

COMMENTARY

Cartoons needlessly
insult Muslims / 6B

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Sunday
March 5, 2006

Editorials 2B
My Turn 2B
Stantis 2B
Letters 3B

B



Tom Scarritt

High gas will drive changes

No one wants to pay more for gasoline. No one wants to pay more taxes. A majority of Americans, though, say they would support a higher federal tax on gasoline if it helped reduce our dependence on imported oil or reduce global warming.

Those findings, from a recent New York Times/CBS News poll, could be the foundation for a real energy policy in this country. What we have now is an undeclared but consistent policy that is leading us in the wrong direction. That policy, says Car and Driver editor Csaba Csere, is simple: "Keep energy as cheap as possible for as long as possible."

That leads us to seek oil wherever we can get the lowest price, without regard to what that does to our national security. It leads us to burn all the fuel we can find, without regard to what that does to our environment. It takes away much of the incentive to be more efficient.

When pollsters posed their question purely as a tax issue, 85 percent of the respondents preferred the present policy. They said they would oppose an increased gasoline tax. The results changed dramatically, though, if the tax would enhance our independence and our environment. Taxes for those purposes receive 55 and 59 percent support.

We know we have a problem. Even before President Bush made our oil addiction a part of his State of the Union address, Americans were concerned about the ill effects of that addiction.

Knowing we have a problem, though, is not enough to curb our consumption. Even shocks such as the spike in gas prices after Hurricane Katrina sparked only limited interest in smaller cars or alternatives such as hybrids, carpools or mass transit.

We need a solution that is as big and as lasting as the problem. Columnist Thomas Friedman, writing about The New York Times poll, said: "The Energy Question is the big strategic issue of our time, overtaking 9/11 and the war on terrorism." The issues are related, of course, as oil revenues finance enemies of democracy.

We have tried other ways of reducing consumption, such as encouraging mass transit and requiring car makers to meet fuel efficiency standards. This newspaper supports both those initiatives. But neither has proved strong enough to change our behavior.

There is no magic bullet. People are not burning to ride buses, if only they were more available. The car makers are not hiding some secret high-mileage technology they will bring out if the Corporate Average Fuel Economy standards are raised high enough. Progress in cutting consumption will be incremental, and it will be market driven.

High gasoline prices in Europe have affected both technology and consumer choices. A higher gasoline tax could have the same effect here, and it could be offset by other tax breaks to keep low-income workers from bearing too much of the burden.

Moving away from our cheap-at-any-cost approach to energy policy in this country is a big step, and it will involve some sacrifices. It should be carefully debated, so we come up with a strategy that really works. A large number of Americans, it now appears, are willing to consider a higher gasoline tax as part of that strategy.

Tom Scarritt is editor of The News. His e-mail address is tscarritt@bhamnews.com.

Despite terrorism ties, UAE is an ally

By BLAKE PRITCHETT

When Attorney General Alberto Gonzales stopped in Birmingham recently, he predictably

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argued that the decision to allow Dubai Ports World (owned by the United Arab Emirates) to take over the operations of six major ports in the United States was vetted through the normal Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States process that considered a variety of concerns regarding U.S. port security.

Despite this, the latest polling shows 64 percent of Americans are opposed to

allowing the deal to occur. Alabama's congressional delegation, which tilts heavily Republican, is leaning toward opposition. The proposed plan does not impact operations at the Port of Mobile, but it is still important for Alabama lawmakers, the media and the public to understand what is at stake in the Dubai deal and how it relates to our homeland security.

The main points of contention relate

to UAE's past connections to terrorism. The UAE has been suspected of serving as a transfer point for illicit shipments of nuclear materials to Iran, North Korea and Libya. The Federal Bureau of Investigation claims UAE financial networks were used in a money-laundering scheme to finance some of the 9/11 hijackers. The UAE was one of only three

► See UAE, Page 8B

With open arms

UA welcomes cigarette makers to campus

By ALAN BLUM

More than 40 years after U.S. Surgeon General Luther Terry, an Alabamian, published the landmark report "Smoking and Health," the toll taken by tobacco is greater than ever.

The 1964 indictment of cigarettes as a principal cause of lung cancer and other diseases should have marked the beginning of the end of the Marlboro Man. But far from heading off into the sunset, the tobacco industry has more than met the challenge of keeping America smoking. The sad result is that cigarette smoking remains the nation's No. 1 avoidable health problem, accounting for 440,000 deaths a year.

