

Opinions

The First Amendment

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Story was too easy on Mission

The front page article by Dillon Davis about letters written to NC Attorney General Stein intermingled reporting with editorializing. Bias marred a generally informative article, particularly in the section about letters expressing concern about or outright opposition to selling Mission Health and establishing Dogwood Health Trust.

Davis chooses the loaded word “gripe” as representative of those with concerns about the racial and gender makeup of the Dogwood board. I forcefully reject reporting these concerns as petulant or irritatingly nagging. Not only does Davis prejudge such concerns, but he presents a counter-argument by a Mission senior vice-president. No counter-arguments are printed in the section about letters favoring the sale.

Further discrediting that minority of letter writers opposing the sale, Davis writes that “the strongest letter of concern” is one that came from a group. Such an expression of opinion does not belong in a news article.

If the Trust is to “address the social determinants of health,” it needs leadership who understand these determinants as systemically driven and intentionally designed to negatively impact the poor (disproportionately women, children) and people of color. I, too, believe such leadership is less likely with a majority white (8), majority male (7) 11-member Board.

Mary Alm, Asheville

Our system will be stronger with H.R. 1

A bill to reform many areas of American politics, H.R. 1, is currently working its way through house committees. I support the goals of this bill wholeheartedly. The bill in its current incarnation will almost certainly not become law any time soon simply because it would encourage strong challenges to heavily corporate-backed politicians in Congress.

This is why I do not expect to see Patrick McHenry or Senators Burr and Tillis support reforms such as this. However, America will be stronger when the interests of its citizens come first. All of our members of Congress should make it their primary goal to enact H.R. 1 into law without delay.

Sam Ready, Asheville

Hood has it wrong on climate change

John Hood makes the tired, specious argument we’ve heard so many times from those not willing to face reality with respect to climate change, and our absolute need to wean ourselves from polluting fossil fuels. In lamenting the promotion of carbon pricing by concerned citizens—which essentially all economists agree is the most effective means for reducing carbon pollution—Mr. Hood conveniently fails to mention the bipartisan carbon pricing bill introduced in both the U.S. House and Senate in the past few weeks.

The policy is not a tax, but a fee, with all net revenues returned to Americans on an equal basis. If enacted at the federal level, the Energy Innovation and Carbon Dividends Act would be by far the most effective policy the world has ever seen for combating climate change, ushering in a new era powered by clean energy. Oh, and we’d experience economic growth, and most Americans would actually have more money in their pockets from the monthly dividends check. The Energy Innovation and Carbon Dividends Act would lead to a 40 percent reduction in greenhouse gas pollution in only a dozen years, with 2015 as the benchmark. Let’s start the realistic conversation from here, Mr. Hood.

Michael Hill, Asheville

Carbon Act good for people, economy

When it comes to climate solutions, I’m tired of being told what’s “not going to happen.” The 100,000 plus supporters of Citizens Climate Lobby were told that bipartisan legislation supporting a tax on carbon pollution was “impossible.” But we respectfully lobbied our lawmakers for a decade, and last month, Republicans and Democrats in U.S. House and Senate introduced the Energy Innovation and Carbon Dividend Act. The bill puts a fee on fossil fuels, raises it each year until emission goals are met and sends all the net revenue to American households as a monthly dividend. It will be good for people, the economy and revenue neutral.

Don Kraus, Asheville



Trump’s perilous withdrawal from Syria

David Ignatius

Columnist

WASHINGTON – Asked to describe U.S. policy toward Syria after President Trump’s sudden decision on Dec. 19 to withdraw U.S. troops from that country, several key officials use the same two words: “total chaos.”

There’s another phrase that comes to mind in assessing Trump’s move: snatching defeat from the jaws of victory. American-backed forces were on the verge of eliminating the Islamic State in northeast Syria when Trump made his surprise announcement, which went against the recommendations of all his senior diplomatic and military advisers.

Trump did it anyway, for reasons that remain mysterious to some of his subordinates. The trigger was a Dec. 14 phone call from Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Trump had been briefed to warn the Turkish leader not to invade Syria, as he had been threatening to do. But Trump instead told Erdogan: “You know what? It’s yours. I’m leaving.”

