

The New York Times

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The Rejected Windfall

Some governors, like Florida's Rick Scott, are turning their backs on federal dollars

After Gov. Rick Scott of Florida thoughtlessly rejected \$2.4 billion in federal aid for a high-speed rail line, he claimed last month that he was doing a huge favor for the national Treasury, which he expected would give away the money in tax cuts. That was nonsense, of course; Mr. Scott was really doing a favor for train passengers in the Northeast, Midwest and California, which were given \$2 billion of his money on Monday for better service.

Florida voters might want to think about that decision as they sit in traffic jams, burning up \$4-a-gallon gasoline. In fact, some of them clearly have thought about it because Mr. Scott now has some of the worst approval ratings of a Florida official in the last decade.

He has joined other newly elected Republican governors so rigidly opposed to the Obama administration that they are willing to harm their states to score points. The result is a crazy quilt of state relationships with Washington, stitched more with ideology than reason.

None of the money in Monday's announcement will be going to Wisconsin, for example, where Gov. Scott Walker has also decided that his strapped state could do without rail improvements and the construction jobs that go with them. Nor will it go to Ohio, where Gov. John Kasich preferred rejectionism to the improvement of rail service among the state's largest cities, which could have produced 16,000 jobs.

Instead, it will go to 15 states that have more farsighted leadership, who understand the important role federal dollars can play in stimulating the economy, moving people quickly from place to place and reducing tailpipe emis-

sions. Some of those states are led by Republicans: Gov. Rick Snyder of Michigan happily stood beside Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood on Monday to accept nearly \$200 million to upgrade the rail line between Dearborn and Kalamazoo, the bulk of the Chicago-Detroit corridor.

The difference between states that want better infrastructure and those that do not is likely to grow in coming years. Some states will accept federal aid and tax themselves to pay for better trains, upgraded roads and bridges, and effective water systems. Others will not.

In the Northeast, several Amtrak corridors will be upgraded, including a sliver of the Acela line and the Empire line through upstate New York. The Chicago-St. Louis corridor will be improved, and \$300 million will be invested in the high-speed project between Los Angeles and San Francisco. Texas is accepting \$15 million to start work on a fast line between Dallas and Houston.

Transportation is not all that is at stake. Last year, Utah Republican lawmakers tried to refuse \$101 million in federal money intended to save teachers' jobs; they backed down when it was clear that Washington could send the money directly to school districts. Oklahoma and other states have rejected federal dollars connected to health care reform. Earlier this year, Missouri nearly rejected extended jobless benefits for 10,000 residents after a handful of Republicans said the money was wasteful.

Refusenik Republicans glorify shopworn principles like smaller government and states' rights. They will have to defend them to their voters when the public hears the passenger trains whistling from the next state over.

New Attacks on Women's Rights

The House passes a sweeping bill to deny access to abortion

With the help of 16 Democrats, House Republicans passed a bill the other day with the narrow-seeming title of the No Taxpayer Funding for Abortion Act.

The measure, which came just weeks after the furor over failed Republican attempts to defund Planned Parenthood, is a slightly modified version of a terrible bill proposed last year by Representative Christopher Smith, a Republican of New Jersey. It is far more sweeping than its title suggests.

In fact, the bill is not really about federal financing for abortion or even preventing insurers from offering any abortion coverage on the insurance exchanges created as part of federal health care reform. The federal Hyde Amendment has long barred federal financing of abortion, and the burdensome rules for segregating an individual's premium payments from government subsidies already seems destined to discourage insurers from offering abortion coverage on the exchanges.

The Smith bill imposes new limitations on abortion access by driving to end abortion insurance coverage in the private market using the nation's tax system as a weapon. A provision would deny tax credits to small businesses that offer private health plans that cover abortion services, as some 87 percent of private plans now do. The

They Should Be Condemning Syria

Syrians have shown extraordinary courage, defying a bloody government crackdown to demand greater political rights and freedom. Their courage, and their blood, should shame the many governments that are cynically supporting Syria's election later this month to the United Nations Human Rights Council.

It is outrageous that Syria is even being discussed for membership. Since the uprising began more than seven weeks ago, President Bashar al-Assad's security apparatus has repeatedly responded with deadly force, including firing live ammunition at a funeral and seizing critically wounded demonstrators from a hospital. Hundreds are believed to have been killed, including 14 on Sunday. Thousands have been arrested or are missing. On Monday, the government boasted that it had gained the upper hand over the protesters.

Along with India, Indonesia and the Philippines, Syria is on a consensus slate to take one of four seats set aside for nations in the so-called Asian bloc. Despite pressure

bill imposes no such restrictions on large corporations.

The measure also eliminates the medical-expense deduction for most abortions and ends the availability of reimbursement for abortion costs from medical savings accounts — changes that could invite intrusive inquiries from I.R.S. auditors trying to confirm whether an abortion procedure fell within exceptions for rape, incest or when the life of the woman is endangered.

Over all, the bill treats tax benefits as the equivalent of public expenditures for abortion. This equivalency is at odds with a reality in which individuals can deduct donations to religious institutions without running afoul of the constitutional bar of government support of religion.

