

Standard online reader survey



Q: Faced with steel tariffs, do you think Harley-Davidson is justified to move some production overseas?

YES or NO

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GUEST EDITORIAL

State needs to stop broken TNReady test

The superintendents of Tennessee's two largest public school systems are asking the state to "hit the pause button" on TNReady, the state's buggy, beleaguered standardized testing system.

That, they suggested, would give the next governor and education commissioner time to "convene a statewide working group of educators to sort out the myriad challenges" and rebuild confidence in the state's K-12 assessment system.

"We are writing to join a growing number of districts, legislators, teachers, parents and students in expressing concerns about the lack of reliability of the TNReady assessment system," wrote Shelby County Schools Director Dorsey Hopson and Metro Nashville Public Schools Director Shawn Joseph, whose districts represent 20 percent of all public school students in the state.

"After years of repeated implementation failures and missteps by multiple vendors, we believe educator and public trust in TNReady has fallen to irretrievably low levels. ... When basic delivery is botched, it's difficult to trust the fundamental integrity of the underlying assessment."

They also noted that districts have spent millions of dollars over the past few years on technology to prepare for TNReady tests that didn't happen or didn't count. That's not even

Commercial Appeal Memphis

counting the millions of dollars taxpayers also have sent to big corporations for testing materials.

TNReady testing earlier this year was disrupted by a cyberattack, a dump truck that cut a fiber-optic cable, and other problems. So many districts had so many problems with Questar's online testing, legislators intervened and said TNReady results wouldn't hurt students, teachers or districts.

In 2017, test results were delayed for weeks after thousands of 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.

Now, as this new school year begins, state officials are marching on with the same testing company. The state plans to spend an extra \$12.5 million to hire ETS to handle parts of the testing previously handled by Questar.

State officials and their multi-million-dollar, data-driven testing vendors have failed the TNReady test three years in a row.

It's time for classroom educators to take over the state's corporate testing system and turn it around.



The press not the enemy

When I look at what seems to have become our national "conversation" on the press, it appears every level of journalism has devolved into such an endless barrage of insults and calumny that I want to flee to some quiet, hidden place, safe from the very give-and-take I have treasured all my life.

We know, of course, what Donald Trump thinks, or at least what he says. He cannot get enough play out of the words "fake news."

But isn't it time we looked deeper -- if we remain a serious people -- and our national discussion about journalism?

As a local reporter in Chicago, then a foreign correspondent and columnist, I have some experience in journalism. Don't ever believe print journalists are somehow casual about their work for there are great passions and world-shaking predications inside them.

The achievements of my paper, the famous Chicago Daily News, and the hundreds of other great papers in this country, were made possible by layers of editors, by checks and balances and, most important, by gatekeepers at every level, devoted to keeping things straight.

And then came today.

For many Americans, the press is not composed of newspapers and print journals but of cable TV news they devour like Cleopatra did Mark Antony's caresses, and therein lies the problem. Most of the safeguards, the checks and balances and gatekeeping have broken down in the cable news realm, be it FOX News, CNN or MSNBC. Note, too, that virtually all

actual reporting is still done by the remaining newspapers and then purloined by TV for profit.

Not that we do not have our problems. Famous Watergate journalist Bob Woodward wisely warned recently: "A number of reporters have at times become emotionally unhinged" about the Trump reign.

Undermining the craft of journalism is the indisputable fact that newspapers -- often the only places where true journalistic principles still exist -- have been failing for years. (In 1990, daily and weekly newspaper

publishers employed roughly 455,000 men and women; by 2016, that number was 173,000.)

But I am happy to say there are incipient signs of a turnaround. Semi-

private groups such as the Pulitzer Center have stepped in to foster foreign news coverage. Another inspiring event is the purchase of the ailing *Los Angeles Times* by a brilliant Chinese-American billionaire doctor, Patrick Soon-Shiong, who promises convincingly to return the paper to its previous greatness.

In the end, the future of journalism in America is going to depend on the commitment of individual reporters, editors and columnists to fight for their honor and their integrity with the strength of giants. But it will also depend upon millions of Americans, who either have to start reading, and paying for and appreciating, real news as reported by newspapers -- or just lean back and be had.

Georgie Anne Geyer has been a foreign correspondent for more than 40 years.



COLUMNIST

GEORGIE ANNE GEYER

Best when read by 2018

I recently discovered a box of chicken tenders in my freezer, hidden underneath a container of very fuzzy cherry chocolate-chunk ice cream. I made a salad and put a few pieces of the microwaved tenders on top.

As I returned the chicken to the freezer, I spotted a little line on the package that said, "Best when eaten before August 2017."