Trump’s idea was to let Turkish forces take over the American-backed campaign against the Islamic State in northeast Syria. But senior military officials say the Turkish alternative doesn’t add up, quite literally, in terms of numbers.

The Turks want to replace a Kurdish-led force of about 60,000 fighters, known as the Syrian Democratic Forces. They have claimed to U.S. officials that they have 50,000 Syrian opposition forces under their control, but that’s wildly overstated. The Turkish-backed opposition is closer to 5,000, U.S. officials say, and many have jihadist connections.

The Turks have been trying to sell the notion that they can combat the Islamic State for more than two years. U.S. military commanders who investigated Ankara’s proposals starting in 2016 began describing the force that would supposedly clear Raqqa and other jihadist strongholds as a “ghost brigade.”

The posturing continues: Last week Turkish-backed Syrians moved heavy weapons across the border toward Manbij, to signal their readiness. But Turkish military resources are so threadbare that they’ve asked the U.S. to provide overhead surveillance, logistical support and air cover for any operation to finish off the Islamic State in the Middle Euphrates River Valley, officials say. The U.S. has so far refused such requests.

The most dangerous consequence of Trump’s Turkish solution is that it could re-ignite the Islamic State. The problem starts with about 780 foreign fighters who are now being held by the SDF in a half-dozen prisons in northeast Syria. The SDF commander, Gen. Mazloum Abdi, told me bluntly in an interview 10 days ago that he wouldn’t be able to hold the prisoners if Turkish forces invaded the areas he controls.

These jihadist prisoners are the worst of the worst, and their release could mean mayhem. But so far, almost none of the 48 countries from which the fighters traveled to Syria has been willing to take them back. Britain, France, Belgium and other European nations that have been attacked are said to have re-

fused, claiming they don’t have legal authority or making other excuses. Macedonia has agreed to take a handful, as has Lebanon. Several North African nations are considering repatriation requests, and a Central Asian country might eventually take as many as 100.

Trump’s apparent assumption, initially, that Turkey would take the prisoners could be almost as dangerous as letting them go free. The Turks have allowed jihadist fighters to crisscross their border since the Syrian civil war began in 2011, U.S. officials say. These officials argue that Erdogan’s real nemesis in Syria is the Kurdish militia, which he calls a terrorist organization, rather than the jihadists.

Erdogan has many links with the Trump team. Michael Flynn was a well-paid but unregistered Turkish lobbyist before he briefly became Trump’s national security adviser. Rudy Giuliani, Trump’s personal lawyer, tried in 2017 to broker a deal to free Reza Zarrab, a Turkish-Iranian businessman with links to Erdogan’s family. Trump himself has embraced Erdogan as a kindred spirit when they’ve met at summits.

Amid all this policy turmoil, the Kurds just keep on fighting the Islamic State. A U.S. official told me Thursday that the SDF had suffered 80 casualties, including 25 dead, in heavy fighting by its 5,000 fighters over the previous 72 hours in the Euphrates Valley. It had also pushed to within 15 miles of the Iraqi border. A brief ray of hope for the Kurds is that Trump has agreed to carry out the withdrawal of U.S. Special Operations Forces from Syria over the next four months, and Turkey has promised it won’t attack until the SDF’s American advisers leave.

The Kurdish fighters “do what they promise to do,” said one U.S. official who has worked closely with them. The same, alas, cannot be said of the Trump administration.

David Ignatius can be reached via Twitter: @IgnatiusPost.

EDITORIAL BOARD



Dedicated to the upbuilding of Western North Carolina since 1870.

Letters Policy

We invite Letters to the Editor of 200 words or less written by the submitter for the Citizen-Times. Please include your name, mailing address, daytime telephone number and email address.

Mail to: Letters, Asheville Citizen-Times, P.O. Box 2090, Asheville, NC 28802-2090.

E-mail: letters@citizen-times.com

For information: Call Casey Blake at 828-232-5841 or email cblake@citizen-times.com.

Casey Blake
Opinions Editor
Katie Wadington
News Director

John Boyle
Senior Writer
Bill McGoun
Contributing Editor

DOONESBURY / GARRY TRUDEAU



MALLARD FILLMORE / BRUCE TINSLEY

