

The Dallas Post

EDITORIALS

Emergency plan for region a good idea

As two recent near-disasters affirm, the Back Mountain needs a coordinated plan to deal with large emergencies such as a spill of toxic waste or a major gas leak.

Ted Wright, a veteran firefighter and an instructor in the handling of hazardous materials, points out how serious the lack of a well thought out plan is. In a recent incident, Route 29 in Jackson Township was closed for 20 hours while an overturned tanker was emptied and recovered. "Could you imagine that on Route 309?" Wright asked.

Emergency personnel have responded to previous disasters with remarkable skill and speed. But they need a better blueprint to follow as more trucks carrying toxic materials travel through the Back Mountain. While federal law requires that large shipments of hazardous material be clearly marked, trucks may take most any route they choose, such as the winding, steeply downhill Route 29 or the congested Route 309.

Emergency plans have been formed in the past to deal with natural disasters such as a flood, or a release of radiation from the nuclear power plant in Berwick. Now, the potential problems are different and much closer to home.

This is yet another example of how closely intertwined the communities in the Back Mountain are, and of the value of regional planning and cooperation to insure the health and safety of the people who live here.

Why go halfway on health insurance?

With Bill Clinton's election, the tenor of the debate over health care in America has changed dramatically. Suddenly old opponents like the insurance industry are calling for universal coverage, and it is generally agreed that something will be done to see that every American has access to good basic care. The question now is less whether and more how this will be accomplished.

There are two main schools of thought on the issue. On one side are the proponents of "managed competition," in which large blocs of consumers — sort of super HMO's — negotiate with insurers for lower fees. The insurers in turn work out lower charges with doctors and hospitals, theoretically controlling costs while maintaining enough competition between groups to guarantee quality care. Government programs would pay for people unable to secure private coverage.

The other primary thrust is for a "single-payer" system like the one that operates in Canada. Under this plan, the government becomes the sole insurer and in addition to assuring coverage for all establishes overall spending ceilings. In Canada, patients are free to choose their own doctors, but cannot order expensive tests without the recommendation of their primary physician.

Managed competition appears to have the lead right now, perhaps because it's the least radical change from our present system. But it is a halfway measure at best, and carries a great risk of failure, at least in controlling costs. As groups attempted to attract customers with claims of excellent care — with the accompanying expense — more employers, especially small ones, would opt out, adding to the rolls of people in a government plan, which would likely provide minimal care. Eventually, this two-tier program would become politically unacceptable, and a single-payer plan adopted.

Why wait? The biggest reason is that the American people mistrust their government's ability to run any program effectively or efficiently. But if that's the case, health care is only the tip of the iceberg, and Bill Clinton's challenge is less to install new programs than to restore government's rightful place in a modern society.

It may be that managed competition is the best choice right now. In the end, though, it will probably be a stepping stone to a single-payer system, lasting long enough for those who need and provide health care to adjust to the new realities of our society.

Warning: Weather forecast ahead

This is a warning, not just a watch. A serious condition is moving up the East Coast and is expected to merge with another front coming in from the West. When the two converge, all life in northeastern Pennsylvania will be disrupted.

If you are low on food, get to the store right now, before the stores run out. If you are in any business except groceries, prepare to see your receipts shrink as shoppers stay home with a vengeance. But if you haven't finished your holiday shopping, now's the time, as the stores will be empty and you'll have the undivided attention of clerks and salespeople.

This warning will remain in effect as long as television weather reporters do their best to scare the bejesus out of you in order to boost their ratings. The actual weather may or may not be a concern, but the hyped-up weather reports surely are.



Winter arrives in Orange

Photo by Charlotte Bartizek

Letters

Harveys Lake official says auditor's report clears borough

Editor:
One of the three so-called suspicious accounts that promoted the D.A. to launch a probe into Harveys Lake Borough is no longer suspicious.

Last week the Borough of Harveys Lake received a copy of the audit as done on the Police Pension Plan. This audit was requested

by the D.A. as part of his investigation of Harveys Lake Accounts. The audit was completed last August. Borough Officials have known the results of the audit for about four months, but lacked the documentary proof to refute any charge of malfeasance. This report indicates that there has been no criminal misconduct on the part of Borough Officials.

The cover sheet on the report states that the audit is a public record which should be made available to the public. It also states that the audit may be released to the news media in order to make a full disclosure to the taxpayers of the manner in which public funds are being spent.

I would encourage the residents

of Harveys Lake to take advantage of the opportunity to read the report on this audit. The document is on file in the Harveys Lake Borough Building. The work was done by the Office of the Auditor General in Harrisburg and is signed by Barbara Hafer, the Auditor General.

Bill Mann
Harveys Lake

J.W.J.

Christmas message becomes garbled in many ways

By J.W. JOHNSON

The outward message of Christmas descends upon us with an almost ferocious glitter at this time of year. But if America looks inwardly as it approaches Christmas-1992, there is much to suggest a nation with hopeful eyes to the future.

We've just elected a new president, the youngest such man since the fabled days of John F. Kennedy's Camelot. With youth comes hope, or at least the idealism of an expectation for the better.

As well, President-elect Clinton's election marks a changing of the guard in this country. President Bush marked the World War II generation. Mr. Clinton represents the Vietnam War era, and is the first President since Kennedy to represent a constituency still young enough to change and, therefore, to effect change.

The true message of Christmas should not be swept aside, however, by the glitter or commercialism, nor the euphoria of temporal possibilities. Rather, it should be used by those who choose to in personally strengthening efforts to deal with disturbing temporal realities of child abuse and racism, to name just two.

