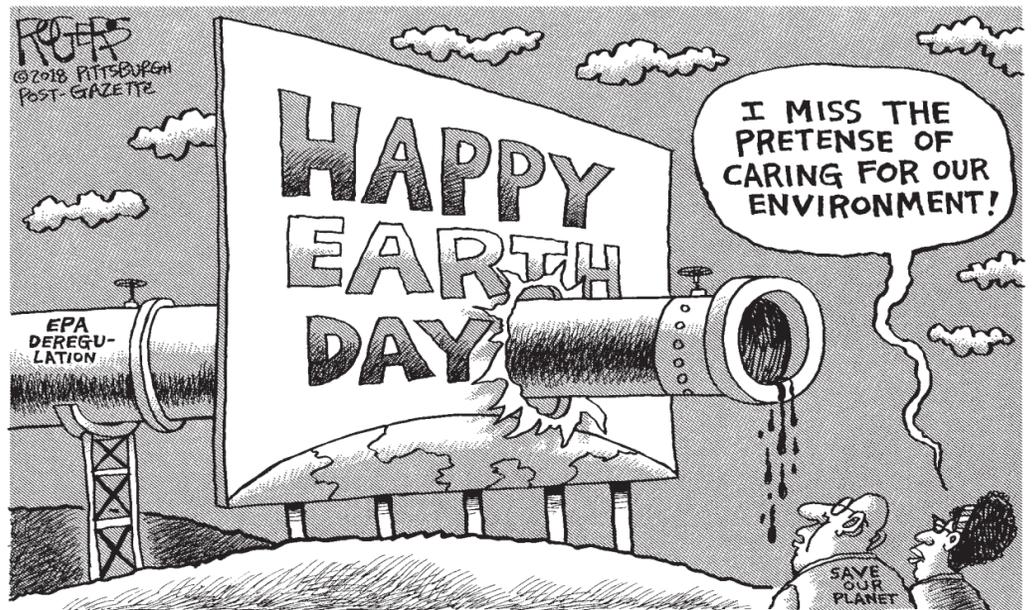
Standard online reader survey



Q: After failing for the third straight year, what do you think should happen to the TN Ready standardized test given to students?

- End standardized testing
- Give tests on paper only, not online
- Keep trying to make online test work

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GUEST EDITORIAL

Safe Place for Newborns a vital service to save

The annual "Rock the Cradle" fundraiser for A Secret Safe Place for Newborns of Tennessee is one of those things that reminds us why we're inspired by tragedy born of innocence. Why people wipe away tears and say "never again, not if I can help it." Why legislators sometimes pass laws with regular folks in mind. And why Gov. Bill Haslam signed a proclamation on Feb. 2 designating April as "Safe Haven Month in Tennessee."

One of those people who made "never again" her mantra was the late Anna C. Irwin, a *Daily Times* reporter who covered the story of a 14-year-old girl from Townsend who was so afraid people would find out she was pregnant that she abandoned her newborn baby girl in a shed.

Anna covered the story like she covered every story, straight up and full speed ahead, including reporting on the decision to charge the teen with first-degree murder. She just wrote the facts when the infant was found dead in a wooden box in October 2000. That didn't mean she wasn't affected by it. She wrote the news without fear or favor, but she had

The Daily Times
Maryville

feelings. In May 2004, Anna wrote these words:

"Imagine being 13 years old or 15, 17 or 19. You're pregnant. You're not a bad girl, but you made a serious mistake, and now you don't know what to do. You've tried to pretend there wasn't a baby on the way and managed to hide the situation, but as the birth approaches, you are faced with the question of what will happen to the baby.

"What are the options and how can you find out about the possibilities without revealing your secret? How can you be sure your secret and your baby, once it arrives, will be safe?"

Answers are available at A Secret Safe Place for Newborns of Tennessee Inc. help line, (866) 699-SAFE. All calls are confidential, and never recorded.

Anna died three years later, but the cause is still good. If possible, give financial support to A Secret Safe Place for Newborns of Tennessee. For more information, the business phone number is (865) 254-2208.

Time to toss TN Ready

For the third year in a row, TN Ready has flopped like a beached whale upon the shore.

Last Monday, for example, students and teachers across Tennessee were prepared and poised for the ordeal of testing, but TN Ready was again unready.

The truth is TN Ready has failed or floundered since its abortive beginning during school year 2015-16. That's when testing was abruptly cancelled for grades 3-8, and test vendor Measurement, Inc. was fired.

Then came Questar, a large-scale, highly touted test-maker based in Minneapolis. In praise of that apparently auspicious occasion, TN Education Commissioner Candice McQueen said this in July, 2016, "Students, teachers and parents deserve a better testing experience in Tennessee. And we believe this is another step in the right direction."

In retrospect, Commissioner McQueen sounded a lot like Pollyanna in her overly optimistic vision for Questar. Despite winning a two-year contract to administer TN Ready at a whopping \$30 million cost per year, with an option to extend that contract for up to five years, Questar stumbled from the start and it continues to stumble along at great cost to Tennessee taxpayers.

In my view, there is a much greater cost to the morale and esprit de corps of students, teachers, schools and parents all across Tennessee. Low morale is running rampant through the ranks of teachers, thanks to the distractions and disarray of TN Ready.

That could spell disaster for the future of teaching and learning in

Tennessee. Students are confused and frustrated to boot by bureaucratic bungling. In turn, the best and brightest of aspiring teachers are discouraged and disinclined to follow the teaching profession.