In Alabama alone, annual deaths from cigarette-related diseases such as emphysema, heart attack, stroke and lung cancer total 7,600, more than all the deaths from AIDS, illegal drugs, alcohol, motor vehicle accidents, homicides and suicides combined. Among all states, Alabama trails only Kentucky and Mississippi in the percentage of men who smoke (29 percent). In the 18-24 age group, more young women are lighting up than men. Overall, 25 percent of the state's 4.5 million population smokes, compared with the national average of 20 percent.

And we're paying a price: Alabama's Medicaid expenditures for smoking-related illness cost taxpayers well more than \$200 million last year; annual lost productivity due to smoking now approaches \$2 billion.

On the other side of the ledger, last year Altria, parent corporation of Philip Morris USA, the maker of Marlboro, earned more than \$5 billion in profit, putting it near the top of the Dow Jones average. Forty percent of all cigarettes sold are Marlboro, more than the next seven brands combined.

So who is still coughing up more than \$4.50 a pack in Alabama, or more than \$1,600 a year for a 20-cigarettes-a-day addiction? Those with the least education and lowest incomes are most likely to light up: 40 percent of individuals who lack a high school diploma smoke, compared to just more than 10 percent of those with a college degree. Minority groups are especially hard hit.

► See Cigarette, Page 8B

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NEWS ILLUSTRATION/
MARK BAGGETT

Mentally disabled Alabamians waiting

By ELLEN GILLESPIE

Imagine the predicament of an older widow, unable to lift her middle-aged son who has mental retardation, or to have any peace about where he may live once she is gone.

In a lawsuit filed in 2000, Susan J. vs. Riley, Alabamians with mental retardation and their families are seeking critical services for which they have been on waiting lists for many years. Many parents of people with mental retardation are older and can no longer meet the physical and mental demands of providing round-the-clock care for a dependent adult.

Alabama's Department of Mental Health and Retardation acknowledges that more than 1,400 people with mental retardation are on the department's waiting list for services.

Now, six years into the lawsuit that seeks to obtain needed services, Attorney General Troy King has moved a second time to have the suit dismissed, claiming the plaintiffs do not have a right to sue. He argues a lawsuit is not necessary, and that a federal judge should not tell the state what to do.

In an ideal world, the attorney general would be right.

In an ideal world, Alabamians with disabilities would not have languished for years on a waiting list while receiving no services. No lawsuit would have been necessary if Alabama had met the needs of some of our most vulnerable citizens and their families.

But we do not have an ideal, much less adequate, system of care in our state. Adequate funding to meet the needs of this population has never been made available. Department of Mental Health and Mental Retardation leaders know the dire

► See Waiting, Page 8B

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Choose to make the grade, make a difference



DeMeco Ryans

By DeMECO RYANS

Life is funny. It changes in ways you don't expect and at times you don't anticipate. Take this essay, for example. As a football player for the University of Alabama Crimson Tide, I've been asked to talk with lots of reporters for lots of stories. Most of the time, I didn't mind. It goes along with the territory of playing for a

DeMeco Ryans, a recent University of Alabama cum laude graduate, was a consensus All-American linebacker for the Crimson Tide and was defensive MVP of the 2006 Cotton Bowl.

school with such rich tradition and passionate fans.

However, I was most excited to have the chance to write a piece that not only reflects on my career but, hopefully, points to some positive aspects of college athletics and college life that don't always make the sports pages. And in keeping with past media interviews, if I can offer any words that might serve to motivate high school students to make good choices about their futures, then I'm all over that.

Winning the NCAA Top VIII award brought honor to me, my family and my university, but it also gave me a voice, a platform to talk about some other important things. My college experience — tack-

ling my coursework, competing for the Crimson Tide, trying to give something back to my community — hasn't left much time to reflect. And while it's not yet clear where God may lead me next, it is clear that many people have helped me get to this point. I wanted to take this opportunity to say thank you to some of those who have helped me along the way and to encourage those who may read this — especially students — to always strive for your personal best, whatever that may be.

That's one of the things my mom emphasized when I was growing up. "Do your best. Work hard. Take advantage of the

► See Make, Page 8B

Moving along

Mass transit is losing its legislative torch-bearer with the retirement of state Rep. George Perdue, says editorial writer Eddie Lard. 2B



John Edwards

Running or not?

Former U.S. Sen. John Edwards, who ran for vice president as a Democrat in 2004, is roaming around again, with 2008 in mind, writes columnist George Will. 6B

CIGARETTE: Makers recruit UA students

► From Page 1B

A front-page story in The News on Jan. 26 reported that African-Americans are far more likely than other racial groups to develop lung cancer even if they smoke the same amount.

