

EDITORIALS

Keep the pressure on National Utilities

At last, National Utilities, the rogue water company, has gotten what it deserves. The state Public Utility Commission last week asked that \$5.1 million in fines be assessed against the company, which has among its holdings several small water systems in the Back Mountain. Among them are systems at Oak Hill and Warden Place, complaints about which were included in the evidence against the company.

National Utilities' shortcomings have been the subject of ongoing articles in *The Dallas Post*, as customers and municipal officials have brought forward a litany of complaints about poor service, poor quality, sloppy repairs and denial of responsibility for the problems the company has caused. Through it all Joe Bontrager, the company's president, has been accessible and cordial to reporters, even as he has blithely assured us that everything was being taken care of. It wasn't.

Aside from endangering the health and safety of its customers, National Utilities is charged with misusing \$50,000 it received in surcharges to customer bills, and falling behind in loan repayments to the state. Now, the company wants an average 49 percent rate increase, which, it says, will allow it to do all the things it has promised time and again, but failed to complete. And get this: the company's costs to file a rate increase request are passed on to customers. Bontrager said last year that adds about \$60,000, or \$17 per customer.

We've heard these promises before, and then we've learned that the repairs that were to be financed with higher rates were not completed. There is no reason to reward this irresponsible behavior any longer; if National Utilities wants more money from its customers, it must first prove it won't steal it. The only way that can be done is for the company to make improvements with its own funds first, and get paid back later. And if National Utilities is unwilling to do that, it should be forced to turn its operations over to a company that will treat customers fairly.

Make middle school student's punishment fit their crime

It's wrong to possess marijuana. It's stupid to smoke marijuana. It's both wrong and dumb to get caught smoking the stuff at school. And the Dallas school administration has every right and reason to severely punish the two Middle School students caught doing that, but they must make the punishment fit the crime.

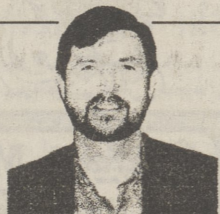
Expulsion is one of the punishment alternatives available to the school, and while it may sound attractive in this era of tough talk about crime, it's probably the worst one. It makes little sense to banish teenagers from the place where they are likely to be most closely watched by people who know them best. Expulsion can take many forms, from home schooling to transfer to another school. Either of these options carries extra expense for the district, and does little more than punish without exposing the offenders to a lesson in the consequences of their behavior.

It would be far better to send the pair for several weeks of community service with a drug rehabilitation program, where they could see firsthand the effects of drug abuse on the minds and bodies of users. At the same time, their conduct should be monitored closely, and they should be required to relate their observations to their peers after the community service was over.

This would seem to be appropriate punishment for first-time offenses. If there's another occurrence, expulsion or stronger measures would be in order.

Publisher's notebook

Ron Bartizek



Health care reform is in the news again, this time over proposals pushed by Republicans in the U.S. House. What began as a useful bill to make health insurance more affordable and accessible got sidetracked when special-interest amendments were added. The two most serious ones would do little or nothing for the typical citizen, but would be a windfall for the better off. One would limit damage awards for pain and suffering to \$250,000, and ban suits filed more than two years after injury was discovered. That seems like a puny amount these days, and an unreasonable time limit. Suppose someone had surgery, and discovered several years later that improper procedures had caused great harm? Even if they could prove it was unreasonable to expect the problems to surface in two years, they would have to go to a great deal of extra expense to do so.

That's not the worst amendment, though. That honor goes to "Medical savings account," an IRA lookalike that would allow individuals to salt away up to \$2,000 a year tax-free for use paying medical bills. Who, pray tell, would verify that this money was used properly, or would see that taxes are eventually collected if not? This sounds a lot like the wording in the original home equity loan legislation that restricted tax deductibility to money used for home improvement. It took about a week for everyone to figure out that no one was checking, and now the loans are being touted for every purpose under the sun.

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Suburban horse, Dorchester Drive, Dallas..Photo by Charlotte Bartizek.

As I was saying



Jack Hilsher

Almost 75 years ago a book hit the top of non-fiction best seller lists and stayed there. It was called "ETIQUETTE - The Blue Book of Social Usage" by a lady named Emily Post. I picked up a copy at the last Back Mt. Library Auction. It was almost 50 years old, (and in an amazing 77th printing!) and I thought that one day I might get a column out of it. Sure enough, this is it...

