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THE INDIANAPOLIS STAR

PAGE F3

Food stamps for needy

The food stamp program provides nutrition to 23 million needy Americans, half of them children, helps families weather the recession by helping put food on the table while employment is being sought and is so well-targeted that almost all its benefits go to households living at or below the poverty line.

Your July 15 editorial likened the program to a "rat hole" for taxpayers' money. It cited a New Jersey food store operator who pleaded guilty to selling a house for \$90,000 in stamps. The Star's point was that such there are agents in the field to catch thieves and con artists who rip off the program. Taxpayers should be skeptical of money put into it. But the fact that the defender was caught shows agents in the field are sharp enough to catch fraud.

Sensationalizing and generalizing about abuses of an unforgiving law to reflect poorly on the most direct and effective program to alleviate hunger for those in need is unfair and unfortunate.

Today as never before this program helps thousands of food insecure and their children. The recession has pushed food stamp participation to the highest levels since 1983. The most recent increases in participation appear to be a result of the recession's impact on families with children. In most cases, the

Letters

The Star welcomes short, concise letters signed with name, address and telephone number. All are subject to editing. Send to Letters to the Editor, The Indianapolis Star, Box 145, Indianapolis, Ind. 46206-0145.

stamps are a short-term remedy for those in financial crisis more than half the households leave the program within seven months.

Data show that 51 percent of all recipients are children; 83 percent of all benefits go to families with children; 69.4 percent are white; 91.1 percent have three or fewer children and the majority of participants have jobs with incomes paying less than needed to meet the families' basic needs. These are facts.

In a climate devoid of resources and hope but with real and perceived barriers to escape, it's no surprise that some of our most needy are currently in a pragmatic underground economy. Steps to minimize dishonest persons' ability to exploit the program must be taken. But



RANDY BACH PHOTO ILLUSTRATION

The pork in a highway funding bill

Early in August the federal highway bill was sent back to committee in the House to be re-examined. The bill that contained funding for the proposed Evansville to Indianapolis highway.

On National Public Radio a reporter explained the failed bill this way. Many representatives did not want to return to their districts and have to explain why they voted to raise the gasoline tax or cents a gallon to pay for \$6.3 billion of pork barrel projects.

The Evansville to Indianapolis highway is a classic example of such a pork barrel item — politicians spending our tax money to satisfy special interests in their districts and help themselves get re-elected. Several independent economic feasibility studies have failed to find enough justification to recommend building this highway.

Using mostly new terrain, it would devastate sensitive environmental areas, destroy scenic routes and damage the economies and integrity of many rural areas. Thousands of acres of land would



THE BRANTON ILLUSTRATION

be condemned and numerous local roads cut off.

The Indiana Limestone Institute estimates it could lose up to \$1 billion in limestone reserves currently proposed routes are used.

Proponents claim this highway would be one link of a Canada to Gulf of Mexico interstate, and as such would have national significance. A quick glance at an atlas will disclose that several such interstates already exist, including through Indianapolis.

To argue that another north-south highway, which cost \$1 billion to build, is so important to Evansville, has national significance, is to wish for a road that would cost \$1 billion to build and would have no national significance. The Indiana Department of Transportation estimates the proposed highway would save 15 minutes of travel time over existing routes between Indianapolis and Evansville.

The final cost of this project will be over \$1 billion. Reps. Lee Hamilton and Frank McCloskey, both Indiana Democrats, sponsored legislation to include \$50 million in the failed highway bill to help fund the "special project." Gov. Evan Bayh has promised \$230 million of lottery money.

Meanwhile, educational, social and health programs across the state are being cut. This highway would be an environmental and social disaster if it were free to ask taxpayers to pay for it with increased taxes while neglecting other needed programs are responsible leadership.

Existing bridges and roads throughout Indiana are badly in need of repair. Making these repairs and upgrading the roads throughout northwest Indiana would do more good for more people than one more massive highway project across freeway.

THOMAS R. TOKARSKI
Bloomington

'Express' on homosexuality

As an elementary school teacher I was disappointed in your July 29 Children's Express. I have always participated in the Newspaper in Education program and encouraged my pupils to read Children's Express.

