

Opinions

SUNDAY
APRIL 29, 2018

4A

Southern Standard

McMINNVILLE, TENNESSEE

Standard online reader survey



Q: Did you take advantage of early voting in the Republican and Democratic primaries?

YES 52 percent
NO 48 percent

GUEST EDITORIAL

Why do these tests hold so much power?

For the third consecutive year, TNReady couldn't pass the test.

The state's buggy, beleaguered standardized testing system for grades 3-11 was bogged down by computer glitches and a "deliberate" cyberattack. School districts across the state halted or canceled testing for which they have been preparing all year.

The breakdowns shouldn't have been a surprise. Similar testing disruptions and delays were reported earlier this month in New York, which uses the same testing vendor, Questar Assessments.

Last year test results were delayed for weeks after more than 9,000 Tennessee students received incorrect scores because of a problem with Questar's scanners.

Questar is the testing company Tennessee hired to replace Measurement Incorporated after TNReady's catastrophic failure to launch in its first year, 2016.

State legislators are blaming Education Commissioner Candice McQueen. Democrats called for her resignation. Republicans summoned her and demanded an explanation. Lawmakers have also called on the state's chief internal investigator to conduct a review of the TNReady student testing system.

"We're tired of it. The state's tired of it. Our teachers are tired of it, and most of all our students are suffering," state Rep. Ron Lollar, R-Bartlett, said. "The

Commercial Appeal Memphis

faith in the system is not there."

Legislators can fault state education officials for online testing woes, but they share the blame.

There are alternatives to government-mandated, commercially designed, machine-tallied achievement tests.

"Test results are good to see benchmarks where kids are, but we should have multiple measures to determine how a school is doing and what kids are learning," Shelby County Schools Superintendent Dorsey Hopson told his board members last week.

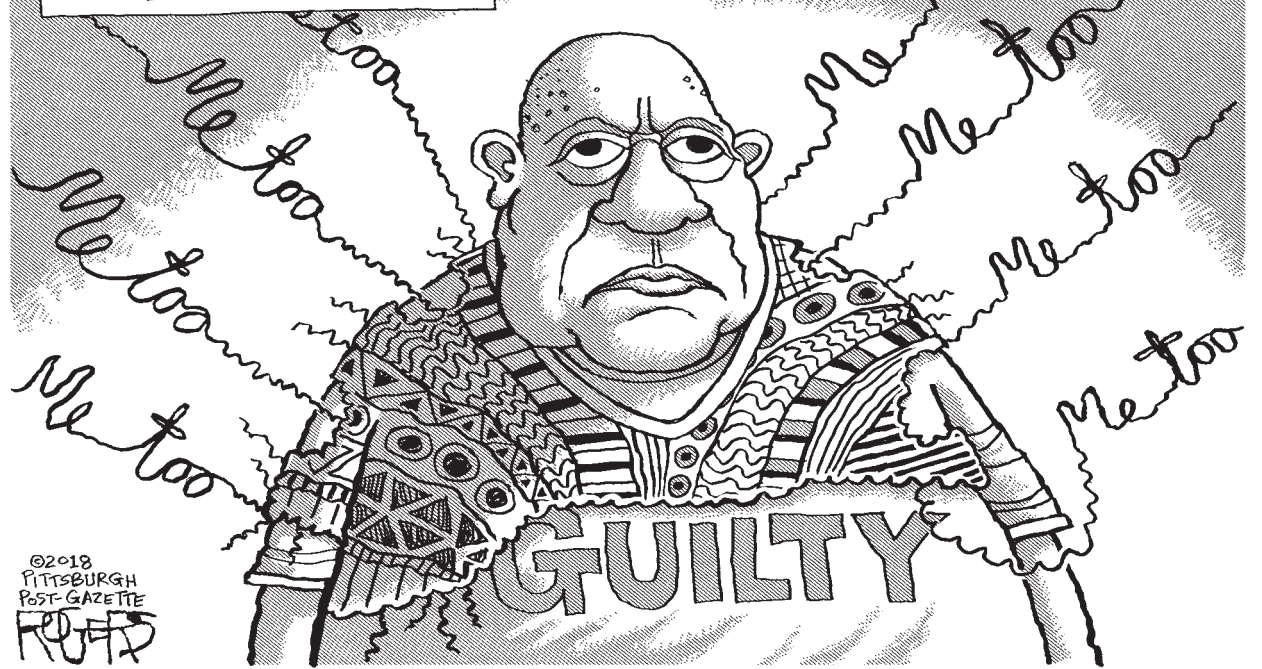
High-stakes achievement tests have turned our public schools into testing mills. Year after year, grading period after grading period, week after week, valuable instruction time is lost to practice tests to prepare for state-mandated tests.

