

OPINION

“We’re suffering — this is costing at least 20 cents more on the dollar. But then again, Paris means spending money.”

CHARLES GILDEA, RETIRED FINANCIAL MANAGER
On the effects of the slumping dollar on his vacation in Paris

HOW THEY SEE IT

Tax-Cut Plan Has Hummer Of A Loophole

In campaigning for massive tax cuts, President Bush ridiculed questions about their fairness as “Washington political rhetoric.” So why does the tax bill he signed into law omit a \$400 child credit for millions of low-income families but contain a juicy but obscure boon for the wealthy?

In a last-minute maneuver, House and Senate leaders precluded families with incomes of \$10,500 to \$26,625 from eligibility for the \$400 increase in the child credit to \$1,000. Canceling the provision — on the grounds that such families pay little federal tax anyway — saved \$3.5 billion.

But if savings, rather than punishing poor Americans, had been the aim, lawmakers wouldn’t have handed out a tax break for huge sport utility vehicles, even Hummers. Not just a little tax deduction but as much as \$100,000.

It kicks in for individuals with small businesses, potentially anyone merely filing as self-employed. Depending on the tax bracket, this generous depreciation deduction could be enough to cover the cost of another vehicle, say a middle-class stalwart sedan like the Honda Accord or Ford Taurus.

The Natural Resources Defense Council is lobbying to get rid of the tax loophole with legislation sponsored by Sen. Barbara Boxer, D-Calif. Congress should pass this measure and Bush should sign it into law as soon as possible. The loophole started in 1984 when Congress let small businesses deduct up to \$25,000 of the cost of a working commercial vehicle, like a dump truck or delivery van. The deduction covered vehicles weighing 6,000 pounds or more. This presumably ruled out the family car. But in recent years, sport utility vehicles grew bigger and heavier and ever more popular as family cars. The NRDC says 38 models of these family vehicles are heavy enough to qualify for the deduction.

This year, Bush proposed raising the deduction to \$75,000. Congress boosted it to \$100,000. The lawmakers, perhaps with a wink, chose not to close the SUV loophole. It’s easy to fix this situation and keep the deduction as a legitimate boost to small business and job creation. The Boxer plan simply redefines working commercial vehicles and excludes SUVs.

Congress’ Joint Committee on Taxation estimates that the Boxer exclusion would save the government \$1.3 billion over the next decade. Congress should halt the ridiculous practice of the government paying people to buy SUVs. No less reprehensible is lawmakers’ stinginess toward poor families. Of the many questionable elements in the Bush tax cut, these two are enough to drive you off a cliff.

— LOS ANGELES TIMES

Fireworks Regulations Could Backfire

Perhaps the summer news doldrums are on us sooner than usual, but a dispatch from the U.S. House Judiciary Committee, hardly an alarmist outfit, grabbed our attention.

According to its chairman, Rep. James Sensenbrenner, R-Wis., some communities relying on rail transport may not get their fireworks in time for the Fourth of July because of firefighting among the departments of Homeland Security, Transportation and Justice.

Apparently, the three agencies cannot agree on regulations governing shipment of explosives by rail called for in antiterrorism legislation passed last year. And this, said Sensenbrenner, threatens to prevent delivery “in many areas of the country.” Presumably, communities who get their fireworks by truck, plane or barge are OK for the Fourth.

But any community bereft of fireworks on Independence Day is unacceptable.

John Adams, writing to wife Abigail on the eve of July 4, 1776, ordained that the day be celebrated “with shows, games, sports, guns, bells, bonfires, and illuminations from one end of this continent to the other.”

Now, the three Cabinet secretaries are assuredly true gentlemen and worthy patriots, but it’s only fair warning to say: If you mess up the Fourth of July, you’re going to be hiding in the same cave as Osama bin Laden.

— SCRIPPS HOWARD NEWS SERVICE

Spelling Bee Good For Society

First, there were about 9 million, then there were 251, and finally there was Sai Gunturi. That’s the way the math worked in the 76th Scripps Howard National Spelling Bee, and here is how the spelling went after all those other millions had been eliminated: P-O-C-O-C-U-R-A-N-T-E. The word means apathetic or indifferent, which scarcely describes Sai’s years of effort to emerge as the champ.

It was study, study, study to get to “pocourante,” and then get it right and win. Skip the hard work and you won’t be a regional winner making your way out of so many to earn the trip to Washington. Sai, a 13-year-old from Dallas, had worked his way to the finals three times before, coming in seventh, 16th and 32nd.

It might have been Plato who said that a society will cultivate what it honors, and a society that honors accomplishments of the mind is more likely to engender accomplishments of the mind than one that doesn’t. There was good, clean fun at the bee, and there was drama, too, and when all was said and done, there was Sai. That’s S-A-I.

— SCRIPPS HOWARD NEWS SERVICE

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Hog Fans Gear Up For Letdown

It’s a small and secret group, fearful of repercussion, but hungry. One of its members lured me with a “psst” from the grocery store aisle and whispered as I came over, after she made sure no one was around, “I loved that column about the Razorbacks.”

That was January, the last time I ventured to assail myths of our state’s Razorback religion.

A few requests for a new installment have accumulated and must be honored. Others should try to understand. To live in Arkansas and find the Razorback obsession to be the debilitating cultural disease I call hogaholism — by which fantasy and false hope are nourished by misinformation and disinformation — is akin to what it must be like to live in France and like the United States.

These covering people are starved for the adrenaline rush of agreeable commentary. They can’t turn on their television sets without encountering the mindless, pro-pork boosterism of Paul Eells, Craig O’Neill and Mike Nail. They dare not punch the radio button for fear of noise pollution by “Drive Time Sports Malapropisms,” with “Double-R” and that unctuous



John Brummett
ARKANSAS NEWS BUREAU

Schaffer guy.