Why, then, did the University of Alabama roll out the red carpet last month for the Marlboro man, in the rotunda of the journalism school? Amid the College of Communication and Information Sciences Hall of Fame, which honors great men and women of Alabama such as the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. and Helen Keller, 10 job recruiters from Philip Morris USA hosted a catered reception for some two dozen students to tout the benefits of working for America's No. 1 cigarette manufacturer.

If hired as summer interns or full-time territory sales managers, these future University of Alabama graduates, who themselves are highly unlikely to smoke, will be working to reinforce the nicotine addiction of countless young, poor and less-educated Alabamians.

The lead recruiter of the group, UA alumna Tiffany Elliott, spoke eloquently about Philip Morris' core values, integrity and social responsibility. Nor did she deny that cigarettes cause lung cancer and a host of other diseases. "We're very honest about what we do," she told me. "We know the product we have causes harm. We haven't always been honest about that. Our culture has definitely changed." And she was most adamant that "we don't want to pull in children."

The Philip Morris recruitment brochure distributed at the school highlights its Youth Smoking Prevention campaign, which portrays cigarettes as strictly an adult custom that parents should discuss with their children. But every parent already knows that teenagers seek rebellious and risk-taking ways to reject authority, so such a campaign may make smoking even more appealing to young people.

Nonetheless, at least one UA student at the reception supports the company's approach. "Yeah, Philip Morris sells cigarettes," he said, "but they also help prevent children from smoking."

As various legal restrictions have been placed on cigarette advertising and sponsorships, tobacco companies have shifted their marketing budgets to the retail point of purchase, as well as to promotions in bars and clubs where they enroll young adults for direct-mail discount offers and other gifts. The ubiquitous bar promotions are not mentioned in the Philip Morris recruitment brochure.

To reach its youthful consumers, then, Philip Morris USA has stepped up its recruitment on college campuses, cultivating ties with 35 universities across the country. The University of Alabama has the dubious distinction of being the sole institution of higher learning in our state which has put out the welcome mat for a tobacco company to recruit its students.

In addition to receptions and presentations in the College of Communications, Philip Morris USA has gained access to classes at the Culverhouse College of Commerce and Business Administration and has addressed student



groups. At last month's Career Day, the company was one of just two out of more than 100 to have its logo prominently printed in the job fair's program and to be given special thanks by the university.

Barred from Career Day

Perhaps this special relationship can explain why I was barred by a UA administrator from observing this year's Career Day, at which both Philip Morris USA and the RJ Reynolds Tobacco Co. were given prominent space to meet and greet hundreds of Alabama students.

Over the past 30 years, during the course of my research on the tobacco industry, I have attended and studied hundreds of events in all 50 states that have been sponsored in whole or in part by cigarette companies. The stepped-up involvement of Philip Morris on the University of Alabama campus confirms findings of my published research, namely that cigarette manufacturers have succeeded in forging close ties to academia as a means of assuring the future strength of cigarette sales in the face of medical admonitions against smoking.

Although the UA administration has thus far declined to reveal the full nature and extent of its dealings with the maker of Marlboro, the effort to prevent one of its own professors from gathering information on the way the tobacco industry attracts students is a clear violation of academic freedom. If university administrators intend to lend their support to Gov. Bob Riley's initiatives aimed at reducing the high cost of health care and preventing disease, then playing up to cigarette company recruiters is antithetical to this mission.

At the University of Alabama, the medical school is entrusted with protecting public health, while the business and communications colleges appear to be protecting the health of cigarette companies. Perhaps I am too naive. But 40 years after the surgeon general's report, it's not hard to see why we have failed to end the smoking pandemic.

Philip Morris USA recruiters will return to the University of Alabama Ferguson Student Center on Tuesday.

