Standard online reader survey

Q: Do you think Brett Kavanaugh should be confirmed as the next Supreme Court Justice?

YES or **NO**

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GUEST EDITORIAL

A 30-minute walk brings many benefits

Bristol Herald Courier

Poll after poll shows health care and related health expenses are among the top concerns of Americans. One of the simplest methods of keeping healthy is to engage in physical activity, and one of the easiest ways to do that is by walking. Toward that end — and a host of associated benefits, both physical and fiscal — many cities are striving to make their downtowns more walkable.

Walking produces a range of health benefits. Walking can lower blood pressure and combat the progress of diabetes, two major health concerns in this country and this region. According to the American Heart Association, adults should be walking 150 minutes a week to fully receive the health benefits from such a physical activity. That's only a half hour each day, which is an easy goal to accomplish, provided that people have access to a safe and attractive walking environment.

A good 30-minute walk can also produce emotional and mental benefits, too. Walks are great for clearing cobwebs from the brain, fostering inspiration, reducing stress and bestowing a general sense of well being.

Walking is great for business, as well. Walkers on the paths and sidewalks in revitalized downtown areas get to enjoy the aromas wafting from restaurants, browse the windows of art galleries and antique shops, admire gardens and landscaping, study vintage architecture, and much more.

Local officials should look at even more ways to incorporate safe and attractive thoroughfares for the benefit of those who like to reach their destination on foot. Walking trails, especially when combined with aesthetically and environmentally pleasing green spaces and water features, are an economic boon to any community.

The AHA points out that walking can easily be paired with other activities:

- Taking the dog out for a stroll through the neighborhood.
- Spending quality time with the family at the park.
- Parking farther from your workplace and using the stairs instead of the elevator.
- Window shopping at a mall or downtown shopping districts.
- De-stressing after a hectic work day.

Walking does a body good. Walking also does a community good. Individuals and communities should join hands and walk together in providing more safe and accessible walking opportunities for everyone.

Established 1879
Southern Standard
Publication No. 506-840

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2018 Tennessee Press Association Member

A Prize-Winning Newspaper UT-TPA Press Awards 2016

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Trump testifies against himself

The president continues to strengthen the case he is obstructing justice. The latest evidence: a tweet in which Trump condemned his own Justice Department and Attorney General Jeff Sessions for pursuing criminal charges against two Republican congressmen running for re-election.

"Two easy wins now in doubt," he lamented. "Good job Jeff."

Compare that tantrum to Merriam-Webster's definition of obstruction: "The crime or act of willfully interfering with the process of justice and law especially by influencing, threatening, harming or impeding a witness, potential witness, juror or judicial or legal officer."

The attorney general is clearly a "judicial or legal officer." He is clearly being influenced, threatened and impeded -- by his boss, no less: the president, who can fire him at any time.

"This is not the conduct of a president committed to defending and upholding the Constitution," complained Sen. Jeff Flake, an Arizona Republican and frequent Trump critic.

Sally Yates, fired by Trump as acting attorney general, called Trump's statements "nothing short of an all-out assault on the rule of law."

The attack on Sessions for indicting the two congressmen is just a sideshow to the main event: Trump's incessant attempts to undermine special counsel Robert Mueller, who is investigating possible connections between Russia and the president's 2016 campaign. In one typical tweet, Trump railed recently: "This is a terrible situation and Attorney General Jeff Sessions should stop this Rigged Witch Hunt right now."

Influencing? Threatening? Impeding? All of the above.

The public increasingly believes that the president is acting like a criminal. The latest ABC/*Washington Post* poll asked, "Do you think Trump has tried to interfere with Mueller's investigation in a way that amounts to obstruction of justice or not?" Fifty-three percent said yes, including 1 in 5 Republicans, while only 35 percent said no.

In the ongoing feud between Trump and Sessions, 62 percent back the attorney general and 23 percent side with the president. Almost two-thirds say Sessions should not be fired; a similar number supports Mueller's investigation. Overall, 3 in 5 disapprove of the president, while only 36 percent support him.

COLUMNISTS

Steve & Cokie Roberts

Trump is not the first modern president to face possible obstruction charges. The articles of impeachment filed against both Richard Nixon and Bill Clinton cited that crime, but there's one huge difference: Nixon and Clinton were accused of acting in private. Trump's sins are public and palpable.

A key element in any obstruction case, and one that's often difficult to prove, is criminal intent. That's why Trump's own words are so critical to any inquiry. *The New York Times* reported in July that Mueller wants to question the president directly about his tweets in order to demonstrate his mindset and reveal his true purpose.

So far, the president has refused to sit down with Mueller and answer his questions. But Trump is still a damaging and hostile witness to his own cause -- the chief architect of the "narrative arc" that prosecutors will use against him.

Steve and Cokie Roberts can be contacted by email at stevecokie@gmail.com.

