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Coming Tomorrow: Straight talk is missing in Oakland's debate about language spoken by black children, says columnist Ellen Goodman

Opinion

Our mission: "The Press-Gazette strives, as it has since 1915, to be the primary provider of information in Northeastern Wisconsin, keeping the welfare and development of the Greater Green Bay area at heart. It is our responsibility to provide a forum for free and open expression of diverse opinions while maintaining the public trust necessary to serve our readers, advertisers, employees and stockholders."

★★ A-7

Green Bay Press-Gazette | Comments and suggestions? Call Opinion Page Editor Mike Blecha, (414) 431-8248 | Monday, December 30, 1996

In our view

Open doors on water meetings

Fox River and Green Bay pollution is a matter of public concern.

Unfortunately, important meetings that may determine how much effort and how many dollars go into river and bay cleanup are being held behind closed doors.

That's outrageous.

The issue is how much of an estimated 90,000 pounds of polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) legally dumped into the river before 1971 will be cleaned up under U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service order.

■ Issue: River, bay cleanup
■ Our view: Public should know details of PCB pollution talks

PCBs, byproducts of carbonless paper process used from 1957 to 1970, are believed capable of causing cancer.

On Dec. 20, representatives of several federal agencies, the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources and seven Fox River paper mills met in secret session. They have on their agenda both overall cleanup and the possibility that the Fish and Wildlife Service will delay a cleanup order for a year in hopes of reaching a cooperative settlement.

As we said in November, pragmatic cooperation between the mills and government agencies is essential. Working together, they can keep anti-pollution efforts on track and prevent a return to the bad old days of monotonous, lawsuit-ridden public-private confrontation over environmental quality.

We would rather see voluntary agreement than a court-ordered settlement.

However, both mills and government agencies must understand that they deal with a public issue, not a private matter. Water quality is vital to hundreds of thousands of people living along the Fox and the bay. They have a right to know how their government agencies represent them in discussions with industry.

No doubt, preliminary negotiations that could involve millions of dollars are sensitive. A DNR spokeswoman has said that "the public will be brought in and made part of this."

But members of the public have too big a stake in river and bay water quality to be treated like children and told only the terms of a deal done in closed-door negotiations.

Open the meetings.

Tell the people what kind of deal is being struck over their water.

Mills on cleanup list

Paper mills named by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service as potentially responsible parties in a possible cleanup of Fox River and Green Bay PCBs are:

- Fort Howard Corp., Green Bay
- U.S. Paper Mills, De Pere
- Riverside Paper Corp., NCR, Appleton Paper, Wisconsin Tissue Mills and P.H. Glatfelter in the Appleton-Neenah-Menasha area.

Bill aimed at defeated judges needs a legislative rewrite

A shortsighted bill to ban judges who lose elections from serving as reserve jurists should be revised before going to the Legislature.

An acceptable rewrite would propose banning only judges convicted of crimes or disciplined for ethical violations.

Reserve judges, appointed to one-year terms by the chief justice of the state Supreme Court, sub for vacationing judges and work when court calendars are crowded.

The myopic proposal to limit them comes from Milwaukee-area Assemblymen Scott Walker and Jeff Plale.

"If a judge is serving on the bench, it should be because he or she was elected to do so. If you've been removed from the bench in a democratic election, then you shouldn't serve," Plale said.

Walker said the legislation would keep from the reserve bench the likes of Milwaukee County circuit judges Russell Stamper and Frank Crivello.

Stamper, now a reserve judge, lost an election following a campaign that included allegations he was a wife beater and violated the code of judicial ethics. Crivello, up for election in spring, is under an 18-month deferred prosecution agreement following his wife's allegations that he struck her.

Granted, they are lousy role models. But in their haste to keep Stamper and Crivello from reserve duty, Walker and Plale would deprive the state of needed service by qualified judges.

Walker argues that "you have to really be involved in some questionable activities to lose a (judicial) race."

That's not necessarily true.

Court races are far too rare. But good judges can lose elections because they make correct, though controversial, decisions. They can be swamped by someone more popular. Why prevent the state from using their experience?

Walker and Plale should rewrite their bill. Prevent judges with tainted records from serving as reserve jurists. But don't shun those with clean records just because they lost an election.