I've heard suggestions that we keep TN Ready and Questar, but focus on reforming both to improve student testing and teacher evaluation in Tennessee. To me, that's roughly akin to rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic.

The oft-quoted "Insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results," certainly applies to TN Ready and Questar's twists and turns.

The cumulative effect of their incompetence and indifference is to suck the joy out of teaching and learning by sapping the energy of teachers and students on excessive testing. That's why I think we need to toss TN Ready and stop spending millions of dollars on fool's errands like Questar.

After all, Tennessee has survived and thrived for 222 years. I don't think a moratorium on madness in excessive student testing and teacher evaluation will jeopardize our future. Meanwhile, we could return testing and evaluation to those who know it best, our teachers and administrators.

Whether you agree or disagree with me, speak up and reach out to our state and national legislators with your own views on this important issue. You'll be glad you did, and I will, too.

Retired Army Col. Thomas B. Vaughn can be reached at tbvwm1@blomand.net.

MY TURN

THOMAS B. VAUGHN



Senate becoming dilatory body

There was a time, within living memory, when giants strode the Senate chamber.

Today's Senate is less a legislative chamber than a TV studio, less a forum for innovation than a platform for invective, less a deliberative body than a reflection of the body politic.

On the surface that last critique -- that the Senate reflects the country -- might seem an odd characteristic to disparage. But the Founders never conceived of the Senate as a reflection of the nation; that role was delegated to the House. They wanted a Senate that led the country, a body where lawmakers of unusual probity examined matters of eternal consequence.

In that conception, it didn't really matter that some senators were out of touch. Claiborne Pell of Rhode Island, son of an ambassador to Portugal and Hungary, was so isolated from the world beyond the chamber that, in a famous but perhaps apocryphal story, he thought Thom McAn, then a prominent retail chain, was a person who provided him with shoes.

Nor was this a matter simply of personal wealth. George Norris of Nebraska, the 11th child of severely impoverished farmers, steered passage of the Tennessee Valley Authority through Congress. Both Harry Truman, who described his Senate years as his happiest, and Gary Hart, who worshipped the Senate, came from modest country families. Both used the Senate as springboards for national leadership.

Now Ira Shapiro, once a leading American trade negotiator and later the author of an evocative book on the Senate's golden years of the 1960s and 1970s, is holding up a mirror to

the Senate. He has written an important new volume on the contemporary Senate, flaws and all -- and in fact the sad story is that the flaws have become the defining characteristics of the chamber. In a book with an attention-grabbing title, "Broken: Can the Senate Save Itself and the Country?" Shapiro writes:

"Those 100 men and women can change the way they operate; they do not have to be talented and committed individuals trapped in a dysfunctional institution. They can stop being blind partisans and go back to being real senators, focused on collective action for the national interest. They have an obligation to rise above the partisanship, not simply mirror or exacerbate it."

To address this crisis, Shapiro proposes some fundamental legislative changes, including returning to the notion that "non-germane" elements and amendments not be added to bills. "The Senate," he said, "is the only legislative body that can be debating transportation or energy or foreign aid and suddenly finding itself considering amendments on abortion, gun control or school prayer."

Hardly anyone thinks the Senate is performing up to its potential, or to its purpose.

"The proof that the Senate can be fixed is that it was operating a lot better years ago under basically the same rules as we have today," says Sen. Rob Portman, the Ohio Republican. "People are finally realizing we have to do something."

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JUST A THOUGHT

LISA HOBBS



These homework corrections silly

Parent input is needed on this situation.

When my niece's son misses a question on his homework assignment, he has to write out the following with the answers:

- I missed problem number...
- This is the answer I put...
- This is the correct answer...
- This is where I went wrong...
- How do I know this is right...

Those might not be the exact wording of the statements or the order, but it is close enough. Does that seem ridiculously excessive? I can understand having them correct their work and resubmit it. I can also understand having them write one of the five statements, but not all five. That's where it gets excessively ridiculous.

Maybe this is isolated to one teacher or one school. I don't know. What I do know is this could have the potential of helping some students and hurting others.

My reasoning: If you child misses one or two questions, I can see that writing out five statements probably wouldn't be a big deal and could potentially help them. However, if your child is struggling already and they miss several questions, that's when this requirement goes from helping to hurting. A struggling child can quickly turn into one that completely gives up if what they are being asked to do seems like an endless chore.

When I questioned why they have to do this, the response was "studies have proved this helps children learn."

I agree 100 percent that correcting wrong answers is important and can help children learn. I disagree completely with the way this is being done for the reasons I've already stated. Struggling students need to be encouraged and not discouraged.

My son struggled in school. Maybe that's why this is getting to me. If he had been asked to do this with every wrong answer, he would have turned from struggle to giving up very quickly.

All this has reminded me of an algebra teacher of my daughter's. Merissa came home dazed and confused. The equation had one of two methods on how to solve it accurately. While my daughter couldn't comprehend the method shown by the teacher, she easily understood the one I showed her.

My daughter was adamant that her teacher would not accept that method. I told her to use my method, if she felt it was easier, and if the teacher didn't accept it, I'd handle it.

I don't want to give teachers a hard time. Due to the state putting more and more pressure on schools to make good grades, teachers are asked to put more and more pressure on students. It's a horrible cycle with children getting the brunt of it.

As for these serial questions for one wrong answer, what works for one child might not work for another. We need to keep this in mind. Thank goodness they weren't doing this when my children were in school. I would have had an issue with it.

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