No doubt I had just poisoned myself and had minutes left to live. I looked in the fridge to see if there was some moldy sour cream or sour milk I could swallow to make me purge the deadly meal, but no such luck. I also remembered reading a story a while back that some chicken-packing company had recalled a few billion pounds of chicken parts because of a rare failure of their self-regulated inspection system.

The chicken tenders still tasted good despite being a year out of date. Even so, it's probably best to write a note to Sue before she finds my cold, dead body on the kitchen floor.

While writing the third page of my note -- the part about the equitable distribution of my snow-globe collection -- I realized not only was I still alive, I felt pretty good. The more I thought about it, I realized that if some deadly bacteria could live through years in my freezer and four minutes in the microwave, some rogue country would be using chicken tenders as a biological weapon. They'd just put the wrong "use by" date on some common food and kill us all.

How clever the wording is: "best used before," not "spoiled rotten by" or "vile and disgusting by." "Best used" doesn't even imply the product can't be used after that date; we just assume it. Past that date? Better throw it out and buy some more. Why take a

chance?

Now bottles of beer and soda have "best used by" dates on them so you'll know they're fresh. Yeah, you don't want to show up at that tailgate party with stale beer. As if after eating four pounds of chili, nachos and chips, and taking a few nips from a hip flask, you could you possibly tell the difference.

The label on the soda I'm drinking right now says it contains potassium benzoate, calcium disodium EDTA and something called "Red 40." Will any of that really spoil over time? In small print on the back it says "Contains no juice."

How much should a beefsteak that "contains no beef" cost, or olive oil that "contains no olive products"?

Thinking about all this was giving me a headache, so I looked in the medicine cabinet for some over-the-counter relief. I

noticed all my prescriptions expired exactly one year after I got them. Really? So that medicine is perfect for 365 days, but it turns bad in the container on day 366? That's quite a trick. And how long did it sit on the pharmacy shelf before they sold it to me? How long was it in the warehouse?

How long before they start putting "best used by" dates on big purchases like cars and washing machines? If it works for frozen chicken, imagine how much they could make by getting you to toss out the old fridge. I'm not against the "best used by" idea for some things -- athletes, politicians and teenage pop stars come to mind -- but you use your own common sense.

By the way, my out-of-date chicken tenders tasted, you guessed it, just like chicken.

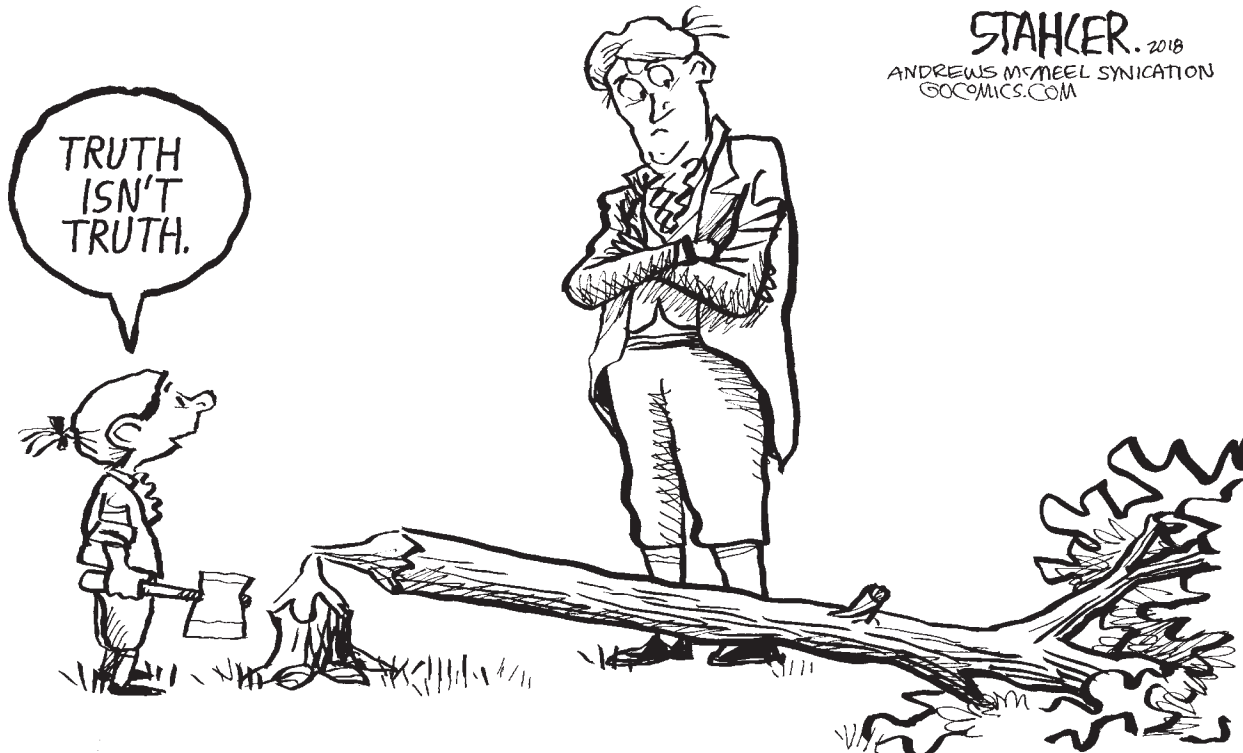
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Nightmares in dental work

