

COMMENTARY

INSIDE REPORT

Ascension raises get easy passage

Danielle Bassett, 29, Michelle Douglas, 28, and a few other friends were stretching and exercising in a field at Tee Joe Gonzales Park in Gonzales one evening last week.

The women said they were trying to keep in shape and get ready for their kickball league.

The evening workout came on May 1, two days before the Ascension Parish Council voted on a 33 percent pay increase. The raise will boost pay from \$1,200 to \$1,600 per month.

Asked about the proposed raise and told the last increase was in 1997, Bassett and Douglas both said they felt the council was due for a raise.

"I think they deserve a raise after (15) years," Douglas said. "That's a long time."

While some council opponents to the increase have noted they heard from constituents opposed to it, the lack of a single comment from the public during the May 3 meeting, when the vote was on the line at the council meeting in Donaldsonville, spoke loudly.

Ascension Parish is hardly known for a disengaged citizenry.

A cadre of residents tracks matters closely and will show up at council meetings in force if they deem the circumstances call for it. They were not present at the microphone on May 3.

This may point to a public openness to the pay raise, often a politically tricky area for elected officials.

Timing is a bit trickier in Ascension than elsewhere because, under the parish's home rule charter, the council votes on its pay and the increase takes effect immediately.

Some other parishes, such as nearby Livingston, must wait until the next term. Such delays are often seen as a protection against elected officials bumping up their pay willy-nilly in their own term.

But the delay can also be seen as a way of granting the elected officials who vote on an increase a bit of political absolution because they can always say the raise isn't for them but for the position.

What has happened in Ascension, then, is a long period between increases and a large increase to catch up.

But the timing for this increase, it seems, may have been just right.

Parish President Tommy Martinez has said he would unveil his long-promised road plan sometime in June.

A key funding mechanism for that plan, along with help from the Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development, is a proposed half-cent sales tax dedicated to roads, Martinez has said.

That delay means the council was able to vote on the pay increase before the administration begins its major rollout of the sales tax proposal, which may go before voters this fall.

The council also shot down an attempt by Councilman Bryan Melancon to have voters decide on the pay increase in the Nov. 6 election, the same election parish officials are considering for the proposed sales tax.

Never once did the proposed road tax come up in the council discussions of the pay increase.

But memories are short and new taxes tend to focus public attention on government spending.

When the sales tax proposal draws voters' attention this fall, the current positive vibrations on the council pay increase may get some reconsideration, becoming ready fodder for tax opponents.

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BOTTOM LINERS



"I'm tired of crying over my beer. Can I borrow your Cabernet?"

Is 'one drop' rule overruled?

So what if Elizabeth Warren claims to be part Native American? She's entitled, according to historical documents. Besides, Americans never have been all that clear or consistent about what distinguishes one race from another.

Sen. Scott Brown, R-Mass., is calling on his Democratic challenger Warren to clear the air over questions raised by the Boston Herald as to whether she has used her apparently ancient and diluted Indian heritage to give herself an unfair employment advantage.

At least she's not lying about her background. Historical records seem to confirm that she has Cherokee ancestors. But is her background Indian enough?

That question looms after researcher Christopher Child at the New England Historic Genealogical Society turned up evidence of her Indian blood.

A transcript of an 1894 marriage application shows Warren's great-great-grandmother listed herself as Cherokee.

That would make Warren 1/2 Native American, although it is possible that more recent Indian ancestors could be turned up in further research. Child also found that Warren's great-grandfather, John Houston Crawford, had lived in Native American territory but identified himself as white in the

1900 census. However, Warren's family is not included in the official Dawes Commission rolls, a census of major tribes completed in the early 20th century that Cherokees use to determine tribal citizenship.



CLARENCE PAGE

Such a tenuous tie to her Indian past has led critics at the Boston Herald, which first broke the story, to label her "Fauxcherokees," among other nicknames. Yet, I would ask, how much Indian blood do you need these days to claim Indian heritage?

In other words, whatever happened to the one-drop rule?

That's the rule in Americans past, you may recall, that declared anyone who had at least "one drop" of black blood to be black.

The irony of this rule, invented by slave masters who wanted to have more slaves, is how it has been encouraged in modern times, particularly by black leaders who want to have more black people.

Like other rules of race, this one is not applied uniformly or consistently. George Zimmerman, the accused murderer of Trayvon Martin in Florida, had an Afro-

Peruvian great-grandfather on his mother's side, according to his family. That would make him at least one-eighth black, which is a lot more than Warren is Indian.