Charities should fight poverty

Mark Green

As the *Press-Gazette* recently reported, U.S. Sen. Dan Coats has introduced a plan that would provide a modest tax credit for contributions to charities that have as their primary purpose the prevention or alleviation of poverty.

I believe this plan could signal a positive new direction in our national battle against poverty.

First, despite what some have suggested, tax code incentives can have a significant effect on the level of charitable giving in America. For example, in 1986, when non-itemizers could deduct 50 percent of their contributions, they gave a total of $9.4 billion.

Just one year later, when there was a 100 percent deduction, contributions climbed to $13.2 billion.

While most current contributors don't give merely for the tax benefits, the real question is whether those who are not donating would be more likely to do so with the Charity Tax Credit.

Second, the empowerment of anti-poverty charities is important because these organizations are often more effective than traditional government programs in meeting the challenges of poverty.

Unlike many of the bureaucracies that administer welfare, charities and community organizations have the flexibility and freedom to treat the needy as individuals, not caseload numbers.

The most effective charitable initiatives are able to distinguish between those who are needy merely because they've fallen on hard times — an unforeseen crisis like a lost job or a sudden illness — and those with deeper problems.

The charities can go beyond the economic symptoms of poverty and help the needy change the behaviors that have either caused or reinforced their downfall.

Some of the most exciting success stories in the war on poverty have arisen from community organizations that provide an element of spiritual renewal or moral challenge for the needy — something bureaucracies could never do.

These initiatives recognize that many of our greatest social problems cannot be solved until, as Coats puts it, "the hearts of parents are turned toward their children; until respect is restored for human life and property, until a commitment is renewed to care about our neighbor."

The good news is that there are already individuals and organizations — families, churches and synagogues, charitable groups — that work effectively.

Third, greater involvement by private citizens in the work of charitable initiatives not only benefits the needy but the larger society as well.

Our current model of welfare puts too much distance between the average citizen and his needy neighbors. It makes it too easy for us to believe that our responsibility for addressing poverty challenges is met merely by paying taxes that fund government programs.

As Dr. Marvin Olasky, co-founder of the Center for Effective Compassion, points out, the literal meaning of "compassion" is "suffering with them — "not just writing a check, but having personal involvement with the needy."

Fourth, empowering charitable organizations in their efforts reinforces the devolution of power and decision-making from the bureaucracies in Washington toward state capitols, local communities and, eventually, families.

The Charity Tax Credit Act could be paid for by devoting merely 5 percent of federal welfare spending.

Nearly everyone recognizes that, despite the $324 billion we spend each year on the 77 overlapping federal welfare programs, our poverty-related challenges are greater than ever.

Giving the money to a more worthy cause would be more useful than a bunch of flags that will probably blow away in a year or two.

Melissa Wojtasiak, Ashwaubenon

Editorial was sensationalism

OCONTO — The *Press-Gazette*'s editorial, Sunday, Dec. 22, stating that local communities, such as Oconto, are sabotaging state tax relief is pure sensationalism. You might sell more papers with your biased opinions, but you do little good for small communities struggling with financial concerns.

The following facts relate to Oconto:

Oconto, a community of 4,500 souls, had, on Jan. 1, a total debt of $12.3 million. On Dec. 31, Oconto will have a total debt of $13.6 million. Oconto's debt to valuation ratio is three times higher than it should be for a community of its size. (Bells and whistles sound, lights flash, "danger, danger Will Robinson.")

Oconto spends more than $450,000 a year on police protection and more than $450,000 a year on fire protection. We are one of the smallest communities with a full-time fire department.

Oconto is also struggling to keep our hospital open and the city has committed hundreds of thousands of tax dollars for that purpose. On top of all that, the debt service for the city of Oconto, per year is more than $500,000. It costs every man, woman and child more than $100 per year just to cover our existing debt.

The Oconto City Council decided that, with the "state-supplied bonanza," we could keep the bottom line of our total tax bill about the same as it was last year and use the additional revenue, generated from our higher city tax rate, to pay down our total debt.

If the *Press-Gazette* wants to blame the city of Oconto for anything, then let it be for trying to practice fiscal responsibility.

