

VIEWPOINT

THE BATTALION
TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY

WEDNESDAY
JULY 5, 1978

Wanted: Scapegoats

We don't know quite what to make of the just-concluded annual get-together of the U.S. Conference of Mayors in Atlanta. The meeting, attended by some 250 mayors and other municipal officials and held in the lengthening shadow of California's Proposition 13, began on a kind of "don't blame us" note as mayor after mayor took the microphone to call on the federal government to "tighten its belt" and cut spending.

A resolution introduced by Mayor Coleman Young of Detroit aligning the conference with the burgeoning taxpayers' revolt was sanitized in committee by deleting references to the need "to reduce the number of municipal employees" and "the size of municipal government."

The mayors sobered up a little, however, when Wayne F. Anderson, executive director of the Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations, reminded them that the fastest growing federal expense has been aid to local governments, which increased from \$7 billion to \$80 billion in less than two decades.

Not that the mayors didn't have some legitimate complaints. Anderson also observed that the federal government "has purposely raced local governments' fiscal engines" by requiring matching funds for many of its aid programs. This has meant increased local taxes.

Yet as a New Bedford, Mass., city councilman pointed out, while local officials duck the blame for increased spending they eagerly accept federal money.

"If the plague were being passed out, we'd be the first in line," said Ralph Saulnier.

Thus as the conference progressed, a grudging consensus emerged that there was going to have to be belt-tightening at all levels of government — local, state and federal. But just how this was to be accomplished with the least curtailment of essential services remained an unanswered question at the end.

The nation's harried mayors clearly are aware of the implications of the movement started by the voters of California.

Yet if their inconclusive conference left us with one overall impression, it is that the politicians closest to the people are still looking for someone else — the statehouse or the White House — to bail them out of their difficulties, even as the unhappy taxpayers nip more fiercely at their heels.

Scripps-Howard Newspapers

In search of the missing electorate

By DAVID S. BRODER

PALO ALTO, CALIF.—The real story of American politics this year does not make a good Fourth of July speech. It is an invisible story. It is the play that was never performed because the audience never showed up. It is, in short, the story of non-voting, the decision by millions of American citizens not to participate in the most basic and fundamental of the rites of democracy: the choice of elected officials.

That was the subject of a two-day meeting of politicians, political scientists and journalists, convened here last week by a committee of the American Bar Association. The lawyers are trying to decide whether any changes in the laws governing the administration of elections might reverse the appalling and apparently accelerating drop in the use of the franchise.

It is a grim story to be telling on the 202nd birthday of the country. For, more than any other warning sign, it signals that the foundations of this experiment in self-government are crumbling.

THE FIGURES ARE so bad they can barely be comprehended. As summarized here by Walter Dean Burnham of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and Curtis Gans of the Committee for the Study of the American Electorate, here

are some of the trends:
—During the past decade, more than 15 million Americans, many of them regular voters in the past, have stopped voting.

—Turnout in presidential races has dropped from 63.8 percent in 1960 to 54.4 percent in 1976.

—The turnout in the 1974 mid-term elections was the second lowest in 150 years, and the continuing falloff may drag this November's percentage even below that all-time nadir of 1926.

—Except for Arkansas, which had its hottest contests in a quarter-century, the turnout in state primaries so far this year is down below past levels. In New Jersey, barely 10 percent of the eligible Republicans participated in the primary in which Jeff Bell defeated Sen. Clifford P. Case, R-N.J.

—Even the celebrated Proposition 13 failed to draw large numbers of turned-off voters back to the polls in California. Turnout was below that of the 1976 primary and probably even lower than off-year 1974. Overall, referenda votes on the supposedly dominant tax questions draw even smaller turnouts than normal elections.

THIS DECAY IN the voting base of the country has taken place in the same period

that significant steps have been made in reducing the legal and mechanical barriers to registration. The Voting Rights Act effectively ended ballot-box discrimination against blacks in the South; residency requirements for federal elections have been reduced to help mobile voters; states with more than half the population now offer the option of registering simply by return of a postcard.

