

OPINION

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Kids and crime rates

THE FBI'S annual report on the nation's crime rate this week was essentially good news. It showed a 4 percent decline in violent crime in 1995 compared to 1994.

Among violent crimes, murder dropped the most — 8 percent. Robbery was down 7 percent, rape 6 percent and aggravated assault 3 percent.

But the report came at a difficult time in this area. The community is still dealing with the shock of a Jenkins High School student shooting another student to death only 10 weeks ago and a more recent incident where a student at Groves High School shot into a crowd of students inside the school's media center.

The almost fatal shooting of Savannah physician Robert Grant outside one of Savannah's finer restaurants March 29 by an armed robber is still on the public's mind, as is the spate of armed robberies in restaurant parking lots on Hilton Head Island, S.C. — four in the last five weeks.

There is no denying, of course, that the FBI's national statistics are encouraging. But they are not mollifying in the wake of these local horror stories.

It would be foolish for either presidential candidate to depend too much on 1995 crime figures in the coming election campaign. President Clinton has already attributed the 1995 decline to putting 100,000 more police officers on the streets and lengthening prison sentences.

But it is the next generation of killers and robbers we must be concerned about. Between 1990 and 1994, the murder rate for teen-agers grew by 22 percent.

Said James Alan Fox, dean of criminal justice at Northeastern University in Boston, of the FBI statistics: "We are facing a bloodbath of teen violence in the years ahead that will make 1995 look like the good old days."

Over the next 10 years, he said, America's teen-age population will expand by 17 percent. That is because there are 39 million children under age 10 today, more than we've had since the 1950s when the baby boomers were in grade school.

Teens are not deterred by increased incarceration, Mr. Fox said. They are seldom locked up, and most of them don't think they ever will be. Such a gloomy outlook is something the FBI could not quantify.

Hospital 'freebies' in S.C.

STATE LAWMAKERS in South Carolina know a good perk when they see one — even if it costs the state-owned hospital in Charleston, S.C., more than \$1 million a year.

It seems that legislators and state employees who are treated at the Medical University of South Carolina seldom, if ever, see a bill. That's because after their insurance pays the customary 80 percent of the charges, the hospital doesn't bill the patient for the remaining 20 percent.

Why? Because that's how the legislature wants it done — even though this practice is apparently contributing to financial problems at the state's teaching hospital.

In fact, the practice has been going on for more than 10 years, and it's going to keep going on: Last week, the S.C. Senate voted 27-10 against abolishing the perquisite.

It's not quite as good a deal as members of Congress have written for themselves. Under the Federal Employees Health Benefits Program, they pay one-fourth of their health-insurance premiums — about \$100 per month for a family of four. Taxpayers pay the other \$300.

Still, it's a discount to which most citizens of South Carolina aren't entitled. In fact, they probably pay a little more for their care as the hospital shifts costs.

Even with the lopsided Senate vote to keep the "freebie" in place, it may not last forever. MUSC's own state employees are worried about losing their health-care benefits if parts of the MUSC hospital are sold or leased to Columbia/HCA Corp. Such a takeover is under consideration.

Lawmakers who take advantage of the 20-percent discount should thank state taxpayers for their generosity. But they shouldn't expect any "get well" cards.

How to properly celebrate FDR

Controversies concerning the memorial to Franklin Roosevelt are today's evidence that this is an age in which one cannot find common sense without a search warrant.

Because of trepidation about possible protests by the animal rights lobby, the statue of Eleanor Roosevelt will not depict her wearing her familiar fur wrap. And FDR's cigarette holder, seen in so many photographs, will not be in evidence. That holder, often clenched in a toothy smile illuminating FDR's large upturned head, was emblematic of the infectious jauntiness which was his greatest gift to a shaken country and a précis of his political philosophy. But the cigarette holder must be banished, lest sin flourish.

More seriously wrong is the decision that none of the three statues of FDR in the 7.5-acre memorial will depict him in a wheelchair. We wallow waist deep in a confessional culture, in which any lunatic can get on television to confess unnatural acts with llamas, yet we will not truthfully depict this century's most important president in a way that is, to say no more, pertinent to understanding him.

The decision has been made to continue in stone a reticence about FDR's disability, a reticence that in his lifetime was required by public sensibilities that now have been happily surmounted. The decision reveals confusion about the proper point of the memorial.

Defenders of that decision say it would be wrong to "revise the record" — that it would be unhistorical to display what FDR successfully concealed from the American people, most of whom did not understand the reality of his affliction. (Thanks to a cooperative press corps, only one of the more than 125,000 photographs in the FDR library at Hyde Park shows him in a wheelchair.) But fidelity to FDR's wishes is not guiding the design of the memorial: FDR told Felix Frankfurter he wanted only a starkly simple memorial no larger than his desk, the sort of memorial to him that already exists at the National Archives.