"This is a very high-stakes test that impacts student report cards, teacher evaluations and employment, and even determines soon-to-be letter grades for schools and districts," Jennifer Proseus, a Bartlett parent, told ChalkBeat.

"Why do these faulty tests — that parents and teachers are forbidden from seeing — hold so much power?"

That is the question our next governor, legislature and education commissioner should ask and answer.

COSBY'S UNRAVELING...



Comey's attacks lack facts

Hard on the heels on his new book release, "A Higher Loyalty," former FBI Director James Comey continues to make the multimedia rounds, promoting his anti-Trump tome and touting himself as the exemplar of ethics.

The question is "Who is Comey hurting more -- President Trump or himself?" The answer depends on who you ask. To Trump's most vocal opponents, Comey's sordid stories about Trump's values, beliefs, attitudes and behaviors reinforce their own perceptions of the president as an "amoral, authoritarian president who's unfit to serve."

Conversely, to Trump's most avid defenders, Comey's ad hominem attacks on the president are proof positive of his hatred for Trump and his desire to see him removed from office because he is "morally unfit to be president."

Comey is, of course, entitled to his own opinions regarding Trump's unfitness for the presidency. However, he is not entitled to his own facts. When he insinuated in an ABC News interview that Trump had hired prostitutes in Moscow to do despicable things with him in 2013, Comey quickly added, "It's possible, but I don't know."

Comey also opined, sans facts, when he accused Trump of "colluding with Russians," presumably to help him win the White House in

the 2016 presidential elections. Again, he added, "It's possible."

Here's a clue for Comey. Many things are "possible." That doesn't mean they are true. For example, it's theoretically possible for me to win the Publishers Clearing House Grand Prize, but it's also highly improbable.

Even as Comey preaches about the importance of ethics in public service, his own practice or malpractice during his tenure as FBI Director reveals a sinister side of his selective ethics. From being disingenuous and evasive in his testimony to Congress to leaking sensitive information to friends and cronies in a deliberate attempt to damage Trump, Comey comes clean to his own discredit.

Comey's book and his multimedia blitz have managed to alienate conservatives, moderates and liberals alike, although for drastically different reasons. In his vicious, vitriolic attempt to torch Trump, he may have torched what's left of his own reputation.

As for Comey's claim of "A Higher Loyalty," it's clear to me that his highest loyalty is to himself and his version of the truth. As a lawyer, he should know his litany of lies and innuendoes could come back to haunt him.

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

MY TURN

THOMAS B. VAUGHN



Maine could change politics

PORTLAND, MAINE -- In less than two months, this state, which has had three Independent governors in the last four decades and has an Independent in the Senate today, will embark on a breathtaking new era, selecting nominees and public officials in a daring new election scheme that could turn the Dale Earnhardt epigraph ("Second place is just the first-place loser") on its head.

This grand experiment, approved earlier this month by the state Supreme Judicial Court after years of debate and contention, has the potential of changing the way citizens vote, the way candidates behave, the way political contributions are made and the way Maine is governed. It could upend the current culture of negative campaigning and alter the character of the state's politics.

Or it could fail miserably, leaving Maine politics in rubble for a decade, and blacken the name of political reform for a generation.

That's because this June, Maine will become the first state to implement broad use of a ranked-choice voting system: In multicandidate races, voters would rank their selections, giving life to the contenders who are their second and third choices. Then, if no contender gets a majority, the rankings would be employed to bolster candidate vote counts and then eliminate them until one of them gets a majority.