And yet registration and voting percentages decline. In the face of this fact, there was no great optimism at this meeting about the potential for mechanical changes in registration-and-voting procedures.

Burnham estimated that if the United States were to adopt the kind of fully automatic system of universal voter registration has (with the expense and burden borne by the government, not the individual citizen), it might increase participation between 7 and 9 percent. That would not bring voting back to the 1960 level.

An even more modest Carter administration proposal (not well-regarded by most of the experts who met here) for election-day registration at the polls was killed by Congress last year.

Many of those present said they believe that the politicians in power, Republicans

and Democrats alike, are quite comfortable with the relatively restricted electorate they have. The wealthier and better-educated of their constituents enjoy disproportionate influence, because they vote in twice the proportion as the poor and less-educated.

Indeed, as overall turnout has declined in the past two decades, the class bias in the active electorate has increased significantly, tending to impose status quo policies no matter who is governing.

BUT THE REAL QUESTION is how long anyone can govern without the legitimacy that comes from a genuine and representative mandate from the electorate.

Jimmy Carter was elected by 27.2 percent of the potential voters, and now finds himself buffeted about by the single-interest pressure groups. Their power is immense in a politics as lacking in a mass base of popular support as ours is today.

The conferees here seemed to think that pattern will persist until a political party comes along that really offers the voters meaningful choices and then mobilizes them to bring them to the polls.

And no one professed to know what that might be.

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TOP OF THE NEWS STATE

Hill will not intervene

Attorney General John Hill said in Austin he has no reason to go to court to force a recount of votes in the May 6 referendum on parimutuel horse race betting. Hill released copies of a letter to Mr. and Mrs. Tom Russell of Red Oak, Texas, declining to intervene. The investigation of the matters did not produce grounds for instigating court order to impound ballot boxes and recount votes, Hill said.

Opinions on rail studies asked

The Railroad Commision decided Monday in Austin to solicit public comments on a \$2 million project to develop a State Rail Plan and local rail studies in Dallas, El Paso, Galveston, Laredo and College Station. The commission approved publication of proposed rules for the project which is funded by a grant from the Federal Railroad Administration. A hearing will be held Aug. 1.

Union, hospital to negotiate

Negotiators from Wadley Hospital and from a union whose members are striking the medical center were scheduled to meet Wednesday with a federal mediator in efforts to settle the labor dispute. The strike against Texarkana's largest hospital by members of the Communications Workers of America begins its eighth day Wednesday. The negotiations will be the first since June 24.

NATION

Fireworks burn auto

Two teen-agers in Baxter Springs, Kan., who threw firecrackers from a car to celebrate the Fourth of July found the noisemakers can make more than a loud bang. One firecracker fell on the back seat of their vehicle, landing among numerous other firecrackers. The fireworks went off and caught the car on fire. The youths were uninjured in the incident.

Poor economic health predicted

U.S. government spokesmen said Monday the index of the nation's future economic health slipped 0.1 percent in May, gloomy evidence the economy could be headed for a sharp slowdown in the remainder of 1978 and perhaps a recession before the end of 1979. The decline in the Commerce Department's Index of Leading Economic Indicators was the first since January and followed a healthy 1.0 percent rise in April.

Flight rule opposed by blind

A day after six blind persons were refused permission to keep their canes aboard a flight from Cleveland, the National Federation of the Blind said Monday it would push for legislation to end the practice. The six blind persons, traveling to Baltimore for the NFB convention, decided to take a bus when United Airlines officials in Cleveland told them they would have to store their canes in overhead baggage compartments. A Federal Aviation Administration regulation maintains that canes can become hazards during turbulence or a crash.