Curtis Campbell, 5th ward alderman, Oconto

Let's wage peace

MARINETTE — What the heck are the military doing in our schools? Where are the women peace activists and ministers? I am a dues-paying member of the International Veterans for Peace. We are not a popular organization, as the world's economy depends on weapons for profit.

Corporations are trying to take over our schools. They will train students to be useful in our economic system, not to educate them.

Our public schools are educating our children to build their souls. We don't do this with computers, kicking a football or idolizing grown men playing children's games and making them multi-millionaires.

We build a child's soul by teaching them history, geography and the other arts and sciences. This tells them who they are and gives them pride in themselves.

Life is a game to be played and enjoyed, not a contest with the competitive forces — greed and fear. This should apply to individuals and nations. As a nation, we have lost our soul.

I quote the late Rev. Axel Pearson: "So many people are saying today, America first. We are joining them, but not in guns or bayonets, but in arts, culture and education. American. America first, but not in capturing the world's market for our business, but in friendly cooperation with the rest of the world. America first, not in being feared by anybody, but by being loved and befriended by all."

Let's wage peace in 1997.

Bill Reines, Marinette

Chapels are peaceful

GREEN BAY — A place to worship, usually contained in a church — this is *Webster's Dictionary*'s version of the word chapel. To me it is a place where we can always go and find God in peace.

Its always open day or night and all mankind are welcome. We sit in awe and joy as we say our prayers. No one tells you what to come and go and it doesn't matter what religion you are, all are welcome for there is only one God.

Life, indeed, can be beautiful for God works in mysterious ways. His wonders never cease.

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Crash was an accident

GREEN BAY — To Debra Mefford of Pulaski, I would like to say, Deen, I felt the same, but couldn't get my emotions calm enough to compose a letter that said what needed to be said. She did it. I agree with her letter it was an accident — Dec. 24 issue.

It is time for the adults who make laws and decisions to stand up and take responsibility for actions they took that may or may not put lives in jeopardy. They should see if better guardrails are needed. Why were the roads not salted? Is there enough lighting? Mefford raised some good points. I hope someone with authority sees it and actually takes action and does something about it.

Her last sentence said it all, it could happen to anyone, any age.

Would they have questioned someone sober and 40, about their ability to drive?

Susan Willems, Green Bay

Sees tribute to White

GREEN BAY — What a wonderful tribute to Reggie White, the minister of defense, to take his number 92 and add a 0 to be our new area code 920.

Reggie, we won't ever forget you.

Mrs. Ruth Felton, Green Bay

People's Forum

Dump affirmative action

DE PERE — As a 17-year-old who has grown up in the '90s and '00s, I have been bombarded by ideas of racial equality and nondiscrimination. In church, school and home I have been taught that it is wrong to discriminate against someone simply because of their skin color, nationality, race, sex or age.

Everyone should be given an equal opportunity.

For this reason, I am in favor of Proposition 209 that recently passed in California. I am not neglecting the fact that minorities were discriminated in the past. I have read this in my history books.

But the level of discrimination today compared with 30 years ago is so insignificant in the business sector that it is almost obsolete. Why do we need more laws to regulate business?

I think that people forget about the Equal Protection Act of the 14th Amendment and the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Those two pieces of legislation make it illegal to discriminate for age, race or creed.

Instead of making legislation to give preferential treatment to minorities, why don't we enforce the laws already in place? Everyone is already considered equal under those laws.

Also, who is to decide how much compensation a race as a whole should receive as a result of segregation in the past? How much should they get? Discrimination should be determined on an individual basis if a situation should occur. The laws already in place will protect people.

Proposition 209 is the nose under the tent. People should realize the opportunity for reverse discrimination under current affirmative action laws. They should be eliminated. They are unconstitutional.

Eric Wimberger, De Pere

Flags aren't a worthy cause

ASHWAUBENON — A few weeks ago, while driving down Oneida Street, I noticed that some new and, if I might add, overly tacky Packers flags had been hung from all of the electrical poles. I also recall my parents and teacher telling me to watch that I don't spend my money on stupid things.

I know that the money was solicited by the village from businesses, but they could have put it to better use. I'm always hearing about how the Humane Society and various other programs are in need of money. Why aren't these businesses that put out money for flags giving money to better causes?

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Send e-mail to 74604.1402@compuserve.com or to pgnews@wolnet.net

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