UAE: A naval hub for our operations in Iraq

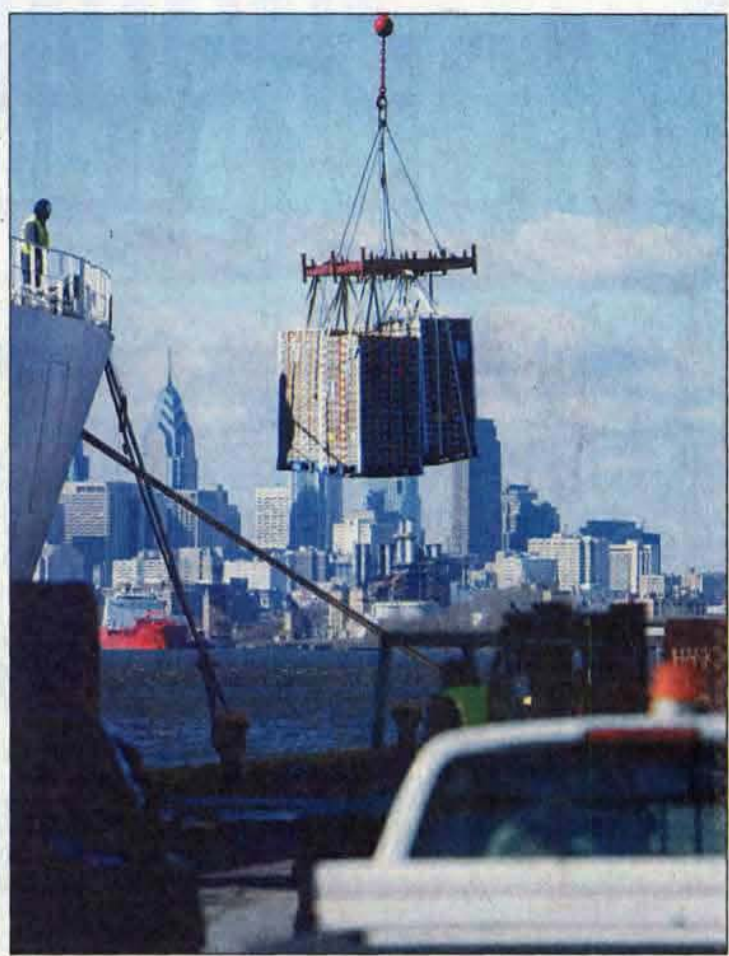
► From Page 1B

countries to recognize the Taliban government of Afghanistan as legitimate, and it opposes the supposed pro-Israel tilt of U.S. foreign policy. Based solely on this information, the situation sounds dire. But it fails to reveal the entire story.

The Bush administration has noted accurately that the UAE is a key ally since 9/11 in the U.S.-led war on terrorism. It is a naval hub for our operations in Iraq, and it was the first Middle Eastern country to join the U.S.-sponsored Container Security Initiative and Megaports Initiative, which are designed to secure the global supply chain against weapons of mass destruction proliferation. The UAE may not rise to the level of a responsible trading partner such as Great Britain, but the situation is not as threatening as some would suggest. In a time of Middle Eastern turmoil, the UAE has worked to engage the United States while other nations have taken increasingly hard-line positions and promoted extremists into positions of power. We need more of the former and less of the latter.

Red flags

Nevertheless, the Dubai deal raises a number of red flags in a policy process that should concern our lawmakers. The CFIOUS is composed of the secretaries of state, treasury, defense and homeland security, among others. Under an amendment passed in 1993, the committee is required to conduct an additional investigation into matters of foreign investment where the acquiring firm is controlled by or acting on behalf of a foreign government or if the acquisition would affect our national security. The Dubai deal appears to rise to this level, yet media reports note that key administration officials were unable to explain why the additional investigation did not occur. Equally troubling is that secretaries John Snow, Condoleezza Rice, Donald Rumsfeld and Michael Chertoff were reported as unaware of the deal until many days after it had been approved. It is common practice for representatives of department secretaries to represent them at



Workers at the Tioga Marine Terminal in Philadelphia say business shouldn't be affected by a United Arab Emirates-based group's plans to buy a stake in their company.

CFIOUS meetings, but it is alarming that a deal of this significance went unmentioned to the individuals who actually serve on the committee. In the post-Katrina environment, this does not classify as a confidence-building measure.

Given this, is not unreasonable for members of Congress to want an additional investigation. As South Carolina Sen. Lindsay Graham noted, "This process has been flawed from the beginning, and it needs to be fixed." Even Colin Powell has argued that someone should have recognized the political implications of the deal and engaged in the proper briefings. Some in Congress have expressed concern that a delay in the deal might damage our strategic partnership with UAE, but a more astute observation might be that decision-makers in the UAE can learn more about the democratic process in America and how our system of government respects the co-equal branches of power.