This spring's primaries, ordinarily a sleepy affair watched by no one west of Fryeburg or south of Eliot, will receive national attention. This scheme has been used sparingly across the country, in cities such as San Francisco, Oakland, Minneapolis and even here in Portland, but this is the first statewide test -- and it came against the will of the state legislature,

whose members after all were beneficiaries of the current system, and over the objections of the governor, who likely wouldn't have his position in Augusta had the new system been in place eight years ago.

But a series of citizen initiatives prevailed, profiting almost certainly from the nationwide contempt for the political establishment. Hillary Clinton carried Maine two years ago, but Donald J. Trump swept the northernmost reaches of the state and -- another example of Maine's unusual political character -- salvaged a single electoral vote here.

Some experts believe the new system, which requires several voter choices, will so complicate the process that people will be discouraged from voting. Jason McDaniel,

a San Francisco State University political scientist, has studied the scheme and believes it will cause a decline in voting participation of between 4 percent and 7 percent.

Not so, say the backers, a group called the Committee for Ranked Choice Voting. They insist the new system gives life -- and a fighting chance -- to Independents and third-party candidates that many voters might favor but whose prospects are so dim they would be reluctant to vote for them.

There remain constitutional challenges. There remains much uncertainty. And there remains a ballot measure that poses a vital question to primary voters: Do you want this system, or do you want the state legislature, which does not want this system, to examine it further? That may be the least visible, and most important, issue at all at the ballot box this spring.

Shribman is executive editor of the Post-Gazette (dshribman@post-gazette.com).

JUST A THOUGHT

LISA HOBBS



I'm ready for adventure

I've been accused of being a little adventurous.

Making the allegation Charles Armstrong from the Tennessee Fire and Codes Academy during a firefighters training session for McMinnville Fire Department. Leading up to that comment, he asked me if I wanted to see inside the training tower. I readily agreed.

Setting the scene: The training tower is three stories. It is used to provide responders with response scenarios. It also includes rooftop access. That area can be used to repel off the roof, among other things.

Armstrong and I were making our way up the flights of stairs and he's showing me all the ins and outs of the tower -- the forced entry door, smoke generator, window access, sprinkler system, etc. Then, we get to the top floor and he asked if I want to go onto the roof.

"Absolutely," I said. Armstrong says, "You're a little adventurous, aren't you?"

I'm more than a little. What he didn't know is I thought they were repelling off the water tower, and I already asked Fire Chief Kendall Mayfield if I could do that too.

Standard editor James Clark said I was crazy. However, if given the greenlight, he wanted me to let him know because he would take pictures. I'm sure the headline would be something like, "Where there's news, you'll find *Southern Standard* reporter Lisa Hobbs."

How many people can say they repelled off the downtown water tower? I would be one of very few. I was ready to go. Nervous, but willing to do it.

I was slightly disheartened when I arrived at the water tower to discover a tower-like building beside it. Getting to go onto the roof was at least a consolation prize. After climbing up there, I instantly reconsidered by my initial rush to climb the water tower. The training tower was probably one-third the height of the water tower, and I felt a little taken back by it. However, it was fun.

Do you remember in 2015 when the TWRA was studying the Indiana Bats in Hubbard's Cave? I do. I called TWRA Region 3 wildlife diversity coordinator Chris Simpson to receive all the information for an article. As he explained to me, they were going into the cave, capturing bats, putting radio trackers on them and then releasing them. The intent was to track them as they migrated. They are an endangered species. I finally asked if I could participate.

Simpson explained that workers had to go into a tent, strip off to underwear, be decontaminated and put on a suit. Upon exiting the cave, the process had to be reversed. I agreed.

Simpson said, "You are unlike any female reporter I've ever met."

He promised to call me the following year, but he did not. Don't you hate it when men say they'll call and don't?

If you love your job, you never have to work a day in your life. That's true, because I love mine.

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



Established 1879
Southern Standard
Publication No. 506-840

Patricia Zechman, Publisher
James Clark, Editor

Phyllis Vanatta, Business Manager
Dale Stubblefield, Circulation Director

Phone: 473-2191
105 College St., McMinnville, TN 37110
FAX: 473-6823
Email: standard@blomand.net
Website: www.southernstandard.com

Copyright Standard Publishing Company,
All Rights Reserved

2018 PRESS MEMBER
A PRIDE WINNING NEWSPAPER
UT-TPA Press Awards
2016