Dental work really freaks me out. I'm a year overdue on my next dentist appointment and I can't seem to make myself schedule it. While filling out info for my benefits, I was hit with these stats:

- 80 percent of adults suffer from some form of gum disease
- 92 percent of adults have cavities
- Studies show heart disease, clogged arteries, strokes, premature births and diabetes may be associated with poor oral health.

While I'm 98 percent sure this was a scare tactic by Cigna to sway me to sign up for its dental benefits, (which I did), now I need to woman up and actually use them. After all, I suffered and endured braces in middle school, slept religiously in my retainer and had my wisdom teeth removed to get these straight chompers.

The thing is, I've had so many horrible dental experiences. Seriously, I've never had a pleasurable visit to the dentist office. I get clammy and sweaty just thinking about it. Before you scoff at me or call me ridiculous, let me share a few of them with you.

During a routine cleaning, the dental hygienist left that straw-like tool in my mouth that sucks out all your saliva (you know the one I'm talking about) while asking me questions about my oral habits. While I'm trying to oblige by answering, the tool goes up my left nostril. The bib prevented me from retrieving the tool so I made noises to get her attention. How did she respond you ask? "Sorry dear" before pulling it out and putting it right back in my mouth!

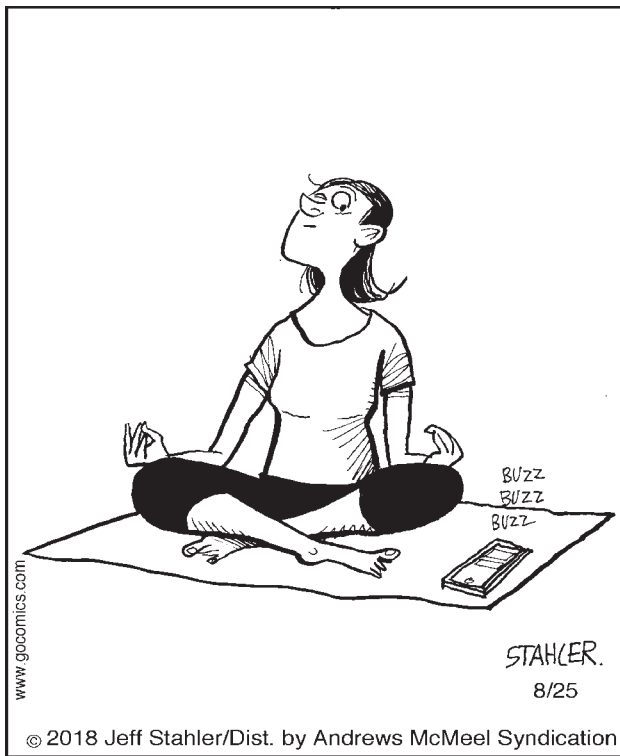
Another time, I had to return to get a small cavity filled. They reclined my seat back and I inhaled laughing gas in preparation. Well, either they gave me too much or they hit a nerve because as soon as the dentist started drilling, I threw up everywhere. I had to ride home from Tullahoma in a zipped-up jacket.

Let's go back to the wisdom teeth removal procedure. Mine were impacted so they had to be cut out. Even though I was in high school, I cried before the surgery. When I woke up, the luxury of feeling nothing and being silly from the amnesia didn't happen. I was in pain as soon as I got to the car. I lost 15 pounds, my face blew up like a black-and-blue balloon and my careful diet of pureed food and my no-straw policy did not prevent four dry sockets. It took me nearly five weeks to recover.

As you can see, I've not had the best of luck. Sometimes I've gotten cleanings that felt like the dental hygienist was taking out her terrible day on my gums while flossing. Other times, I've accidentally swallowed the foamy flavored stuff and nearly choked.

Still, if you have any suggestions, please shoot me an email. I don't even mind traveling to Murfreesboro once a year if I must.

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