A statement by the FDR Memorial Commis-

sion almost implies that the project is a celebration of the New Deal. If that is so, the heck with it. The statement says the memorial "is designed to serve not as a monument to the man, but as a place of remembrance, contemplation and tribute to his work."

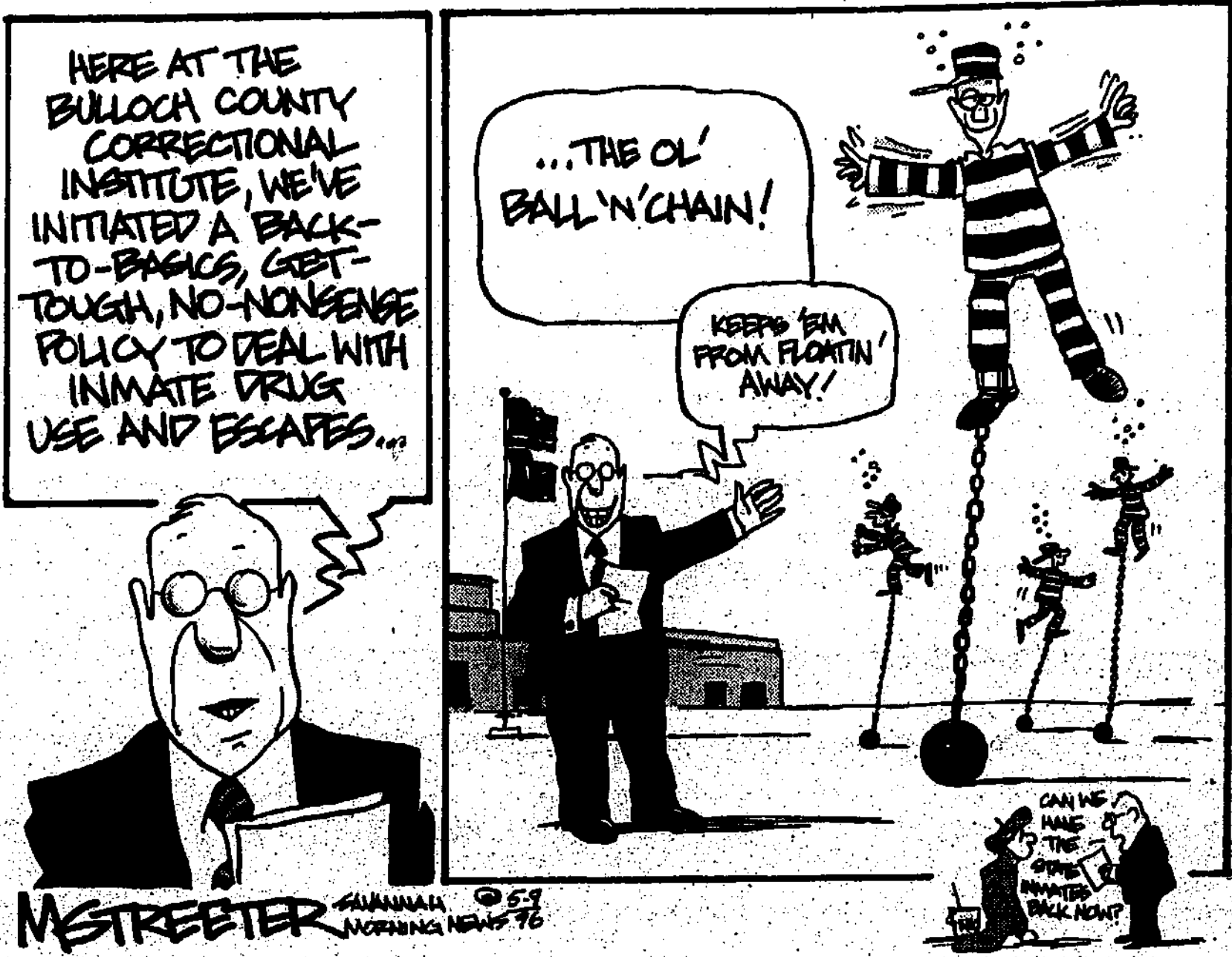
But that is a distinction without a difference. The work of the last 13 years of FDR's life cannot properly be contemplated without reference to the affliction that left him a paraplegic for the last 24 years of his life. He probably would not have become president, and certainly would not have become the long-headed and tough president he was, without passing through the furnace of polio.