After seeing a whole page devoted to encouraging young people to accept their homosexuality I have decided no longer to use The Indianapolis Star to teach newspaper education.

Your implication that an 8-year-old having a crush on a teacher of the same sex means that child is gay or lesbian is absurd. Every child at some point during grade school has a crush on the art teachers and looks up to their story also unfortunately encourages children to think they're gay or lesbian if they have a close relationship with a child of the same sex. No wonder our youth are confused.

I only pray that most parents were able to intercept your article before their children were encouraged to call the Gay, Lesbian

Tough time in fields

Your front page article and picture about drought July 31 left a seriously wrong impression. The picture is not one of corn kernels on a cob.

They are kernels that come from occasionally firm on a corn tassel. In the picture the tassels spikes are clearly visible.

Over the 20 years of my farming experience I have seen a great many of the same things. There is no cob going through the middle of those kernels. If there is a cob there, there would be corn stalks around the kernels.

Farmers are going to have a tough time this year, but it doesn't help to misrepresent the evidence. My garden did not show a decent harvest for the whole month of July, and it shows. My zucchini plants shriveled after producing about a dozen squash. I have put nine pints of sweet corn in the freezer where there should have been about 30 pints, and so forth.

I started farming for myself in 1934, using three blind horses and some old equipment that was bought from a farmer. Those were tough days, too, but during those days I bought and paid for an 80-acre farm and enjoyed real freedom from everything but patches on my overalls.

I raised two daughters and

Curbing park vandalism

Mayor William Hudnut's letter published Aug. 4 connected neglect of our inner-city parks with the problems of financing the mall downtown. Dorethy Petrovsky's July 21 article connected the neglect of our parks with the expenditures to provide facilities for the Pan Am Games and other sports events.

What we made the expenditures for the archery, rowing and bicycling facilities. It is time to make expenditures for the inner-city parks.

Hudnut mentioned the "baptism" water fountain pictured in the article. He has picked an excellent example of a major failure in management of the parks organization. The fountain has been vandalized three times this year.

Surely it is time for the department to address the problem of how to prevent vandalism rather than continue to waste scarce resources on band-aid reactions.

Enhanced use of the parks is a major community concern. Vandalism is one part of that concern. It seems punitive to use

vandalism as an excuse for reducing service in the parks still further. We need to light canals, not cure the darkness.

AMBEROSE SMITH
Community Organization Inc.
Indianapolis

Racial harmony

I am tired of hearing about how whites and blacks can't get along. There are a lot of us who do get along. And we don't have to try hard either.

I'm white, you may be black or white, but I'm a bigger human being than you are. I'll live longer because of stress and I'll have a lot more friends.

What I really tried to do are whites who are scared every time they see a young black man in their neighborhood or blacks who think a young white man who listens to rap music and has a box haircut wishes he were black.

Let our children grow up united instead of divided.

MERRY HOLLIDAY
Indianapolis

Preserving ranges where cattle roam

Where's the beef? Deploying herd-like thinking typical of the media elite, cable television's Ted Turner — having already copied the national networks by introducing pop innovations such as the "Hollywood Minute" and colonization of old budget films — brings his formidable powers of frontalization to ecological issues.

He recently awarded a prize for the best environmental propaganda novel, thus establishing a new but dubious genre of American fiction. Now he has launched a new campaign against cattle, branding these beasts as land-destroyers.

Speaking recently to the National Audubon Society, Turner announced he is banning cattle from his Montana ranch, replacing them with 7,000 bison. Cattle, he said, are turning land into deserts by overgrazing. Apparently, Turner thinks bison are incapable of such ecological felonies. But this is nonsense. They can do as much damage as cattle, given the chance. Indeed, Turner's ranch is a few miles from Yellowstone Park where overly abundant elk and bison have already eaten almost everything that photosynthesizes.

YET HOWEVER mistaken, Turner is doing a splendid job pushing the environmentalists' buttons. Trampling cattle has become a consuming obsession among grandia members. But this posturing is more about Chardonnay conformism than about ecology.

