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Opinion

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EDITORIAL

Friday After 5 a downtown success story

Friday After 5 begins its 13th annual run tonight on BB&T Plaza at the Riverpark Center against the backdrop of the construction cranes and steel piles along Owensboro's riverfront. The popular warm weather combination of socializing and music will gear up despite the ongoing construction between the RiverPark Center and Mitch McConnell Plaza. That building activity claimed Friday After 5's late-night counterpart, the Sunset Series at Mitch McConnell Plaza — which was put on hold for the

immediate future. In a sense, Friday After 5 played a role in setting into motion the plans that helped bring those construction crews to Owensboro's riverfront. In 1997, Downtown Owensboro Inc. began building on the idea that providing a chance to socialize outdoors to live music could draw people downtown. With the initial success of the music series, additional dates were added and Friday After 5 expanded to include a street fair along Veterans Boulevard. The Friday night event was one

of the primary reasons given for the expansion of the RiverPark Center patio in 2003. One of the first major projects in Owensboro's downtown redevelopment, the new patio has become asset to the RiverPark Center and home to other events such as Winter Wonderland. Many of the same design themes in the expanded patio, now called BB&T Plaza, will be present in the new River Wall and Smothers park once they are completed. Those recurring elements, also seen in Mitch McConnell Plaza by the Executive

Inn Rivermont, will help link the different portions of Owensboro's main section of riverfront to create an even better venue for downtown events. Friday After 5 has paved the way for much of what this community is hoping to attract through its downtown revitalization efforts. The redesign of Veterans Boulevard in the downtown master plan is intended to make it more pedestrian-friendly and encourage more activity like what occurs during Friday After 5's street fairs.

The crowds at Friday After 5 show the viability of downtown open-air events space such as what's been proposed at the Market Square Plaza. And the same impetus for Friday After 5 — to bring people downtown for entertainment, shopping and dining — is a driving force in this community's investment in Owensboro's core. Friday After 5 is one of this community's success stories, and more of this type of activity will be on the way as Owensboro's downtown continues to develop.

READERS WRITE

Newspaper has struck blow against academic freedom

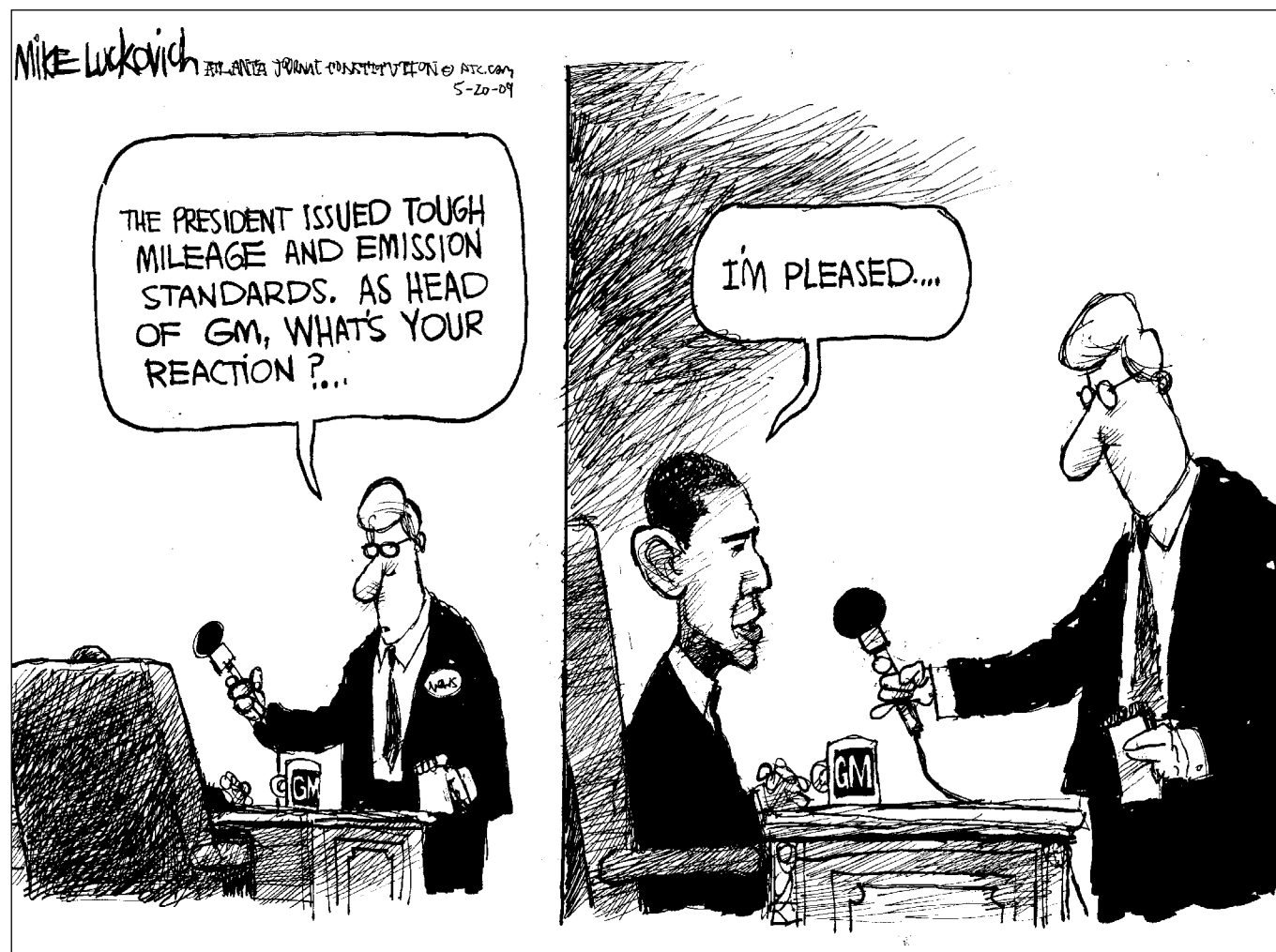
Despite its claim otherwise, the Messenger-Inquirer struck a blow against academic freedom in its May 17 editorial against tenure. Tenure continues to be a bulwark for academic freedom. In an ideal academic world, no caprice would exist among administrators or governing boards. In reality, we have not reached that point. During my 50 years of teaching, most of my colleges' presidents and academic deans have staunchly defended academic freedom. Unfortunately, in some instances, untenured faculty have been dismissed because they expressed opinions that did not coincide with administrators' opinions. Like other professions, the professoriate includes a few losers. However, faculty members must prove their competence during a seven-year probationary period, and most rank and tenure committees painstakingly evaluate them before recommending tenure. Contrary to the editorial's claims, most colleges require regular post-tenure evaluations. Even a tenured faculty member can be dismissed for demonstrable incompetence or moral turpitude. Historically, newspapers have championed freedom of the press and

