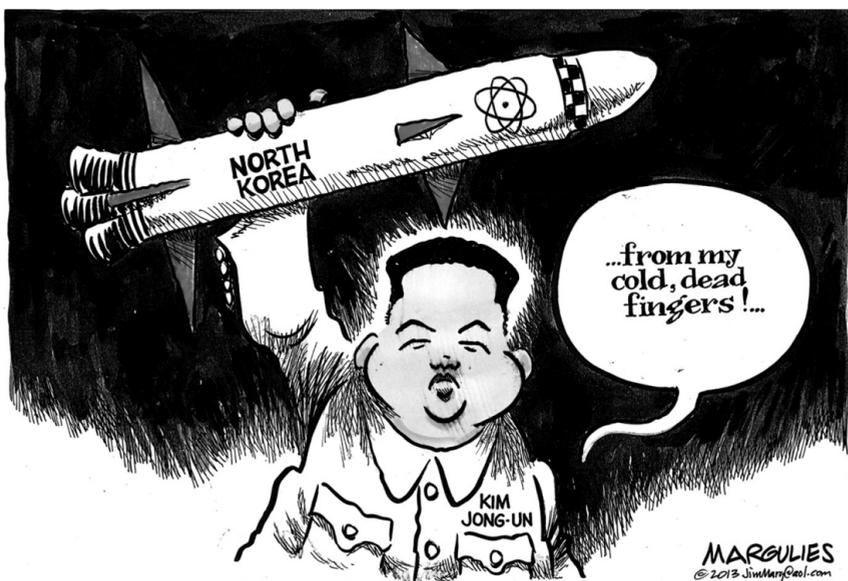


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Paper 'n Ink...

what are the odds?

By Lynn Brisendine

I participated in an interesting phone call last week. The caller, a woman who was expert in her attempt at gaining opinions about a hot topic, offered an unique approach to achieve results concerning that hot topic.

She asked me if I would consent to her composing a letter to be sent to Texas Representatives and Senators asking for casino gambling in our state.

A few months back, a news item made print in many dailies across the state telling of former Sen. John T. Montford's newest endeavor, that of bringing casinos to Texas.

Montford has a habit of making the best of whatever project he takes on and works to implement. He did as our State Senator. He then took the reigns of Chancellor at Texas Tech and met some, at the time, significant donation goals raising Tech's finances and its reputation as a major University. Montford then took on a high level position in the corporate world, and from all reports was a success.

Locally, Montford, as our Senator, saved our railroad. At the time a new project was unveiled in Lubbock. The Tech Freeway, now known as Marsha Sharp Freeway, was a model in the basement of a Tech building.

I can remember the article in our area daily which described one advantage to using the proposed route across Lubbock. Paraphrasing, "it will be much easier to build this highway as a seldom used railroad track runs along side the proposed route. Its closure and removal will facilitate right-of-way concerns."

It didn't take long for a lot of folks in this area to figure out that "seldom used rail track" was our only link to major rail lines. Tearing it out would have deprived this part of the South Plains the service several communities and many companies depended upon for rail delivered and shipped freight. The tracks ran through Lubbock to the south, split just past the city with the tracks running west to Levelland and Whiteface. Naturally the one which went southwest was the only track serving Brownfield and Seagraves.

None of our big city neighbors seemed all that concerned. In fact, they had taken on a pretty unneighborly attitude. It was a shame, our loss would be their gain, and everyone knows big cities prevail over their rural kin every time.

Sen. Montford was assailed with some hateful letters and phone calls. These complaints did not have their desired effect, and he was looking forward to the project.

To his credit, he accepted an invitation to discuss the problem. In a congenial meeting, the hardships closing the tracks would cause saw him work hard for a compromise which resulted in a new rail route around Lubbock which saved

the service for a great deal of the South Plains. It was a task that met a lot of opposition but he stood his ground and prevailed.

That "seldom used track" today has been upgraded and sees heavy use, with much more activity to come. None of which would be possible if the original plan had been accepted.