Beyond the insurance realm, the Smith bill would permanently extend the prohibition on the District of Columbia from using locally raised revenue to provide abortion care that was imposed through fiscal 2011 as part of the budget compromise struck last month. The bill also would eliminate the yearly renewal of the Hyde Amendment's denial of abortion services for poor women and others who rely on the federal government for their health care.

The administration has signaled it would veto the Smith bill. It should be on guard for attempts to sneak parts of it into the debt limit talks.

from the United States and Europe, Syria is refusing to abandon its candidacy.

Mr. Assad knows no shame. But shame on the Asian bloc for not insisting that Syria withdraw. India, Indonesia and the Philippines would be a lot more credible candidates if they refused to run with Syria. Shame, too, on the Arab members of the United Nations that reaffirmed support for Syria's election even after Mr. Assad turned his guns on his people.

The Council nearly destroyed its credibility from the start when some of the worst abusers were immediately elected members. Its record had been improving. It ousted Libya from its ranks. Two weeks ago, it adopted a resolution urging Syria to "put an end to all human rights violations" and calling for an investigation of abuses.

Electing Syria would make a mockery of the Council — one from which it might never be able to recover. And it would make a mockery of all the countries that voted for Syria. Syria must be dropped from the slate.

Continuing Questions About Chernobyl

It has been 25 years since the worst nuclear power accident in history at the Chernobyl plant in Ukraine, and we still aren't certain what health damage it may ultimately cause. That gap needs to be filled by a vigorous research program — both to improve readiness to cope with another bad nuclear accident and to enhance understanding of the long-term effects of low doses of radiation.

Although Chernobyl is rightly synonymous with disaster, international health authorities have found the damage from fallout downwind to be far less than originally feared. The latest evaluation — a United Nations committee in 2008 — concludes that emergency workers who struggled to bring the plant under control suffered great harm but the wider public was barely affected.

In the three countries hit with the most fallout — Belarus, Ukraine and parts of the Russian Federation — the committee found that the only significant harm was several thousand cases of highly curable thyroid cancer

among people who were exposed as children, mostly by drinking contaminated milk. Only a handful have died.

Critics have long contended that such estimates downplayed the dangers. Now a panel of experts assembled at the request of the European Commission is also calling for a wider look. It cited scattered reports, many appearing in leading scientific journals, suggesting that Chernobyl's radiation might be increasing the risk of breast cancer, various other cancers, and immunological abnormalities, among other effects.

The panel suggested that a research foundation be established to conduct long-term studies much as a foundation in Japan has been studying the long-term effects of the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. It is a very good idea. The continuing uncertainties should be a warning to Japanese authorities to begin studies of the health effects of the Fukushima nuclear accident while the evidence trail is still fresh.

Bin Laden Aftermath: A Rush of Emotion

TO THE EDITOR:

Re "Killing Evil Doesn't Make Us Evil" (column, May 8):

Thanks to Maureen Dowd for getting it exactly right. Those who bemoan Osama bin Laden's death as unjustified are naïve at best, or may be far removed from anyone who experienced a loss on 9/11.

That September morning neither I nor my children knew whether their father, who worked at 7 World Trade Center, was alive or dead. A woman I worked with rushed home because her daughter, knowing she was about to die in the conflagration, had made an anguished phone call to say goodbye. Children of a family I knew were left without a father. Thankfully, mine were not.

While the eruption of spontaneous celebrations after Bin Laden's killing may have disturbed many, I believe that the outpouring came from a sense of profound relief that someone who had threatened their lives every day for 10 years had finally been dealt a measure of justice.

So please let us stop the collective handwringing and thank those responsible for removing Bin Laden from our midst — the Navy Seals and President Obama, who made a brave decision.

DOLORES SOFFIENTINI
Holmdel, N.J., May 8, 2011

TO THE EDITOR:

Killing evil does not, indeed, make us evil, but could we not have reached this same end without leaving so many bodies strewn along the path to justice?

Measured intelligence and leadership from President Obama were key. Just as important were intelligence gathering in the field and synthesis of that knowledge. Finally, precision by a small team in carrying out the surgical strike enabled by that intelligence brought fruition to the 10-year manhunt.

One can only wonder, however, if after 9/11 we had focused exclusively on the criminal investigation— including the gathering, sharing and synthesis of information — could two wars, about 6,000 American deaths, over 30,000 casualties, and many more Afghan and Iraqi deaths have been avoided?

Did we really need to obliterate Afghanistan and Iraq to get the guy who committed mass murder on Sept. 11?

JOHN E. COLBERT
Chicago, May 8, 2011

TO THE EDITOR:

As a lawyer who takes the rule of law quite seriously, I was thankful that Maureen Dowd showed common sense in her thoughtful discussion of the killing of Osama bin Laden. Bin Laden was a proud, self-appointed mass murderer of civilians, including women and children. He proclaimed his own guilt for crimes against humanity and openly planned to continue these heinous acts. What kind of society, what kind of morality, leads us to question the necessity of ending such a person's existence?