Why did Emily's labored and pretentious effort get to be such a hit? And on such a dull subject? Simply, to millions of Americans who wanted desperately to better themselves, the subject was not dull, it was a must, an answer to dreams.

Into the 20's came the automobile, the telephone, movies, prosperity...all these combined to cause a longing for a better life, and the need to know how to behave in that life. Mrs. Post held that knowledge of etiquette is essential to one's decent behavior; its precepts must be so ingrained

J.W.J.



John W. Johnson

Notes from all over:

- Why is it that when a man acts in any way conceivably like a woman he's called a wimp, but that when a woman acts, in particular, dresses, in any way conceivably like a man she's called "chic"?

- Should Michael New, the man who refused to wear United Nation's insignias, or follow United Nation's commanders, have been court martialed, and thrown out of the military? New's position was that he swore an oath of allegiance to the U.S. constitution, not to the UN charter. It would seem that, and while New's point of view is implistically valid, his argument also makes a distinction without a difference. Our Constitution provides for command of the military by civilian authority; in this case, the President was acting with authorization of Congress to use U.S. troops on a foreign soil. Whether or not U.S. troops should be there—and they shouldn't—is an entirely different question from that of a soldier disobeying a lawful order.

- With so many right-wing Republicans now dotting the political landscape, doesn't it now seem that when listening to President Clinton, he has almost been forced into running against himself, the self which was elected President four years ago? Of course, that

Emily Post: don't spit out the olives from your martini

that one acts on instinct.

Perhaps so. But it was still dull. The page on how to ask a girl for a dance for example goes like this: "She replies, 'Yes, I'd like to very much.' After the dance you say, 'That was wonderful!' She says thank you casually, not seriously."

Who is Emily kidding? Today she couldn't sell book one. The rest of her instructions are just as painfully detailed: "If food is too hot, quickly take a swallow of water. Never, NEVER spit it out! If food has been taken into your mouth, no matter how you hate it, you must swallow it. It is offensive to take anything out of your mouth that has been put into it, except dry fish bones and equally dry fruit pits. If you choke on a fish bone, cover your mouth with your napkin and leave the table quickly. To spit anything whatever into the corner of your napkin is too nauseating to comment on."

Well, Emily, I've got news for you. A guy named Erasmus of Rotterdam, a classic scholar in the Netherlands, said it back in 1530 just as clearly and a lot more succinctly... "If you cannot swallow a piece of food, turn around discreetly and throw it somewhere."

Of course he also covered some

ground even you, dear Emily, would never dream of touching, like: "Do not move back and forth on your chair. Whoever does that gives the impression of constantly breaking or trying to break wind."

Both Mrs. Post and Mr. Erasmus might be surprised to find they had earlier groundbreakers in the etiquette field. In the 13th century one said, "A number of people gnaw a bone and then put it back in the dish - this is a serious offense."

From the 14th century: "You should not poke your teeth with your knife, as some do, it is a bad habit." And the 15th: "Do not put back on your plate what has been in your mouth."

But I shouldn't poke any more fun at our Emily, after all she got herself into a dictionary entry (Post, Emily) and after all I've been following some of her instructions without being aware of it. Like *Olives in Cocktails* (Page 501) "Drink the liquid and when the glass is drained it is easy enough to tip the glass and drop the small olive into your mouth. Since a large olive is too much of a mouthful, lift it out and eat it in two or three bites."

And don't forget, never, but NEVER spit it out!

What color should pot sellers call the kettle?

speaks more of the courage of the President's convictions than it does the quality of his opposition.

- Does it worry anyone else but me that two fifths of the world's population is located in just two countries: China and India?

- The so-called "Million Man March" on Washington was designed to demonstrate independence and responsibility to a white culture generationally conditioned to perceive all black men as lazy, shiftless, drug dealing, lusting-after-white-women, bums. However, the statistical facts are that, if you eliminate black crime, and crimes by black kids with guns from the overall crimes statistics, this country virtually has no crime problem. At the same time, the majority of the black crime and criminals involve the so-called (and futile) war on drugs, with more than 70 percent of all persons incarcerated at any level of government today being there because of drug related offenses...much of that being blacks selling drugs to whites. Sort of like the marijuana...er, the pot, calling the kettle black...er, white.

- Basketball loudmouth Dick Vitale wants to start a league for NBA hopefuls; that is, people who don't go to college, but who can play the game, and be a source, other than college, for NBA prospects. Why not? The natural progression of college athletics to pro sports only came about because white people controlled both in the beginning.