The dominant faith in this nation is Christianity—a belief in salvation through Jesus Christ—hence a generally accepted celebration of Christmas as a national holiday. I say generally accepted because there are those (myself among them) who have a fervent belief in the separation of church

and state, and who cringe at what passes for an observance of that essential contributory principle.

Nevertheless, many threads have been woven into the Christian fabric since Jesus walked the earth. Many interpretations of his message have resulted in a variety of faiths.

And yet the simple message of Jesus was one of life, of life that should be lived in the shadow of the Ten Commandments. It is only through ego manifestation by the worshippers that the message gets lost in the interpretive ecstasy of denomination; or historically has been trampled through millions of people being killed in the name of Jesus; or has been deadened in a rush to argue how many angels can dance on the head of a pin; or has been cast aside today, along with the charity of Christ, as many Christians, either as individuals or as churches, stand in front of the government trough taking temporal handouts to the glorification of whom?

Conversely, it is the source for constant amazement to watch those who look to government to make moral decisions for the rest of us, a notion which stabs at the very heart of how and why this nation came to pass.

Whether the subject is church sheltering of refugees, pornography, abortion, involuntary sterilization, or a host of other issues, the simplistic, jingoistic moralizers make basically the same argument:

"Because it is legal when referring to abortion, for example, does

not make it moral." And then those self-righteous moralizers commit mental terrorism or attempt to terrorize lawmakers in persuasion to a particular single issue point of view.

More to the point, it would be futile to even hazard a guess as to how many persons have been killed in the name of religion—in the name of religions which proclaim—on whatever day they worship—the sanctity of human life, and wage war on fellow human beings the rest of the week. And then, this month, Christians around the world selling the memory of Jesus as so much wrapping paper and appliances.

Our government—which is to say our constitution, clearly states that it is not within the power of government (nor should it be) to make moral decisions on behalf of its constituents; that, in fact, ours is not a "theocracy" of any stripe.

And yet the violence, both mental and otherwise, of single issues advocates, continues to plague our electoral process, and continues to break apart our noble experiment. We are rapidly becoming a parochial nation of regions and voting blocs primarily based upon single issues.

James Madison said our republic democracy was created "to secure the public good, and private rights, against the danger of...faction, and at the same time to preserve the spirit and form of popular government."

And while we as a nation continue to wrestle with these dichotomies, following is a Christmas list

for this planet. Why can't the world be one:

—Where it isn't necessary for TV public service announcements to ask: "Did you hug your child today," or for similar announcements to plead for children to just say no' to despair, and yes to fulfillment.

—Where one death does, indeed, diminish us all rather than get us to tune in next week, or to the 6 o'clock news, to witness yet another.

—Where hatred is understood to be born out of ignorance and fear, and for us to possess the courage to act upon that understanding.

—Where politicians will not promise to build bridges even where there are no rivers, or to change the course of rivers in justifying the building of new bridges.

—Where 'religion' isn't used as an excuse to judge and classify; to maim and kill.

—Where we spend more time seeking to understand the questions, rather than boasting of knowing the answers.

—Where we take individual responsibility for our actions, success and failures.

—Where tolerance means more than the what an engineer says should be the space between two pieces of metal; indeed closing the space between ourselves.

—Where the Ten Commandments are not a ceiling, but rather a horizon.

—Where communication is not simply a road to an end, but a highway toward new beginnings.

The economic viewpoint

Pennsylvania local government can be confusing

By HOWARD J. GROSSMAN

Few people can understand the complexities of local government in Pennsylvania especially in light of the many types of governments which prevail in the Commonwealth. Of the 2,639 municipalities in Pennsylvania the following represents the breakdown of types of government:

First Class Cities	1
Second Class Cities	1
Second Class A Cities	1
Third Class Cities	52
Counties	67
Boroughs	966
First Class Townships	91
Second Class Townships	1,459
Towns	1

This astonishing array of local governments represents the interest of 11,881,643

Pennsylvanians according to the 1990 US Census.

Seventy eight percent of the total population of Pennsylvania lives in municipalities 5,000 or under. This clearly demonstrates the striking contrast between the perception of Pennsylvania as being an urban state and the rural nature of the Commonwealth.

To further demonstrate this phenomenon, 42 of the 67 counties of Pennsylvania are over 50% rural. A reason, among others, why the Casey Administration has undertaken to sponsor four Rural Development Conferences in 1991 and create a new perspective as to the role needed to meet the needs of rural Pennsylvania.

Some other interesting data shows that of 1990, the total number of police departments in

Pennsylvania included 1,244 with 881 of these being full time departments. Recognizing the rural nature of the Commonwealth, municipalities with 100% state police coverage totaled 1,198.

Another sign of small town government in Pennsylvania are the number of volunteer fire departments. Of the 2,610 fire departments in Pennsylvania, 2,550 are volunteer fire departments while 60 are paid departments.

Of all local governments in Pennsylvania, only 395 are municipal manager forms and 61 are homerule communities. There are 66 council of governments in which two or more municipalities have joined together to form an inter-municipal relationship.

One of the startling statistics is

the number of elected and appointed municipal officials. As of 1991 there were 23,070 elected officials and 23,418 appointed officials. Total number of municipal employees on a full time basis as of 1990 was 109,968. Of these, 43,892 work for county governments, 43,080 for city governments, 90,298 for boroughs, 5,555 for townships of the first class and 8,193 in townships of the second class.

Pennsylvania is the leading state for numbers of municipal authorities.

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