Coca-Cola in the Hide-Out

TO THE EDITOR:

Re "Bin Laden's Secret Life in a Shrunken World" (front page, May 8):

You report that Osama bin Laden's entourage of bodyguards "was down to one trusted Pakistani courier and the courier's brother, who also had the job of buying goats, sheep and Coca-Cola for the household."

Coca-Cola? After Old Glory itself, is there an image more emblematic of America than a can of Coke? Did they also play baseball out back?

I'll wager that no other single detail yet to emerge from the cache of intelligence heroically swiped from the Abbottabad compound will do as much damage to Osama bin Laden's anti-capitalist bona fides. Now we know that he was not only an evil mass murderer but also a craven hypocrite.

DAVID D. TURNER
New York, May 8, 2011

Early Child Care

TO THE EDITOR:

In "A Real, Unnecessary Crisis for Families" (editorial, May 3), you rightly point out the lifetime benefits of good early child care and education.

New York City has a generous program of free or subsidized child care, and its costs are rising sharply in the face of declining federal dollars to pay for it.

Earlier this year, Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg announced that because of rising costs and declining reimbursement, the city would lose more than 16,000 slots of service, which primarily support after-school care for school-age children.

On Friday, with an investment of \$40 million, the mayor presented an executive budget that ensures that no child will have to lose care and that services are preserved for the future. This is an amazing success for early care and education programs that should have happened with the leadership of our federal partners, not despite them.

LINDA GIBBS
Deputy Mayor
for Health and Human Services
New York, May 6, 2011

ONLINE: MORE LETTERS

Frances Howell, executive director of DES Action USA, responds to a news article, "Hormone Is Said to Cut a Risk of Premature Birth."

nytimes.com/opinion

On rare occasions the death of one's blood enemy may be a justified cause of celebration. While I did not join the understandable public celebrations of Bin Laden's death, they brought me considerable satisfaction.

WILLIAM WINSTON NEWBILL
Dallas, May 8, 2011

TO THE EDITOR:

Re "Killing Evil Doesn't Make Us Evil," by Maureen Dowd, and "Why We Celebrate a Killing," by Jonathan Haidt (Op-Ed, May 8):

As someone who experienced 9/11 from my home about a mile from the World Trade Center, I can honestly say I felt no jubilation when I heard the news of Bin Laden's death. Instead, all the sadness of that dreadful day came back.

The killing seemed to me yet another part of what Robert Klitzman, the brother of a 9/11 victim, has called the "never-



HANNAH K. LEE

ending cycle of destruction" ("My Sister, My Grief," Op-Ed, May 4). Whether or not the killing of Bin Laden was a good tactical move, or a moral act, you have to wonder at the depravity in the way human beings deal with one another. It's nothing to cheer about.

MARY LYN MAISCOTT
New York, May 8, 2011

TO THE EDITOR:

Jonathan Haidt fairly distinguishes patriotism and love for country from a more racist and hostile brand of nationalism. It may be that the flag-waving college students in front of the White House and in Times Square were simply rejoicing in their "desire to show solidarity with fellow citizens." The line between patriotism and nationalism is, however, much thinner than Mr. Haidt implies.

We must remember how quickly the common purpose that followed 9/11 — the flags, the memorials and candlelight vigils — quickly devolved into an environment of fear, an erosion of civil liberties and an ugly rush to invade a sovereign nation on the basis of shoddy intelligence.

Those who were unnerved by the celebratory reaction to Osama bin Laden's death are not only moved by their moral conscience, but also recall just how fast our patriotism can lead to paranoia, xenophobia and war.

ADAM ESRIG
Brooklyn, May 9, 2011

TO THE EDITOR:

According to Jonathan Haidt, those of us who were appalled by the celebrations of the killing of Osama bin Laden have got it all wrong. The revelers in these gruesome spectacles were not expressing hate, he says, but altruism, which is to say empathy and love. The basis for this surprising claim is that human beings share with certain insects — the bee, the ant, the termite — the remarkable capacity to sacrifice self-interest for unity and group defense.

I wonder where that leaves all of us who did not rush out to join the crowds of mostly college students that night, but watched at home with embarrassment and dismay. Selfish, I guess. But are we more or less like bugs for thinking that, surely, there is still a difference between justice and revenge, and human and animal behavior?

SEAN KEILEN
San Francisco, May 8, 2011

A Carbon Fee, Not a Tax

TO THE EDITOR:

"A Charge on Carbon Use" (letter, May 4) listed five reasons that it makes sense to impose an "emissions charge" on carbon and pointed out that calling it a "tax" would be politically unwise.

The term to use is "fee." It should start small and rise gradually over several years, and all of the revenue raised should be returned as rebates to American households. By definition this is not a tax. At the same time, the huge subsidies our government pays to support the fossil fuel industry should be withdrawn.

As the costs of fossil resources rise, the costs of alternative resources will fall. Within less than a decade, ours can be a clean-energy economy.

ELLIE WHITNEY
East Windsor, N.J., May 4, 2011

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