About The Opinion Page

The opinions expressed in the Messenger-Inquirer editorials represent the consensus of the editorial board of the Messenger-Inquirer, on behalf of the newspaper. Articles by named authors and letters to the editor contain the opinions solely of the writer.

freedom of speech. I find it ironic and disappointing that our local editors have stood against academic tenure, one of the principal assurances that faculty and students can openly discuss ideas, however controversial. Tenure protects an important and necessary marketplace of ideas. We should applaud the community college faculties who have stood up for tenure and, ultimately, for academic freedom.

John R. Combs
 Professor Emeritus of English
 Former President, Kentucky
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 Owensboro



Britain savoring embarrassment from scandal

Come to London for the signage ("Danger: Men working overhead"), and to pick up a tube of Euthymol toothpaste and devour a cup of Mr. Whippy lemon ice and a package of chocolate HobNobs, and to enjoy the roomy taxicabs and the cabbies' no-hesitation style of driving, their bold U-turns, and to observe the gilded gates and the Mounted Guards and all the storybook tinges of aristocracy so dear to us Americans. And terrific theater. Saw a beautiful and moving performance by puppets — life-sized horses in "War Horse" at the National Theatre — light shells of horses with visible frames and legs of two puppeteers inside, another manipulating the head, and yet the sight of the beasts grazing, nuzzling, shying, rearing up was the most perfect



Garrison Keillor
 Tribune Media Services

and believable thing I've seen onstage in a long time. And then at the vaudeville-burlesque "La Clique," saw a fine contortionist work his body through the head of a tennis racket and an American comedienne drop her drawers, pull a kazoo out of her bosom and stick it up her dress into a very private place and proceed to give us (we thought, we assumed, we dared to hope) a rendition of "America" from her nether regions and, a moment later, put another kazoo in her mouth and play a very accomplished orifice duet, all with the innocence of a 4-H'er doing a performance project at the county fair. Wowza. But the best show in town is the Daily Telegraph's dogged campaign to bring down Gordon Brown's Labour government by exposing the squishy underbelly of

corruption in Parliament that Labour has tolerated for years. Day after day for almost two weeks, the paper has pounded away with details of petty grifting in high places and large unflattering photographs of members of Parliament, some of which seem horizontally distorted to give the Honorables a piggish appearance, like a funhouse mirror. And now, as I write, the speaker of the House of Commons, Michael Martin, has stepped down, the first to do so in more than 300 years, knocked off his horse by a crusading newspaper. The story is fairly simple: Parliament members from districts outside London can be compensated for expenses deemed "wholly, exclusively and necessarily incurred to enable you to stay overnight away from your main home," and a large number of members have exploited this provision to pad their modest salaries (slightly more than a hundred grand per annum) in ways that Martin tried to keep secret.