This would have also meant that any possibility of seeing a needed expansion of existing tracks to the south through Seminole would also have been much more unlikely.

Getting back to the woman and her phone call, she wanted to visit with me, first to see if I was amenable to the idea of casinos in Texas, and then to see if I would participate in her letter campaign.

Her points in favor were basically an economic issue. Too much Texas money is going across all the borders and into the coffers of New Mexico, Oklahoma and Louisiana.

I ask her if she could tell me where the casinos would be approved. She quickly and enthusiastically told me, "at the present, race tracks." I told her that I wasn't that interested. "Why?" she asked. I told her that plan would leave my part of Texas out and the economic advantages to be had would not be that evident in parts of Texas bereft of horse and dog tracks.

While taxes collected would hold advantage for the state, the added factors of economic development of locations would continue to see dollars leave our part of Texas to be used in other parts. In effect, at least on a local level, no difference, the dollars will be just as gone as if they went to New Mexico.

She understood and said she could include that sentiment in the letter she was proposing to write for me.

I suppose the reality of this deal is that too many Texan leaders are unwilling to share their largess now coming from their own lottery by allowing casino owners to get a part of that large pie.

Texas, after all, already has casinos, they are located throughout every part of our state operated from behind cash registers in the convenience store of your choice.

Back to the legalizing of these huge facilities housing all types of games of chance in Texas, I am not against the idea.

And while I will look forward to seeing the letter the woman on the phone promised, I will think the issue through and write my own missive to Mr. Montford. Should I put pen to paper I already know that I will once again appeal to his West Texas roots and ask him for a fair distribution of casinos.

Still, knowing the love affair of our state officials with their ongoing gaming institution, I will be surprised if even John T. can pull this off.

Wright Words...

By Dustin Wright
Sentinel Managing Editor

Currently, in Austin, a freshman member of the Texas House of Representatives had the bright idea of filing a bill -- HB 335 -- which would allow Texas counties, cities, schools and other governmental entities to drop public notices from newspapers and place the notices solely on their governmental websites.

Rep. Jonathan Stickland (R-Bedford) and those supporting HB 335 say newspaper notices are a waste of tax money, and that newspapers are only trying to line their pockets by defending the concept of published notice. The author of the bill -- a freshman who campaigned on a platform of government transparency -- calls newspapers "horse and buggy" media relics, and "says milk cartons have higher readership than newspapers."

We, as newspapers, are far from "relics" as the freshman state representative and his bill supporters feel.

And, the last time I remember honestly seeing milk come in a gallon carton, was during the George Bush No. 41's Presidential administration. Thus making his point invalid.

Yes, we do live in a time where social media and 24-hour news access is available at our fingertips through our mobile devices and computers.

However, very little can replace holding the pages of newsprint from a community newspaper in hand to help local residents keep up-to-date with happenings within their community.

In fact, there is no more effective way to notify large numbers of people than with newspapers, which publish the notices both in print AND online, much like we do here at the *Seminole Sentinel*.

Donnis Baggett, Executive Vice President of the Texas Press Association stated it best in an e-mail Monday morning to fellow newspapers -- including the *Seminole Sentinel*: "Newspapers' readership far exceeds that of any other me-

dium. The number of print readers, combined with our online readers, makes total newspaper penetration most attractive to anyone who must reach a mass audience. Regardless of the market size, newspaper online traffic is consistently much higher than readership of governmental websites. While newspapers -- in print and online -- are seen as a "go-to" independent source for reliable and consistent local information, local governmental websites have a very small sliver of readership."

Per policy here at the *Sentinel*, we do not charge our local entities any fee for the publication of their notification of public meetings, as the notifications serve as a benefit to informing our local citizens of planned meetings and discussion topics in said meetings.

The *Sentinel* does, however, charge a per-word fee to governmental entities for legal/public notices, which is required by law.

It's a small fee, which is also assessed to local residents who wish place a classified advertisement within our publication.

In fact, Texas law requires that newspapers print public notices at their lowest published classified rate, so the taxpayer is getting a bargain. The fees are used to help defray the hard costs of paper, ink, delivery and the personnel cost of producing the pages.