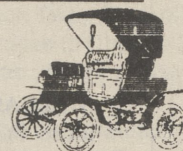
- Did you know that this nation

has spent more? And whether or not we wish to look this particular fiscal demon in the eye, unless we get Medicare and Medicaid costs under control, we are going to bankrupt ourselves. What does this really mean when it is the government which controls the money printing press?

It means that, while we can control the money supply, we cannot control the belief and support for our economy by those in other countries whose faith and support are vitally necessary in our interdependent economies. The key here is faith. If we, and those we do business with, continue to believe in our system, it will continue to work. If we, and those with whom we do business perceive us as every more increasingly financially irresponsible, faith in the system evaporates, and without faith in the system, it collapses like a house of cards...regardless of the safeguards built in after the Great Depression.

- How is it that the movie *Seven*—a film with grotesque physical and mental brutality—received an "R" rating, while *Showgirls*, complete with its sexual themes, received an "NC-17"? For the same reason that the nation tittered over Pee Wee Herman being arrested for masterbating at a porno theater...places where such behavior is encouraged, almost by definition. Ours is a confused, juvenile culture, seemingly bent on punishing itself with unrealistic.

ONLY YESTERDAY



60 Years Ago - Apr. 10, 1936 FLEMING WINS COUNTY FORENSICS CONTEST

For the second year Robert Fleming, a junior at Dallas Borough High School, is champion of Luzerne County's student orators. Fleming attracted considerable attention last year with his fiery forensics, won the county boy's oratorical contest last Friday and then took first place in the finals at Wyoming Seminary on Monday.

A committee of three Dallas Borough Councilmen has been instructed to ask Works Progress Administration officials at Wilkes-Barre why work on borough roads has been delayed. Projects on Pinecrest, Spring and Ridge Streets were halted by cold weather. Councilmen believe the work should no longer be delayed.

50 Years Ago - Apr. 12, 1946 TEACHERS REQUEST PAY RAISE OF \$3 PER DAY

Probing the possibility of obtaining additional salary increases amounting to \$3 a day or \$540 annually, Kingston Township teachers met with the Board of Education to study the school budget and determine whether the district is able to pay more than the \$100 increase which will be granted under state law. Directors explained that township taxes will have to be raised at least 5 mills to take care of the \$100 increase already granted each teacher in the new budget.

The Orange School in Franklin Township was closed this week by an epidemic of mumps. The teacher, Mrs. Forrest Kunkle, also has them.

40 Years Ago - Apr. 6, 1956 POACHER SHOTS RARE TRUMPETER SWAN

Deputy Game Protector Peter Fritsky of East Dallas sadly displayed the beautiful and rare Trumpeter Swan shot last Friday afternoon at Huntsville Reservoir by a Luzerne poacher. By special permission of the Game Commission the bird is being mounted and will be presented to the Back Mountain Memorial Library.

Improvement of traffic conditions on Machell Avenue in the vicinity of Gate of Heaven Church and school during peak periods, was asked by a group of Machell Ave. property owners at the meeting of Borough Council Monday night. John Hildebrand said that it is impossible to get in or out of the street because of two way traffic and improper parking. Leslie Bartstow, member of the parish indicated one way traffic during peak hours might be a suggestion.

"Unconquered" with Gary Cooper and Paulette Goddard, now playing at the Himmler Theatre.

30 Years Ago - Apr. 7, 1966 HUNTSVILLE CHURCH HIT BY BURGLARS

Burglars pillaged the Huntsville Methodist Church sometime late Monday night or early Tuesday morning. The intruders gained entry by breaking the kitchen door window, then proceeded to ransack the church, strewing around what they did not steal.

Abandoned for a year like the remains of some ancient temple, the new Harveys Lake Post Office has begun to rise once more. A new contractor has gamely taken up where the last one left off; one skeptical lake resident observed that he would not want to be in the contractor's shoes and have to guarantee the building after it had been allowed to sit out in open after the past winter.

Well over 1,000 books are already on hand for the Book Booth at the 20th Annual Library Auction July 7, 8, and 9. Last year the booth netted over \$800, the highest amount ever realized during the auction.

20 Years Ago - Apr. 8, 1976 NEW GOSS RESIDENTS WANT 2ND ENTRANCE

Ken Adams and Robert Parker, representing New Goss Manor Homeowners' Association, again approached the Dallas Township Supervisors at their monthly meetings and asked when something final would be done about Orchard St. as a second entrance to Orchard View Terrace.

If you missed *The Post* - you missed the news!