Sea creatures killed

Three sharks and a stingray on display in the lobby of a Miami theater where the movie "Jaws 2" was being shown have been found dead, victims of an apparent poisoning, their owner said. The nurse sharks, a zebra cat shark and an Australian stingray were found dead in their tank Monday. John Creekmore, owner of Ocean's 11, a rare fish store, who had supplied all four sea creatures, said, "It's hard to accept that someone would hurt a helpless fish."

Prison fight quieted

One inmate was killed and several others injured during a violent fight in the honor ward of the Marion Correctional Institute Monday, prison officials said. Officials said the fight broke out shortly after 11 a.m., but they could not immediately determine how many men were involved or what set off the dispute. Officers from the Marion Post of the Ohio Highway Patrol and the Marion County sheriff's department, called to assist prison officers in quieting the disturbance, were interviewing witnesses to the brawl this morning.

WORLD

Radicals have bomb spree

Radical nationalists set off 27 bombs on the French-ruled Mediterranean island of Corsica Monday night in the biggest single outburst of terrorist attacks since the start of the secessionist movement in the 1960s, police reported Monday. There were no immediate reports of injuries or arrests. Police investigators said the bombing spree apparently was launched by the Corsican National Liberation Front to show its sympathy for the Breton secessionists.

Marxists recapture villages

Marxist South Yemen has recaptured two border villages it claims were occupied by troops from North Yemen, the leftist daily newspaper As Safir reported in a special dispatch from Aden. The newspaper said South Yemen regained control of the two villages in the northern Beihan region Monday, the day after they allegedly were seized by North Yemen troops attacking across the desolate Arabian Desert. The Beihan area is about 150 miles northeast of Aden and some 100 miles southeast of the North Yemen capital of Sanaa.

WEATHER

Partly cloudy and hot today and Thursday. High today upper 90s, low tonight low 70s. High tomorrow upper 90s. Winds from the southeast at 10-15 mph decreasing to less than 5 mph tonight.

THE BATTALION

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Letters to the editor should not exceed 300 words and are subject to being cut to that length or less if longer. The editorial staff reserves the right to edit such letters and does not guarantee to publish any letter. Each letter must be signed, show the address of the writer and list a telephone number for verification.

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Means and madness to celebrating the 4th

By MARK WILLIS
Battalion City Editor

We are back, none too happy about it, but we're back.

Those of you who had to return Monday out of guilt, paranoid fear, or for a test, have the sympathy of the majority.

The rest and you too, can now reflect on our holiday, hopefully with contentment.

For many the break meant visits with friends and/or relatives, which in rare instances are one in the same. Visits that renewed old ties neglected or ignored, diplomatic relations with parents, or old love affairs are now done.

Many took advantage of the free time to participate in the summer sports. These folks are easy to spot. They are the ones who move like 80-year-olds, groan as if dying, sport various bandages, and mumble references to the time, "I used to be pretty good." Unplanned acrobatics on water skis and the use of muscles that never forgot, but surely tried, have taken their toll.

Others celebrated the holiday in the traditional college manner. They tested their livers with various and sundry beverages. Those of us who attempted to beat the heat by maintaining a steady stupor throughout the weekend will also be easy to spot, if we can be found at all.

Commentary

Don't let the resemblance to plague victims bother you. This affliction is not contagious, though the "black death" may seem preferable to those stricken. Symptoms include unsteady hands, eyes that resemble maps of the Houston freeway system, and short-term memory loss. The latter may be considered a blessing, though only temporary; such foolishness usually returns to haunt you. These are symptoms of other sins also, that seem to be gaining ground on the more traditional agents of self-imposed idiocy.

Those few who studied and otherwise used the free time wisely are free to gloat. They will, to be sure.

Despite all of this, let us not forget what this holiday represents.

The Fourth of July is the celebration of the success of the "American Experiment." This may not be a bicentennial year, but it is just as important. We are still here and free.