The *Sentinel*, as well as many other newspapers across Texas, newspapers not only publish public notices on print and on their websites, but they combine all their notices into a free, searchable statewide website for the convenience of citizens and vendors who have interests in other areas of the state.

Baggett, in his e-mail, continued: "Many governmental entities already post their notices online, in addition to publishing them in the newspaper. There's certainly nothing wrong with doing that. But if the notices were only available on those government sites, they would be seen only by

citizens who actively seek them out -- and could be found only by those who (a.) have online access, (b.) are aware of each of the myriad of governmental entities whose sites they should scour for notices (Harris County alone has 496 entities), and (c.) have the expertise to locate notices that may be buried many clicks deep within a governmental website. A newspaper notice published only in the area affected, however, can and often is 'discovered' by a reader who is simply reading the paper with his morning coffee.

"Discovering" a governmental notice may be how a citizen first hears of governmental plans that have an important impact on him -- actions such as annexations, zoning changes, school attendance zone revisions, tax increases, bond issues, large governmental purchases, or planned projects with environmental impacts such as landfills, etc.

"The elderly, the poor, minorities and rural residents are statistically less likely to have internet access than other groups. Eliminating print notice would effectively disenfranchise these citizens from civic involvement."

"The independent third-party approach to publishing and archiving public notices is an important element of government transparency and accountability. If governmental entities are allowed to 'publish' and archive their notices on complex governmental websites that are designed, maintained and operated by governmental officials, citizens could lose much more than the relatively few dollars involved in the cost of newspaper public notices."

"Income from published legal notices generally runs about 1 to 5 percent of total revenue at a Texas newspaper. If that revenue should disappear, newspapers will be hurt, but they will survive. Governmental transparency and accountability to taxpayers, however, will be temibly diminished."

I, rightfully agree.

State Capital Highlights

Compiled by Ed Sterling, Texas Press Association



Perry delivers 'State of State' address

AUSTIN — Texas is stronger than ever, Gov. Rick Perry said early in his 36-minute "State of the State" address to the 83rd Texas Legislature on Jan. 29.

Perry praised lawmakers, saying the line has been held on taxes and the state is spending within its means, delivering on his priorities, by "making the tough decisions separating wants from needs."

He called for an amendment to the state constitution "so when we do bring in more than we need, we'll have the option of returning tax money directly to the people who paid it." And he said employment is robust, with nearly 1.4 million low, medium and high-paying jobs added in the last two years.

As for the environment, Perry said that from 2000 to 2011, ozone levels decreased by 23 percent and industrial nitric oxide and nitrogen dioxide gas emissions were cut by 60 percent.

In a pushback statement aimed at Washington, D.C., Perry said Texas would not expand Medicaid under the federal Affordable Care Act and would not set up a state health care exchange — part of phased-in "Obama Care" intended to aid citizens in finding affordably priced health insurance.

Education, Perry said, is progressing, with graduation rates at an all-time high, the third highest in the nation. Perry

noted that some higher education institutions are offering the \$10,000 four-year degree program that he asked for, and he spoke proudly of increases in charter-school enrollment, but he did not mention the \$5 billion stripped two years ago from the public education budget.

What to do with surplus

Even though state finances are off to a running start in 2013 with better-than-expected tax collections that might allow the state to avoid major funding cutbacks like those adopted in 2011, there is room for improvement, Perry suggested.

"We're in a position today to put our financial house in order, and it's time to do so," he said. We have an opportunity this session, an opportunity to true up our budget and move away from the budgetary techniques we've come to depend on all too often. ... We need to make the franchise tax exemption for small businesses permanent. ... We also need to do away with the practice of using dedicated funds and specific fees for anything other than the purpose for which they were intended. If we don't need taxpayer money for that purpose, let's not collect it at all."

Perry added, "I think providing tax relief of at least \$1.8 billion over this biennium is a good place to start."