Yet Zimmerman was reported first as "white" then a "white Hispanic." If the old one-drop rule applies, he also could be called a white-Hispanic black.

If taken literally, that would make the killing of the teenage Martin, about whose blackness there is no confusion, a black-on-black crime — which, sad to say, attracts a lot less national attention than similar violence that crosses racial lines.

Zimmerman is not likely to be seen as black by many people.

However, like the Warren controversy, his case illustrates how quickly our old racial narratives are failing to keep up with changing times.

The Herald reported that Warren used to list herself as "Native American" in law school directories while teaching at several law schools across the country in the 1980s and '90s.

She dropped the reference from her biography after she was hired at Harvard Law School in the 1990s at a time when protesting students and faculty had been pressuring the school to hire more minority female faculty.

The law school says it has one faculty member of Native Ameri-

can heritage, according to reports, but won't say which one. In 1998, a Harvard Crimson article identified the one "tenured minority woman" on the faculty as Warren, "who is Native American."

If Warren was claiming Indian ancestry when it worked to her benefit, she was following another American tradition, writes David Treuer, an Ojibwe Indian from northern Minnesota and author of "Rez Life: An Indian's Journey through Reservation Life."

"An Indian identity has become a commodity," he recently wrote in the Washington Post, "though not one that is openly traded. It has real value in only a few places; the academy is one of them. And like most commodities, it is largely controlled by the elite."

Race is no longer as simple as black-and-white, but then it never really was. The real issue of what Warren, Zimmerman and the rest of us want to call ourselves has two sides: how we see ourselves and how we are seen by others.

If anything, Treuer is right about elites. The Warren controversy illustrates how rapidly the one-drop rule and other old codes of race are fading at a time when race is becoming less of a problem than a privilege — who has it and who doesn't — regardless of race.

Clarence Page's column is distributed by Tribune Media Services.

U.S. future bulging with obesity issues

WASHINGTON — Close your eyes and picture 110 million obese people waddling around America's sidewalks. You'll probably want to keep your eyes closed.

Such is the scenario suggested by a new study projecting that 42 percent of American adults will be obese by 2030. That's 32 million more than today's 78 million.

Of course, they probably won't be waddling. They'll be in their cars in the fast-food lane, as they are now. Recall that independent filmmaker Morgan Spurlock ("Super Size Me") gained 24.5 pounds after one month of eating exclusively at McDonald's.

Something no less than a "major public health intervention" is needed, according to Eric Finkelstein, a health economist with the Duke University Global Health Institute and lead author of the study.

What this means is anyone's guess, but it isn't far-fetched to infer that a government-mandated health-care system eventually would necessitate a government-mandated diet to control costs. In another study, Finkelstein and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimated that obesity costs about \$147 billion per year, accounting for about 9 percent of all medical expenses. An obese person, defined as carrying an

extra 30 pounds, costs about \$1,400 more in medical expenses per year than a person of healthy weight.

No one wants to make overweight people feel worse than they do. Fat is indeed a plague and most of us struggle to varying degrees.

There are about 12 renegade pounds out there that love me so much they never want to be far away. If I drop my guard for so much as a month (that is, eat like a normal person), they jump on me like a June tick.

At this point, we make the necessary disclaimer that some people are blessed with hummingbird metabolisms (and we hate them), and others are genetically inclined toward fatness. Genetic inclination isn't a life sentence, however, and personal responsibility can't be excluded as contributing to most fatty outcomes. These days, responsibility isn't only about pushing away from the table, but it means educating oneself, reading food labels, and going to a little extra trouble.

Getting fat has never been easier, of course. Food is plentiful and convenient, and the bad stuff

is tasty and cheap. At the end of long day, it's easier to buy a Happy Meal than to shop and prepare a balanced dinner. And who wants to hear the little darlings protest when presented with cauliflower over calzones?

Out of sheer exhaustion, we fool ourselves into thinking children should have a say in what they eat. And never-minding all the studies, diets, consultants and excuses, we know that the mystery of non-medical obesity isn't really so mysterious. In a word, it's about sugar, including hidden sugars such as high-fructose corn syrup, a liquid sweetener that seems to be in nearly everything. Because it is six times sweeter than cane sugar, HFCS is cheaper to use and also has preservative, as well as fattening, attributes.

A 2010 Princeton University study found that rats that drank HFCS gained considerably more weight than rats eating sugar, though their caloric intake was the same. On average, Americans consume about 60 pounds of HFCS per person per year, according to the study.