One can believe that many of his works were mistakes and still believe he should be celebrated for the gallantry that the disease demanded from him but need not have elicited. No serious person doubts that FDR played a large role in the making of modern America, and it is passing strange to suppose that the disease did not catalyze the transformation of the debonair young swell, skating along on charm and connections, into the brilliant and broadly empathetic politician.

"Too often," FDR once said, "is the biographer tempted to confine himself to that comparatively brief period after the trumpet of fame has directed the eyes of the world upon him whose life story he writes." From that statement Geoffrey Ward derived the title of the first volume of his unsurpassed biography of FDR, "Before the Trumpet."

Ward's second volume, which recounts FDR's rise from a bed to pain to the seat of power, is titled "A First-Class Temperament." That comes from Oliver Wendell Holmes' famous assessment of FDR: "A second-class intellect. But a first-class temperament!" No reader of Ward can doubt that the temperament FDR exhibited in the 1930s and 1940s was forged in the 1920s.

So, let's see FDR portrayed at the memorial in a wheelchair. Perhaps we should resist the temptation to have him holding something that would accurately depict one of his most noble talents and his unquenchable capacity for pleasure — a martini shaker. But let's see that cigarette holder which, he once breezily explained to an inquiring boy, he used "because my doctor told me to stay as far away from cigarettes as possible."



Letters to the Editor

Drugs don't belong in the workplace

Editor:
Substance abuse is a major issue for American business and labor. More than half the world's production of illegal drugs is consumed in the United States. A majority of current users of illegal drugs are employed.

Ninety percent of large businesses have drug-free workplace programs in effect, while only 5 to 10 percent of small and medium-sized businesses have implemented similar programs. The irony and significant point here is that 75 percent of employed Americans work for these small and medium-sized business.

Workers who want to avoid substance-abuse policies look for work where there is no such policy, and that is where most of them are — small and medium-sized workplaces.

Even though many employers choose to ignore the problem, substance abuse in the workplace has a very real impact on their bottom line. As reported by the Department of Labor and the Small Business Administration, substance abuse drains more than \$60 billion from American businesses every year in worker's compensation claims, medical costs, absenteeism, lost productivity and employee turnover.

Substance abusers have significantly higher medical costs and benefits, are twice as likely to be absent eight or more days a year, and are less productive.

In the Chatham County area, local industries and businesses are trying hard to make a difference. Through the sponsorship of our Chamber of Commerce, a program was started to assist business firms in adopting a drug-free workplace policy for their operations. With the diligent efforts of many leaders of the business community, the council has made tremendous strides toward establishing an awareness that businesses can make a difference.

There are over 180 businesses in the Chatham County area that have implemented a certified drug-free workplace policy. The total employment of these organizations exceeds 38,000 workers, which represents about one-third of the county's work force. That is significant. However, there is much yet to be done.

Every business, professional group or industry needs to be a drug-free workplace and have a formal substance abuse policy in effect. Having one is less difficult than not having one. Having one is less costly than not having one.

Every employee needs to understand that to expect anything less than a drug-free workplace is to invite physical and emotional problems among fellow employees, expose themselves and others to work safety hazards, and increase the potential liability of his or her employer.

It should and must be the intent of employers to provide a workplace which is safe and free from the debilitating and destructive influence which results from any exposure to the "manufacture, distribution, dispensing, possession, or use of any

controlled substance by any employees." Drugs don't work, therefore drugs do not belong in the workplace.

VREELAND GEORGE

Editor:
Drug-free school zones and drug-free workplaces are serious business. Where we live, go to school and work must be protected against the onslaught of drug abuse.

Persons who have problems are offered help under these drug-prevention

policies. However, to refuse to objectify whether or not you have a problem by refusing a drug test when there is probable cause is not only insubordination, it is "scoff law."

This attitude is especially unacceptable in those who teach in our schools and are models to our children. We must not try to make heroes out of them.

WILLIAM B. JOHNSON
Executive Director

The Fraser Recovery Center

Hinesville

Don't overlook payroll tax

Editor:
A recent letter writer questioned Sen. Paul Coverdell's figures revealing that a typical family would pay the federal government \$10,000 on an income of \$40,000.

The writer states the tax on income would amount to \$3,514 under standard circumstances. He also calculated his payroll tax (Social Security and Medicare) at \$3,000.

If he was self-employed, he would realize that his payroll tax on \$40,000 is \$6,120 (15.3 percent). Not being self-employed,

he forgot that employers pay half the payroll tax for the privilege of hiring a worker. This is the functional equivalent of the working paying this tax.

With a combined income and payroll tax of \$9,634, and the extra federal taxes on gasoline, telephone calls, adult beverages, airline tickets and other hidden federal taxes, it's highly reasonable that Sen. Coverdell's figures are more on the money than a subject of question.