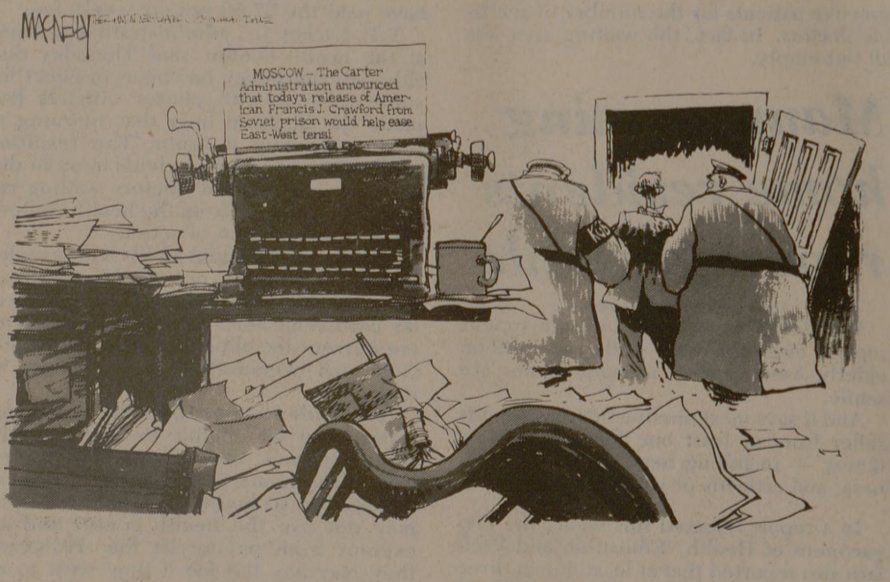
The United States endures, despite inflation, the energy shortage, various political threats both internal and external, governmental scandal, and even Proposition 13.

We are surviving the Carter family. De-

spite his problems, Jimmy Carter is progressing, we hope, and is, no doubt, doing his best. Billy is supplying the entire nation with fertilizer and Ruth Carter Stapleton is getting pornography off the streets and into church, (where it belongs?).

Yes, this country has its problems, yet the fact that we spent our holidays in our various methods attests to the system's strength. No place else on this planet are people allowed to make fools of themselves with nothing to fear except their own stupidity.

For all its faults this country is still free, prosperous, and a damned good place to live.



Readers' Forum

Guest viewpoints, in addition to Letters to the Editor, are welcome. All pieces submitted to Readers' forum should be:

- Typed triple space
- Limited to 60 characters per line
- Limited to 100 lines

—Noel McInnis, '81

Letter to the Editor

Bugs and buses

Editor: Since I have attended TAMU, I've noticed something during the warmer months, that makes my skin crawl; it's those giant roaches, in large numbers.

Most bugs are fine with me. Spiders, beetles, grasshoppers; they are cool. But those roaches, some of which I would be scared to step on, are too much. I cringe at the thought of one crawling up my leg.

Can't something be done about them? I realize that there are several reasonable explanations for this problem: 1) an attempt to control them has been made, with little effect, 2) such an attempt may be ecologically harmful, 3) it may be too expensive to successfully deal with this problem, 4) no real attempt has been made to solve this problem, 5) the problem has been dealt with and I just don't realize it, or 6) it is just one of those things we can do very little about so we have to live with it.

Hopefully, I've included all the possibilities. But still, in my eyes, roach infestation exists here. For my peace of mind, I

would appreciate someone's attention to this "urgent" problem.

And to a less urgent cause, I wish to comment about the shuttle bus service, both intra-campus and off-campus routes.

I lived off campus last semester, and while I was not entirely satisfied with this service, it was acceptable. I wish to make a suggestion, not to the service itself, but to how it was rendered.

Many times I returned to or from campus, say after 7:00 p.m., on a basically empty bus. I also observed the intra-campus shuttle bus on numerous occasions, to see no more than five passengers riding it. This may not have been the case on rainy days or during peak hours, but I know it was like this the rest of the time.

I don't suggest doing away with these valuable services, but why can't minibuses, or something similar to them, be used during these "off" hours? They would be just as effective, and it might possibly cut operation costs.