Allow me, then, to address with serene detachment and objectivity what will be the prevailing question in Arkansas from summer’s onset until answers begin unfolding in September: What kind of season are the Hogs going to have?

My sportswriting credentials? I’ll cite a recent introduction of me before the Sebastian County Democrats by my columnizing colleague in Fort Smith, Jack Moseley. He said that among other things I demonstrated a flair for sportswriting, perhaps because I, like most athletes, was a college dropout.

That established, let me say the Hogs are going to have the kind of season they’re always going to have. They will be successful enough to excite the fanatics and bad enough to cause their fanatics’ eventual despair.

Hogaholism causes the heart to race, then break.

I see 8-4, 5-3 in the conference, give or take a

game, good enough to stay in the division race until the end and qualify for a lesser bowl game at an uninviting destination that will most likely result in ignominious defeat.

The nonconference schedule assures three obligatory, pointless, lackluster wins. The Hogs play South Carolina in Little Rock, and they always win at War Memorial, no matter how unlikely it might seem. They always win one game they shouldn’t, and this year that will come against either Alabama or Auburn. They’ll defeat downtrodden Kentucky and Mississippi State and probably Ole Miss. They’ll lose to the real teams: Texas, Florida, LSU and either Alabama or Auburn.

They will remain consummately average, unable to recruit a significant contingent of elite players and unable to compete at the decisive line of scrimmage against good teams.

The question is not whether Matt Jones or Ryan Sorahan will be the quarterback, nor whether Cedric Cobbs will have the breakout season expected of him since he joined the team a few decades ago.

The question is whether those guys will have anybody to block for them and do the tackling while they’re on the

sidelines. And the answer is that we’ll have adequate blocking and tackling except against the top-tier teams, which will wear us down by superior strength no matter how much we over-achieve through the inspirational pregame sermonizing and sales pitching of the over-excitable coach.

And here’s a dirty little secret: It’s always been mediocrity exaggerated for the Hogs.

Those great seasons in the Southwest Conference were artificially sustained only by participation in a one-state church league with one real opponent, Texas, to whom we usually lost, and with whom we could occasionally compete only because we annually recruited a few Texas high school standouts who had some aversion to the Longhorns and figured Arkansas was the best play to go to have a chance to gig them.

Big-time sports is just not our thing. Turning out presidents, good hunting, fishing, hiking and water-skiing, tail-kicking newspaper columnists — those are our things.

JOHN BRUMMETT IS A COLUMNIST AND REPORTER FOR STEPHENS MEDIA GROUP’S ARKANSAS NEWS BUREAU IN LITTLE ROCK. E-MAIL: JBRUMMETT@ARKANSASNEWS.COM

Amendment’s Limits Confound Clinton

It was bound to happen: former President Bill Clinton, by all comparisons a relatively young ex-president, opined on what it would take for him to make another run at the White House. Wednesday night, the former leader of the free world said Congress should change the part of the U.S. Constitution that prevents him from running for the White House a third time. A wire reporter from Reuters News Service captured Clinton’s candid moment.

Adopted after Franklin D. Roosevelt had been elected to four consecutive terms, the 22nd Amendment limits a person to only two presidential terms in office. Clinton said before a crowd at the John F. Kennedy Library and Museum in Boston that the Constitution should be changed so that a person would only be prevented from serving “no more than two consecutive terms as president.”

“I think since people are



David Sanders
ARKANSAS NEWS BUREAU

living much longer, the 22nd Amendment should probably be modified to say two consecutive terms instead of two terms for a lifetime,” Clinton said.

“There may come a time when we elect a president at age 45 or 50, and then 20 years later the country comes up against the same kind of problems the president faced before. People would like to bring that man or woman back but they have no way to do so.”

I’m sure, in his own mind, the thought of being back in the White House is very appealing. With a third term, he could cast aside the shadow of impeachment, remake the economy into a

well-oiled machine and be part of the war on terrorism. With a third term, the chance for presidential greatness would again be at Clinton’s grasp, or so he thinks.

His party is in shambles, and most observers think the Democratic candidate in 2004 has little chance of defeating President Bush. What has happened to all Clinton’s hard work?

Clinton was quick to say that a potential constitutional change probably wouldn’t affect him and that “I was surprised at how happy I was to have my life back.”

Make no mistake about it, if Bill Clinton was afforded the opportunity to run for a third term, he wouldn’t have to think about it — he would run.

GOP Abuzz About Huckabee

In recent days, Republican circles have been buzzing with the news that Gov. Mike Huckabee may be seriously considering a challenge to Sen. Blanche Lincoln in her

bid for re-election. Only weeks ago, all the attention centered on Asa Hutchinson, former Arkansas congressman and deputy director of Homeland Security, as the emerging challenger to the first-term Democrat. Hutchinson has since put those rumors to rest.

It’s hard to say what is driving this speculation. It could be that Huckabee’s close political confidants see this as the final opportunity to keep the train moving on what has been a dynamic political career. It could be that Huckabee’s two-time senatorial musings have returned.

Huckabee would make a strong candidate for the Republicans, and with the current field of candidates running slim, it now looks like he may be the GOP’s only hope for a pick up in Arkansas.

DAVID J. SANDERS IS A SPECIAL COLUMNIST FOR THE STEPHENS MEDIA GROUP’S ARKANSAS NEWS BUREAU IN LITTLE ROCK. E-MAIL: DAVIDJSANDERS@AOL.COM