OPINION

THE FIRST AMENDMENT

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

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OUR OPINION

Gift of Time

Salvation Army seeking volunteers for Red Kettle, Angel Tree programs to help those in need have a merrier Christmas

While many of us are making travel arrangements, finalizing grocery lists and debating the merits of smoked versus deep-fried turkey for Thanksgiving, one local charity already has its thoughts on the Christmas season.

The Salvation Army has been planning its holiday programs for months, with red kettles appearing outside local stores and Angel Trees being set up around town. And the organization is counting on the help of local volunteers to ensure those in need are able to experience the joys of Christmas along with the rest of us.

"Volunteering makes such a big impact on so many individuals this holiday season," Capt. Jenifer Phillips stated in a press release. "Whether you can spare an hour, a morning or a full day, you can make an impact in your local community. You can also ring as an individual, family or group."

During Friday's Red Kettle kickoff, Capt. Cavon Phillips addressed anyone who may think it's a little too early for bell ringing in the opening weeks of the drive.

"Are we out too early?" Phillips asked during his address to those on hand at the Brookshire Brothers Gaslight location. "No, we are not. We're out at the time we need to be. We're asking for volunteers. You can support that way, or you can support by giving. There are amazing stories that come out all the time when people are giving."

Every dollar collected in one of the red kettles around town supports social service programs right here in Lufkin. Volunteers are needed from Monday through Saturday now through Christmas Eve.

To volunteer, visit Register-ToRing.com and follow the prompts to sign up for the location and shift of your choice. Those interested may also contact Phillips at (936) 223-6624 or Jenifer.Phillips@uss.salvationarmy.org.

The Angel Tree program — which will provide gifts to 800 children thanks to the generosity of local donors and businesses — is also in need of some helping hands. Volunteer activities include working at Angel Tree adoption locations, sorting gifts and helping out during the gift distribution day for registered families.

Churches and businesses are also encouraged to host an Angel Tree to bring holiday cheer to local kids in need.

Angel Tree volunteers are needed now through the Dec. 20 distribution day, which will take place at the Pitser Garrison Convention Center.

To volunteer, contact Phillips at (936) 223-6624 or Jenifer.Phillips@uss.salvationarmy.org.

Anyone wishing to help serve holiday meals is also asked to contact Phillips. To make a donation, visit southernusa.salvationarmy.org/lufkin.

We encourage our readers to experience the true joy of Christmas by giving the gift of their time to ensure others have a happier holiday season.

TODAY IN HISTORY

The Associated Press

Today is Saturday, Nov. 16, the 321st day of 2024. There are 45 days left in the year.

Today in history:

On Nov. 16, 1973, President Richard Nixon signed the Trans-Alaska Pipeline Authorization Act into law, authorizing the construction of an 800-mile (1,290-kilometer) oil pipeline from the Alaska North Slope to the port city of Valdez.

Also on this date:

In 1914, the newly created Federal Reserve Banks opened in 12 cities.

In 1982, an agreement was announced in the 57th day of a strike by National Football League players.

In 1988, Benazir Bhutto was voted prime minister of Pakistan, the first woman to be elected to lead a Muslim-majority country.

In 1989, six Jesuit priests, a housekeeper and her daughter were slain by army troops at the University of Central America José Simeón Cañas in El Salvador.

In 2001, investigators found a letter addressed to Democratic Sen. Patrick Leahy of Vermont containing anthrax; it was the second letter bearing the deadly germ known to have been sent to Capitol Hill.

In 2001, the first film in the Harry Potter series, "Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone" (U.S. title: "Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone") debuted in theaters around the world.

Have your say

To submit a letter to the editor, bring it to us at 300 Ellis Ave. in downtown Lufkin, or mail it to P.O. Box 1089, Lufkin, TX 75902-1089. Or you can email your letter to news@lufkindaily-news.com.

The Lufkin Daily News welcomes letters of up to 250 words. All letters are subject to editing for length and clarity, and unsigned letters will not be used. Unless you stipulate "print only" on your letter, we reserve the right to publish in print or online. An address and daytime phone number must be included so the author's identity can be verified.

Only one letter per writer will be published during any 30-day period. Letters about politics, political campaigns or candidates will not be published once early voting begins in a primary or general election.

The community gets to decide if a newspaper is worth saving

A few weeks ago, I attended a newspaper conference in Charleston, South Carolina. At that convention, we were talking about how to keep newspapers alive and relevant. Then I heard this question.



GREG WEATHERBEE

"Are we worth saving?"

I didn't hear much of what was said for the next 10 minutes or so because that question shook me. It literally gave me pause — like mouth wide open, eyes fixed and slowed breathing.