At this point, it is not clear whether the UAE deal should occur. In the weeks to come, our officials must avoid recalcitrance for its own sake. A more thorough 45-day investigation will provide time to gain a

broader understanding of the issue. President Bush has pledged his first-ever veto of any action blocking the deal, but a wiser strategy would be to re-examine the facts at hand and re-assess the situation following the investigation. If investigations reveal evidence that the acquisition would harm our national security, the deal must be opposed. If no such evidence is found, then the Dubai deal likely will be on par with many of our other ports, which are controlled by companies based in China and Singapore. If the deal goes through, Americans should take comfort in the fact that Customs authorities and the Coast Guard (all under the aegis of the Department of Homeland Security), will remain responsible for the security of our ports and the trade that traffics through them. On the security front, little changes.

Reasonable people may disagree on the implications of the Dubai deal, but our leaders must ensure that decisions are based on a thorough investigation and in-depth understanding of the measures in place to secure the global supply chain and our U.S. ports. Anything less is a disservice to the people of the United States.

Make: Grades key to bright future

► From Page 1B

opportunities you have been given." Those were, and are, some of the messages I took from my mom and tried to incorporate as a part of me. She always emphasized the importance of education. She knew good grades were the key to a brighter future. She had high expectations, and we knew that anything less than a "B" was unacceptable. We also knew if we were capable of bringing home "A's," we had better land the "A." My mom backed up her words with her actions. She worked two jobs most of my life, so my brothers and sisters would have those things and those opportunities we needed. Thank you, Mom.

To my teammates: Guys, it's been a wild ride. I know the bond we share will never be broken, no matter how far the distance between us. I can't imagine a better group of friends to spend my college days with. I wish you all the best in life after football.

To my coaches back at Jess Lanier High School and at the University of Alabama: Thank you for the football skills you taught me and for giving me a chance to hone them on both the practice fields and in the game arena. I'd also like to thank the staff of the athletic department at UA for its support, encouragement and willingness to assist us in all of our



endeavors as student-athletes — always expecting our personal best.

One of the things I always tried to emphasize to the high school recruits during their campus visits was the need to take care of the academic side of their lives as student-athletes. As student-athletes on scholarship, we've been given a wonderful opportunity to earn an education. It's vital we don't waste it. If you want to succeed as a student-athlete — not just on the football field or on the court — but in the classroom, the UA staff will do its best to help you achieve your academic goals. But, you have to want it and dedicate yourself to it. Set academic, as well as athletic, goals.

I had a goal to graduate within four years, and I earned my management degree with six months to spare. We all have different goals and different abilities, but we can all do our best. The university has invested millions of dollars in the Paul W. Bryant Academic Center, which was available to me at the end of my college career. I know it stands as a symbol of commit-

ment to all Tide athletes, now and in the future, that they will have every opportunity to succeed academically if they make that a priority in their lives. The support is there if each student-athlete commits to that success.

To my teachers back in Bessemer and to the faculty at the University of Alabama, thank you for your high expectations and for the encouragement you gave to me and my fellow students on a daily basis. Teachers have one of the toughest jobs, and I thank them for all they are doing for the next generation of leaders of our state and nation.

You hear a lot about what's wrong with young people today, and we sometimes focus on the problems in college sports rather than successes. I am grateful the University of Alabama and many other organizations look for success stories and honor accomplishments and don't solely focus on winning or losing a ballgame. Don't get me wrong: I love to win. I am energized by athletic competition. But I know when the game is over, making the grade and making a difference in the lives of others are the ultimate blessings.

DeMeco Ryans was awarded the NCAA's Top VIII Award, recognizing outstanding achievement in athletics, scholarship and community service that is given each year to only eight student-athletes nationwide. Ryans is presently training in anticipation of April's NFL draft. Follow Ryans on his Web site at www.demecoryans.net

WAITING: Issue never made it to 'front burner'

► From Page 1B

situations of these families and have tried to meet their needs. Simply put, this issue never made it to the front burner until the lawsuit moved forward and hundreds of families and advo-

cates brought the issue to the forefront.

The legal argument King wants to test would be better applied to some other case, one not causing such a dire impact for our most needy citizens. King's strategy will be sure to prolong the case for years before any resolution is reached.

King and the governor have it in their power to assure that people on waiting lists will no longer be ignored. It is not

enough for Gov. Bob Riley and King to promise they will "try" to fund these programs in future years. Changes in leadership occur, and the state of the economy varies.

The governor and attorney general must prioritize the provision of needed services to people with disabilities. They must ensure that vulnerable people will receive the services they deserve as Alabama citizens.

In the meantime, people wait.

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