The editorial pages: A reader’s guide

Who writes the brew of opinion that appears on The News Tribune’s editorial and letters pages every day? Today’s feature explains various parts of our section, introduces the editorial board, explains how editorials are crafted and answers frequently asked questions about what we do.

Why do you publish editorials? As the First Amendment makes clear, one role of the press is to act as a voice and watchdog independent of government. We also publish editorials to entertain, provoke thought and debate, and more to provide civic leadership and promote the welfare of our local communities.

Whose opinions do the editorials represent? The editorials reflect the collective views of the editorial board, whose members are pictured on the facing page. We arrive at these views together through the process, from the initial discussion of the topic to the revisions that any member of the board may recommend. The writer who composes the editorial is conveying the sense of the board, not necessarily his or her own views. While the editorials are unsigned, they are not anonymous. The names of everyone involved in their writing appear in the masthead in the left-hand column – the “rail.”

Do the newspaper’s corporate owners influence local editorial positions? No. The McClatchy Co., based in Sacramento, Calif., strongly believes that its member newspapers should make news and editorial decisions independently. The editorial board receives no instruction from corporate headquarters.

Do The News Tribune’s editorial views influence news coverage? No. The news and opinion sections operate independently.

Why do you publish election endorsements? Our core mission, we believe, is community leadership: The editorial board offers opinions year-round on public policy decisions, so we think it makes sense when election season arrives – to offer our opinions on who ought to hold public office and make those decisions. Many organizations, such as labor unions and political advocacy groups, routinely make election recommendations. Our recommendations are just one part of that mix. Citizens are free to ignore them, and they often do.

What is the civic agenda? This is the list of civic priorities the editorial board uses to guide the decisions it makes each week. An updated agenda is published early in the year and kept online all year. Some priorities, such as promoting open government, are perennial. Others are added or dropped each year. Our 2013 civic agenda will appear Sunday.

How do you pick columns and cartoons? The editorial writer who manages the daily pages chooses from a roster of syndicated columnists and cartoonists representing a mix of political views. The goal is to provide a varied and reasonably balanced mix of conservative and liberal opinion on national and international topics.

Why didn’t my letter run in the paper? Published letters are only a representative sampling – about one-third – of the letters we receive each week. That means some acceptable letters may not appear in print. Those that are not selected for print may appear online at blog.thenewstribune.com/letters. Reasons for rejection include length, poor writing, a lack of clarity, an interpretive tone, duplication or datelessness. Overtly personal attacks are rejected.

How to get your letters published: View tips on the opposite page for improving your chance of having a letter published in The News Tribune.
Meet the editorial board

DAVID A. ZEDEK President and publisher
The News Tribune has been a daily newspaper since 1891. David A. Zedek is the third generation of the Zedek family to serve as president and publisher of The News Tribune. He is a 1977 graduate of the University of Washington.

KAREN PETERSON Executive editor
Karen Peterson joined The News Tribune in 2005 after managing daily newspapers in San Diego for 15 years. During her tenure in San Diego, she served as editor of the La Jolla Press-Telegram and the Reader's Digest Magazine. Before moving to San Diego, she worked as a reporter and editor for the Montgomery Advertiser in Alabama and for the Daytona Beach News-Journal in Florida.

DARLENA PHelps Managing editor
Darlena Phelps has managed The News Tribune's editorial page for 12 years. She focuses on strengthening reader engagement and bringing a fresh perspective to the page. During her time editing the page, it has received several awards, including a national award in 2010 for editorial excellence.

PATRICK O'CALLARAN Editorial page editor
Patrick O'Callaran oversees the editorial page, managing the editorial writers, as well as media and community relations.

CHERYL TUCKER Editorial writer
Cheryl Tucker has a background in writing, editing, and journalism. She began her career in the newspaper industry in 2000, serving as a reporter and editor at various newspapers before joining The News Tribune in 2008.

BARBARA SHELLY Columnist
Barbara Shelly is a columnist for the News Tribune and also contributes to the opinion page on The News Tribune's website, thenewstribune.com/opinion.

JOIN THE CONVERSATION
Letters to the editor

Send a letter to the editor or online at thenewstribune.com/opinion.

You can submit letters by email, mail, or via the Contact Us form at www.thenewstribune.com/opinion.

Letters should be no longer than 300 words and will be published at thenewstribune.com/opinion.

OPINION: A READER'S GUIDE

Wednesday, January 2, 2013 • A11

Somehow, that 'later' might never come

BY BARBARA SHELLY

When I was a kid, I took piano lessons. It was fulfilling. Even as a teenager, I couldn't imagine not having the occasional music lesson in my life. I worked to earn money to pay for my lessons.

Sometimes in my 30s, I actually purchased a used piano. I plunked it in my living room, and sometimes played until late at night. But I didn't resume lessons myself because I was busy then, and there would be time later.

Later became never.

A friend had heard I was a teacher. He had heard I was a teacher in a school building. I played the upright piano in the music room sometimes, usually when the house was empty except for the two of us. Sometimes in my 50s, I managed to hire a piano teacher. And I hired the teacher to teach me.

The beginning of this story was music in my life.

There was always a piano there. I could not imagine not having a piano. But I can't imagine not having a piano. The piano is a big part of my life.

As a retired teacher, I can say that piano lessons are not required, but they are helpful. As a pianist, I can say that piano lessons are not required, but they are helpful.

I once had a student who told me that she had been putting off lessons for years. She finally realized that she was never going to have the time to learn. That's why she started taking lessons at age 70.

Somehow, that 'later' might never come.

Letters to the editor

GUNS: Classroom resource for firearms? Re: “NRA calls for armed police officer in school” (TNT 12-21)

If there’s one lesson from the shooting at the Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Conn., it’s that we need to do more to keep our schools safe.

The Newtown shooting was a tragedy, and it should never happen again. But we can learn from this tragedy to make our schools safer.

One way to do this is by arming our teachers and staff with firearms. This would allow them to protect our students and staff in the event of an active shooter.

However, this is a controversial topic. Some argue that arming teachers and staff is a bad idea, while others believe it is necessary.

I believe that arming our teachers and staff is the best way to protect our students and staff.

In the final analysis, this is a decision that each school district must make for itself. But I believe that arming our teachers and staff is necessary to protect our students and staff.

GUNS: Enforce laws already on the books

Gregoire had excess taxpayer money to spend. Re: “Gov. Gregoire’s legacy included the most money in state coffers in history” (TNT 12-18)

Gov. Chris Gregoire announced that she would ask for a budget surplus of $600 million in the next legislative session.

But the budget surplus is not due to increased revenue. Instead, it is due to a one-time increase in federal funds for education.

As a result, state taxes and fees have been reduced, and the state has been able to cut spending. This is not a healthy situation for our state.

It is time for the legislature to step up and begin enforcing the laws that are already on the books.

The legislature has a responsibility to protect the taxpayers of Washington State. They need to consider the long-term effects of cutting programs and services.

Instead of spending more money, the legislature should focus on enforcing the laws that are already on the books. This would ensure that the state is properly funded and able to provide the services that are necessary for our communities.

BOTTOM LINE: Make the most of your time now. Re: “Is it ever too late to learn?” (TNT 12-15)

I think this is a great question. I think that it is never too late to learn. I think that it is never too late to do anything.

But I also think that it is important to make the most of your time. I think that it is important to use your time wisely.

I think that it is important to make choices that will benefit you in the long run.

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