Although cows damage some ranges, exploding populations of wildlife do greater harm on public lands set aside for preservation. Using teeth like Woodrats, deer and elk turn national parks into sand traps. And however bad overgrazing may be, saving both public and private lands cannot be accomplished by existing herbivores.

Foraging is good for range. Just as deer and cattle need grass, so grass needs deer or cattle. By trampling, hooved animals scatter, they spread seeds and fertilizer.

Preservation, therefore, requires establishing the right balance between ruminants and the range. If the balance is right, it does not matter whether the animal is wild or domestic; the part of the effort to restore rain forest in Costa Rica's Guanacaste National Park, for example, the eminent ecologist Daniel Janzen uses domestic cattle as seed dispersers.

BY CONTRAST, ending grazing altogether can lead to rapid desertification. Lands left untrampled by hoofs develop a water-resistant crust so that the soil absorbs less rain. Untraced grasses remain standing after they are dead, locking up vital nutrients. Seed dispersal is slowed.

The Serivella National Wildlife Refuge in New Mexico demonstrates how much damage the lack of grazing can do. Off limits to cattle for more than 15 years, Serivella is rapidly turning to desert. Meanwhile, pas-

The lost opportunity for lack of a comma

The uses of the period, that uncomprehending red light, are no plain to require explanation. A couple of fine points. If a parenthetical phrase is part of a sentence, the period goes on the outside. If the parenthetical phrase stands alone, the period goes inside. Examples:

THE THOUGHT THAT she would never recognize Tom had last seen him at age 14.

THE USES OF THE question mark also are reasonably clear. Five points. Why not be moved, he asked himself why not. He inquired of the Senate. Why is it not possible to balance the budget? The question is no longer why, but when. This is all the budget director could say? Will you kindly ask him to return, there is in my own writing, I find. The committee must inquire. Why have you devolved us in this duplicitous fashion?

THE EDITORS OF THE Chicago Manual of Style take a sensible view of the comma. Aside from a few fixed rules, "the use of good judgment, with care of reading as the end in view." My own rule is to place a comma wherever the reader needs to take a breath.

THE RULE ON SERIAL commas is more easily stated than applied. In general, there are three or more elements in a series, separate each of them by a comma. The serial includes letters, times, entry, avocados, spring onions, carrot tops, and figuigrut berries. In my own writing, I find to have to find the final comma wherever it pleases me. This is a judgment call. I see no point in the rule-book comma after "top" in the matter of the Riquorific cheese without a pause.

UNIVERSAL PRESS SYNDICATE

THE WRITER'S art

Punctuation marks are road signs placed along the highway of our communication.

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Alston Chase

As the West is de-watered, many conservationists focus narrowly on anti-grazing.

Just as the West is de-watered, many conservationists focus narrowly on anti-grazing. They ignore range decline in national parks because they want more trails. Firm believers that only the federal government can save nature, they fomentate that water belongs to those who own the stream banks. But whereas riparian laws kept water in streams prior appropriation led to the system of dams, canals, and ditches that makes the West what it is today. Without prior appropriation California's Imperial Valley would have no avocados. Los Angeles would be smaller than Scarsdale.

Today some groups lobby to change this law. One proposal would allow ranchers to lease in-stream flow rights to conservation groups; another would permit state conservation departments to claim water for wildlife. But reform, opposed by many hard-core ranchers, is coming slowly.

So as the West is de-watered, many conservationists focus narrowly on anti-grazing. They rail against cattle because they don't want water kept in streams for trout and other fish with no right to do so. This countless streams are sucked dry, killing most life in them.

This PERVERSE rule was introduced in the last century to encourage economic development. It replaced ancient riparian laws, which held that water belongs to those who own the stream banks. But whereas riparian laws kept water in streams prior appropriation led to the system of dams, canals, and ditches that makes the West what it is today. Without prior appropriation California's Imperial Valley would have no avocados. Los Angeles would be smaller than Scarsdale.

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