Climate and global conflict

When I first went overseas as a foreign correspondent in the 1960s, the style of foreign coverage fit the stories of the time. But those stories were tremendously different from the important stories of today, and we ignore the startling changes facing us only at serious risk.

The new threats do not adhere to lines drawn by statesmen in London or Paris. The political parties are largely mute about these new questions, and terrorists do not understand them either. These new threats move stealthily, making the old secrets of MI6, the CIA and the KGB seem simple.

You don't believe it? Think of Africa, source of many of the waves of despairing migrants flooding Europe. Why? In great part because the Earth's largest hot desert, the Sahara, is rapidly advancing south, turning formerly green vegetation dry and making it impossible for farmers to live there. Scientists publishing in the *Journal of Climate* now see the Sahara taking over a water basin that drains into Lake Chad -- and they see other deserts expanding as well, largely from climate change.

In Iraq what is happening is what some scientists are calling an "existential threat" -- the Tigris River and the 1,700-mile-long Euphrates are being diverted by Syrian and Iranian dams and poisoned by American policies.

"If there's a new frontier in political science, it's the realization that environmental problems, particularly water shortages, not only worsen conflict but may actually cause it," the respected writer Joshua Hammer wrote in *Smithsonian Magazine*, the journal of the Smithsonian Institution.

In the oil-rich country of Nigeria, the dry seasons are getting longer, and desertification and population explosions have pitted the "killer herdsmen," or Fulani pastoralists, now armed with AK-47s, against the sedentary farmers.

Nor is the Western Hemisphere exempt from these secretive movements. In Guatemala, home to so many poor human beings trying to live out their destiny by crossing the American borders of "El Norte," drought and rising temperatures are destroying hopes for natives to remain at home. El Salvador, too, has been hit by a devastating drought.

COLUMNIST

Georgie Anne Geyer

Already, the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees estimates that, since 2008, 22.5 million people have been violently uprooted by climate-related or extreme weather events and are searching for new homes across the globe, from Darfur, to Bangladesh, to Puerto Rico, to Gambia, to Ethiopia. For starters!

Of course, we need a presidency and a Congress and institutions that will study these developments. We, as journalists, need to use whatever ingenuity we can scrape up to report these stories effectively in new ways. And above all, we will need the attention and anger of the American people. Without them, all the efforts will simply be scratching an increasingly dangerous surface.

Georgie Anne Geyer has been a foreign corresponden for more than 40 years. She can be reached at gigi_geyer@juno.com.

THE SCOOP

James Clark

Just Do It and support freedom

Nike is a global company which produced $36.4 billion in revenue last year. The apparel and footwear giant took home $1.9 billion of that in profit so I tend to believe Nike is doing something right.

One thing a number of people believe the company is doing wrong is its choice of spokesperson. The decision by Nike to use Colin Kaepernick in conjunction with its 30th anniversary of the "Just Do It" campaign has created extreme backlash. The Nike ad features Kaepernick along with the phrase, "Believe in something, even if it means sacrificing everything."

Nike had to expect a violent reaction from the ad, the type of reaction where people burn their sneakers and vow never again to buy anything with a swoosh.

The criticism has been especially amplified on Fox News where columnist Britt McHenry writes, "To sacrifice everything, you have to be willing to part with life itself, like so many members of our military and law enforcement risk doing every single day."

I agree with the military and law enforcement angle, but arguing about who's the very most qualified person for an ad campaign seems misguided. Whether it's an Oscar or a Little League MVP, it can always be claimed someone else is more deserving so this is hardly the backbone of a meaningful refute.

Fox columnist Todd Starnes goes a step further when he so eloquently writes, "The only thing Kaepernick is qualified to endorse is knee pads." Starnes goes on to call Kaepernick a left-wing America hater.

All this anger stems from Kaepernick taking a knee during the national anthem in 2016. At the time, he was an NFL quarterback.

Said Kaepernick to NFL Media, "I am not going to stand up to show pride in a flag for a country that oppresses black people and people of color. To me, this is bigger than football and it would be selfish on my part to look the other way. There are bodies in the street and people getting paid leave and getting away with murder."

Seems like a fair enough point.

But Kaepernick was blackballed by the NFL for exercising his First Amendment rights. He has been banished from the league and forced to give up his football career for stating his beliefs.

I'm proud of Nike for supporting Kaepernick and drawing attention to his plight. He might be delivering a message we don't want to hear. He might be delivering it during what's intended to be a patriotic moment. But the same Constitution that protects his right to peacefully protest also protects other freedoms, like the right to send ugly and insulting tweets at 3 a.m.

Because of Nike's affiliation with Kaepernick, there are some people who may never buy Nike again. That's their right.

It's also Nike's right to align itself with someone who is working to make a difference. Nike may not be highlighting a member of our fine military, but the company is fighting for our freedoms in its own way.

Standard editor James Clark can be reached at 473-2191.