ED O'BRIEN

Odom

A solution to James' problem

Editor:
My curiosity was piqued (along with my ire) at two stories on the front page of the April 27 Savannah News-Press about the Chatham County Commission's actions on the April 26.

The first story dealt with Squire James and the commission's inability to find a practical solution with would allow them to repay the poor man's taxes. The second was the opening of the offices for the maritime builders to the tune of approximately \$180,000.

It seems to me that since the maritime staff is being paid to do nothing for two months, that Mr. Squire could be hired by them as a consultant (say, as an expert on property taxes) and bingo, problem solved.

I recommend this approach to Commissioner Eddie DeLoach. Maybe the rest of the commission would be able to see their way clear to aid at least one taxpayer.

CAROLINE ARMSTRONG

'Tybee Days' a tremendous success

Editor:
I would like to thank the Savannah News-Press, its staff and readers, for making the First Annual "Tybee Days" a tremendous success. Through your efforts over \$10,000 was raised to help restore the historic but ailing Tybee Island lighthouse.

All too often those of us in the non-profit, volunteer-based sector take for granted the role of the media, both written and electronic, play in notifying the public of

special events and needs in our community.

All of us in Chatham County also owe Phil Heiner and Outback Steakhouse a debt of gratitude for their efforts to save one of our area's most historic landmarks. Thank you Chatham County for helping the Tybee Light shine brightly over our blessed community.

CULLEN CHAMBERS

Tybee Island

Shootings treated differently

Editor:
I can't understand this society. After the Keith Green incident at Jenkins High School, that young man's face was in the paper and on TV everyday. Unfortunately, he killed someone. He went straight to jail.

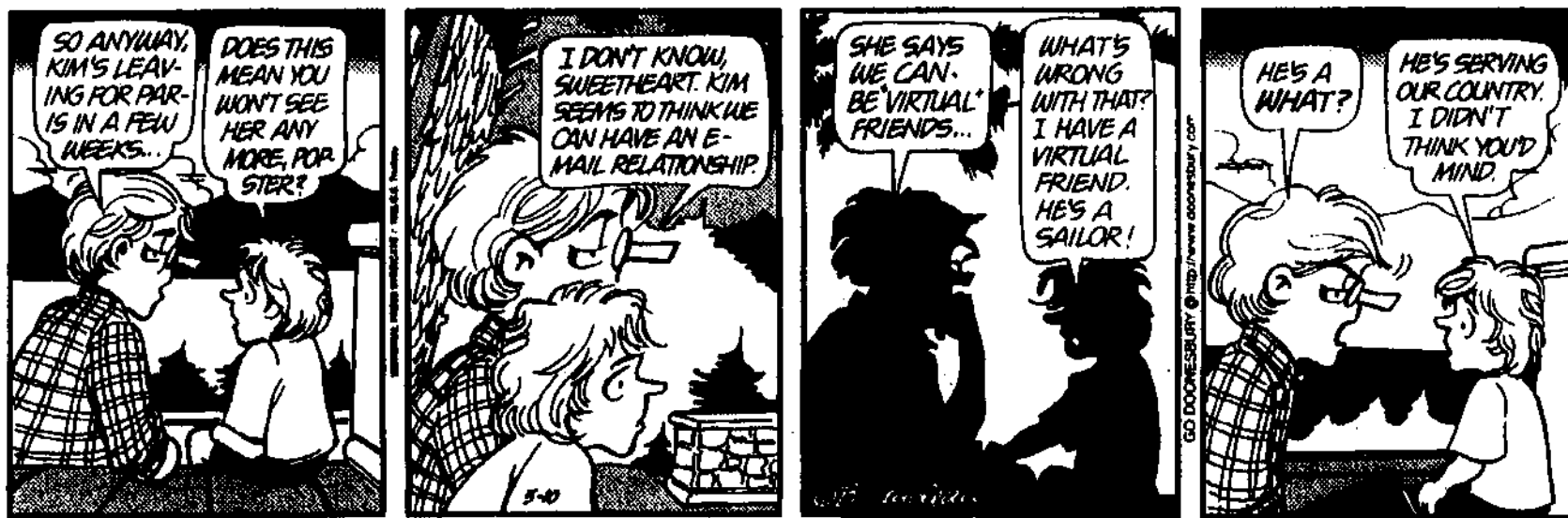
After the incident at Groves High

School, we never saw the young man's face — there was only brief news coverage. He could have killed someone. This person went straight to Georgia Regional Hospital.

Can someone please clear this situation up?

MARY KELLY

Doonesbury



BY GARRY TRUDEAU