But some minion in a parliamentary office took home a computer disk and sold it to the Telegraph for a tidy sum and out spilled the garbage — 2,000 pounds for a 37-inch high-def plasma TV set; 1,625 pounds for a garden table, chairs and parasol; 7,000 pounds for a new kitchen; 519.31 pounds for a week at the Bide-A-Wee holiday cottage; 100 pounds to remove moles from a garden; 725 pounds for a cherrywood mirror; 600 pounds for the removal of wisteria; 2,200 pounds for the cleaning of a moat; 2,000 pounds to repair a pipe under a tennis court; 5,700 pounds for a portico; 115 pounds for a handyman to come and change light bulbs — on and on it went, day after day, a tide of savory details. There were several instances of members being compensated for interest on mortgages that turned out not to exist, a criminal matter. But most of the stuff was rather small, if fascinating, potatoes. A wealthy member who owns seven homes in

Britain and part of one in France charged the taxpayers 119 pounds for a trouser press. This is the sort of thing that makes a constituent grab his pint of bitter and slam his fist on the table. And now, having seen the speaker walk the plank, the Honorables must go out to their districts in Sodden Wickham and Twitching Bridgewater to explain why taxpayers paid for the cleaning of a moat. A dreadful fate, having to kneel down and crawl in public as the mob flings dead fish and dry dog dung at you. The other part of the story is that Telegraph sales are up by 10 percent, which is one answer to the question all newspapers are asking these days. If you print stuff that people are avid to read, they will buy your paper, and there is nothing people love more than to savor the embarrassment of the high and mighty. Forget about Iran — if Mr. Obama is charging us for his trouser press, we want to know.

Justice in terrorism case leaves a bitter aftertaste

Like the Mounties, they finally got their men. And all it took was three years, three trials and millions of taxpayer dollars. At that price, you'd like to feel a certain satisfaction from last week's guilty verdict against five men from inner-city Miami who stood accused of conspiring with al-Qaida to launch terrorist attacks in this country. You'd like to feel you'd seen justice done. Instead, you are left with the nagging suspicion that all you've seen is justice miscarried. Prosecutors say the seven men arrested at a Liberty City warehouse in June 2006 were a hometown terror cell conspiring with an FBI informant they thought was an



Leonard Pitts Jr.
 Miami Herald

al-Qaida representative to bomb the Sears Tower in Chicago and other sites. The feds made their case with secret recordings, testimony that the men swore an oath of allegiance to al-Qaida, and photos of possible terror targets taken by the defendants. But the defense says the seven are just the hapless members of a would-be religious sect who thought they had found a patsy who'd give them money as long as he believed they were planning a terrorist strike. All they wanted, they say, was cash — to finance their sect. Indeed, according to testimony, even the pledge of allegiance to al-Qaida came only after the informant dangled a promise of \$50,000. The men thought

they were scamming him in the name of the Lord. And here we should note that when authorities raided the group's warehouse headquarters, they found ... nothing. No guns, no bombs, no maps, no plans, no manifestos, not a thing that would suggest terrorists preparing to strike. Only Bibles, Qurans, law books, Samurai swords. Two juries were unconvinced by the prosecution's argument. They deadlocked, the first jury acquitting one of the original seven defendants. You'd think the feds would've gotten the hint, but they went back a third time and that proved to be the charm. Still, even last week's conviction came with a caveat: another of the six remaining defendants was found not guilty. All of which amounts to a less-than-ringing endorsement of the government's case. This uncertainty could easily have

been avoided. The government itself says — and the evidence certainly indicates — these guys were nowhere near ready to do anything and were being closely watched, besides. So what would have been the harm in playing it out, waiting to see if they actually made a move — bought guns or bomb-making materials, let's say — before swooping in? Because the government moved precipitously, we are left this irresolute resolution — and five men are facing sentences of up to 70 years behind bars for "talking" terrorism at the government's behest. Remember the Bush administration telling us this "cell" (without even a gun to its name, mind you) was as "dangerous" as al-Qaida? I doubt even the prosecutors still believe that, if they ever did. These men may be guilty of something, but terrorism? Not likely.

And a 70-year sentence would be absurd on its face. But it's a real possibility here in the Great Panic. That strikes me as a fit name for the era that began Sept. 11, 2001, and that can't end soon enough, an era in which some of us see terror behind every Bush and outhouse, an era in which we were told, encouraged and reminded to fear, because fear makes people compliant and unquestioning. Most of all, it is the era in which we were told we had to cut corners, compromise our laws, our fundamental liberties and our dearest principles because these were luxuries we could ill afford in a frightening time when "they" are out to get us. But seeing these hapless "terrorists" convicted on such scandalously anorexic evidence suggests to me that "they" need not bother. We've done a pretty good job of getting ourselves.

The Opinion page featured commentary lineup

| Sunday | Monday | Tuesday | Wednesday | Thursday | Friday | Saturday |
|--------------------------------|---------------------------------|---|---|---------------------------------|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Ellen Goodman Thomas Sowell | David Broder Kathleen Parker | Leonard Pitts Jr. Larry Dale Keeling | Paul Greenberg Board of Contributors | Froma Harrop Kathleen Parker | Leonard Pitts Jr. Garrison Keillor | Robert Samuelson Cal Thomas |



Coming Saturday
 Robert Samuelson writes that President Obama is creating a dangerous level of national debt.