Here's the simple explanation: Refined or simple sugars and their cousins — high-glycemic carbohydrates (think white bread and potatoes) — cause the pancreas

to produce high levels of insulin, which cause the body to store excess sugar not used for energy as fat. The liver in turn is induced to produce cholesterol.

We love high-glycemic carbs because they make us feel good by spiking our blood sugar. But what goes up must come down — with a thud. When our blood sugar inevitably plunges, we feel tired, ornery and hungry — and we repeat the cycle.

Low-glycemic foods (think apples and collard greens), on the other hand, release energy at a steady, less-dramatic rate, and our blood sugar stays reasonably level. Less sugar means less insulin means less fat means leaner bodies means better health.

Oh sure, eating with such attention to the glycemic index ruins your life. You won't have any friends. You'll spend all your time alone weighing 4-ounce cuts of fat-free meat, sautéing spinach and picking flaxseed out of your teeth — and your children will hate you — but you'll be thin. Best of all, you won't need to go to the doctor as often, or rely on federal food marshals to tell you what to eat.

Kathleen Parker's column is distributed by The Washington Post Writers Group.

'Occupy' reveals crumbling moral infrastructure

The "Occupy" movement, which the Obama administration and much of the media have embraced, has implications that reach far beyond the passing sensation it has created.

The unwillingness of authorities to put a stop to its organized disruptions of other people's lives, its trespassing, vandalism and violence is a de facto suspension, if not repeal, of the 14th Amendment's requirement that the government provide "equal protection of the laws" to all its citizens.

How did the "Occupy" movement acquire such immunity from the laws that the rest of us are expected to obey?

Simply by shouting politically correct slogans and calling themselves representatives of the 99 percent against the 1 percent.

But just when did the 99 percent elect them as their representatives?

If in fact 99 percent of the people in the country were like these "Occupy" mobs, we would not have a country. We would have anarchy.

Democracy does not mean mob rule. It means majority rule.

If the "Occupy" movement, or any other mob, actually represents a majority, then it already has the votes to accomplish le-

gally whatever it is trying to accomplish by illegal means.

Mob rule means imposing what the mob wants, regardless of what the majority of voters want. It is the antithesis of democracy.



THOMAS SOWELL

In San Francisco, when the mob smashed the plate-glass window of a small business shop, the owner put up some plywood to replace the glass.

and the mob scrawled graffiti on his plywood.

The consequences? None for the mob, but a citation for the shop owner for not removing the graffiti.

When trespassers blocking other people at the University of California, Davis, refused to disperse, and locked their arms with one another to prevent the police from being able to physically remove them, the police finally resorted to pepper spray to break up this human logjam.

The result? The police have been strongly criticized for enforcing the law.

Apparently pepper spray is unpleasant, and people who break

the law are not supposed to have unpleasant things done to them. Which is to say, we need to take the "enforcement" out of "law enforcement."

Everybody is not given these exemptions from paying the consequences of their own illegal acts. Only people who are in vogue with the elites of the left — in the media, in politics and in academia.

The 14th Amendment? What is the Constitution or the laws when it comes to ideological soul mates, especially young soul mates who remind the aging 1960s radicals of their youth?

Neither in this or any other issue can the Constitution protect us if we don't protect the Constitution. When all is said and done, the Constitution is a document, a piece of paper.

If we don't vote out of office, or impeach, those who violate the Constitution, or who refuse to enforce the law, the steady erosion of constitutional protections will ultimately render it meaningless.

Everything will just become a question of whose ox is gored and what is the political expediency of the moment.

There has been much concern, rightly expressed, about the rusting of bridges around the country, and the crumbling and corrosion

of other parts of the physical infrastructure.

The crumbling of the moral infrastructure is no less deadly.

The police cannot maintain law and order, even if the political authorities do not tie their hands in advance or undermine them with second-guessing after the fact.

The police are the last line of defense against barbarism, but they are equipped only to handle that minority who are not stopped by the first lines of defense, beginning with the moral principles taught at home and upheld by families, schools, and communities.

But if everyone takes the path of least resistance — if politicians pander to particular constituencies and judges give only wrist slaps to particular groups or mobs who are in vogue, and educators indoctrinate their students with "non-judgmental" attitudes — then the moral infrastructure corrodes and crumbles.

The moral infrastructure is one of the intangibles, without which the tangibles don't work.

Like the physical infrastructure, its neglect in the short run invites disaster in the long run.

Thomas Sowell's column is distributed by Creators Syndicate.