Guv has projects in mind

Perry mentioned the state's Economic Stabilization (or "rainy day") Fund — a savings account to be used for emergencies,

disaster relief and to maintain a high credit rating. He said the fund will soon hold nearly \$12 billion, and he supports the use of \$3.7 billion from the fund for a one-time investment in infrastructure programs, which he defined as "critical water and transportation systems."

Straus names chiefs

Speaker Joe Straus on Jan. 31 publicized his list of the state representatives to serve as chairs and members of 38 House standing and three select committees for the current legislative session. With that task accomplished, hearings on proposed legislation will begin.

Some of those standing committee chairs include: Jim Pitts, R-Waxahachie, Appropriations; Harvey Hilderbran, R-Kerrville, Ways and Means; Todd Hunter, R-Corpus Christi, Calendars (the committee that decides which bills advance to the House Floor for debate); and Byron Cook, R-Corsicana, State Affairs.

In announcing the chairs and committee assignments, Speaker Straus also recognized Rep. Tom Craddick, R-Midland, as dean of the House, a title given to the member who has the most years of continuous service as a state representative. Craddick, first elected in 1968, served as speaker in the 2003, 2005 and 2007 legislative sessions.

Straus also appointed Rep. Dennis Bonnen, R-Angleton, as speaker pro tempore.

Thinking in Type...

By Brian Brisendine

I got one of those embarrassing e-mails last week that was full of potty talk.

It was filled with content and discussion that should always remain behind closed doors.

I was even given the opportunity to meet with other folks to share ideas about some of our most private moments.

It was an invitation to the World Toilet Summit, an honest-to-goodness annual event to be held this year in Solo, Indonesia.

A fitting locale for what is primarily (one would hope) a "solo" act.

At first blush, I thought this is an invitation that really stinks.

But my curiosity got the better of me so I decided to glance at the agenda before I flushed it.

It turns out, the organizers really have a movement.

World Toilet Summits have been held each year since 2001.

How did I not know about this?

Attendees from more than 60 nations are expected to converge for the meeting.

They're expected to discuss and debate the issue from top to "bottom."

The itinerary states that the summit will feature workshops on "hot topics" in the toilet industry, sure to keep folks on the edge of their porcelain seats.

For example, Mr. Seok-Nam Gang of the Korea Clean Toilet

Association will present "Toilets As Tourism Attraction."

I immediately started researching vacation packages in Korea.

Other hot topics include "Toilets as Marketing Tools" and "Generating Revenue Through Advertisements in Good Toilets."

Makes sense. Marketing and advertising are all about new and fresh ideas.

Admit it, where have you had more than a few ideas? Although maybe not so fresh.

There will also be a presentation of the "Loo of the Year Awards," a tour of "toilets and related facilities in the host city" and a "dinner show."

I thought that last part was important. I'm sure a tour of the public facilities in Solo, Indonesia will work up a healthy appetite in all of the conference attendees.

The invite also included "fun facts" about our hygiene habits.

The average person spends about four years of their life in the bathroom. (For husbands, it's closer to nine.)

And what's a conference without a trade show?

Exhibits include plenty of ways to turn your alone time into quality time.

There are handmade toilet paper holders that play music. One of them has male and female figurines on top, who come together to kiss as the toilet paper is ripped.

The music? The theme song to the movie "Love Story."

A little romance in the John never hurt anybody, right?

Another of the toilet paper holders features miniature soccer players — and as the toilet paper is pulled down, a small toy ball goes into a soccer net.

Gooooooooooooooooo!!!!!!

There will also be high-tech public toilets for consideration.

One freestanding cabin is made of silvery metal and is shaped like a space capsule.

How fun!

Another toilet unit on display has two fake marble bowls attached to a giant metal box. The bowls spin around so that one can be retracted and disinfected as the other is used.

How weird!

The most anticipated attraction at this year's exhibit will be a Japanese commode which comes with its own remote.

The remote control can make the toilet flush, make its seat go up or down, or make a retractable bidet attachment pop out from the wall of the bowl.

The toilet's cost? More than \$6,000.

There was no mention of how the remote is sanitized between occupants.

And six grand? That seems excessive. Maybe there's a base model.

You know...option number two.