Those words — "Are we worth saving?" — started playing over and over in my head as I pondered the profoundness of such a simple question.

"Of course we're worth it," I told myself. But there was a hollowness in those words.

I repeated the question. "Are we?" I asked myself again.

See, I'd never considered for a second that newspapers weren't worth saving. Trust me, I've engaged in that conversation many times and many times I was animated and brimming with conviction.

"Newspapers are important, and they are sure as hell worth the effort to save them," sounds like something I might say.

There I sat in an over-air conditioned room, sipping bad coffee, chewing on a stale muffin while surrounded by dozens of newspaper folks from around the country. I was astounded that no one else seemed to even flinch at the question that had sent me into an existential crisis.

As I've mentioned many times before, my family owned a small newspaper in Piedmont, Alabama. When my dad retired, Consolidated Publishing in Anniston, Alabama, scarfed up my dad's paper with eagerness. The Piedmont Journal-Independent was the only publication in that area of North Alabama they didn't own.

There was a handshake deal that the good folks at Consolidated Publishing would always keep an office open in the town of Piedmont. It took less than a couple of years for that agreement to be forgotten. The Piedmont Journal, which had served the small town in northern Calhoun County since 1907, was all but gone.

So was my family's paper not worth saving?

I'll not sugarcoat it. It was at one time, and then it wasn't. When ownership cared about the product it put on the street each Wednesday, it was well worth saving. When bought by a company that couldn't care less about the people of Piedmont, it was not worth saving.

My mind wandered all though the landscape of the demise of my family's paper as I sat there in Charleston. Then, out of nowhere, it hit me. The people in the community the newspaper serves get to decide if the local newspaper is "worth saving."

In the United States, we lose a newspaper at a rate of about 2.5 per day. That's a stunning number, and it likely happened because the readers in those communities didn't think they had a newspaper worth saving. Worse yet, they were probably right.

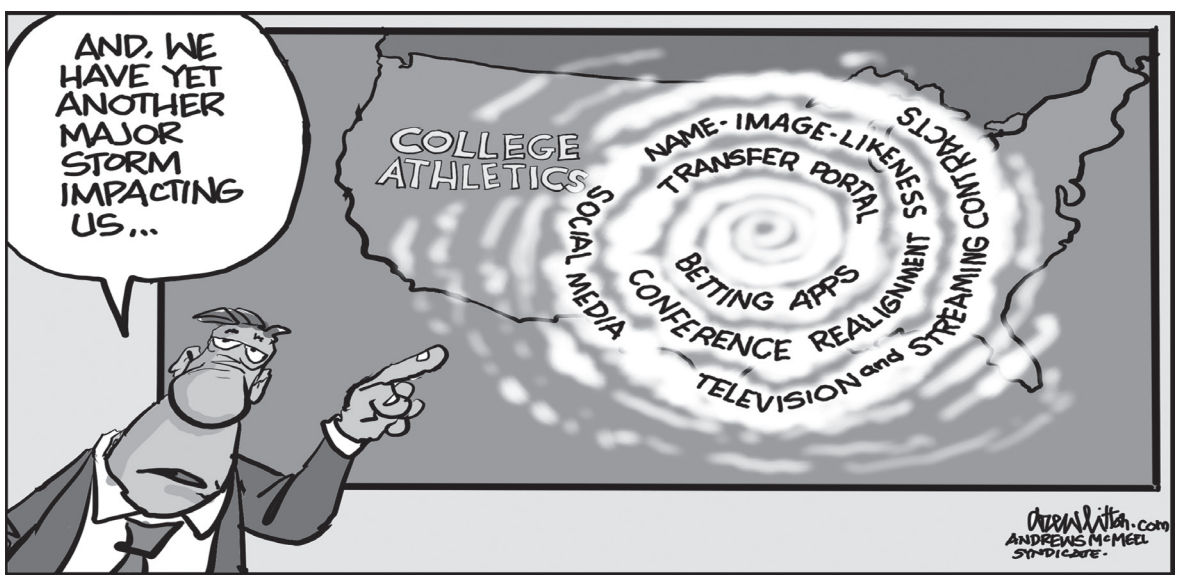
My resolve to keep The Lufkin Daily News alive has been there since the day I walked into the office I'm sitting in now. I work very hard every day to make sure we are delivering a quality product to the people of Lufkin and the surrounding area. Now that mission is to also make sure we are "worth saving."

As hard as I work to make us "worth saving," the real heroes are my staff. They work even harder and care just as much, if not more, about the little newspaper we call "The Lufkin Daily News." As hard as we all work to make sure we give you our best, it is you, our faithful readers, who are tasked with deciding if we're "worth saving."

As you read these words written by a guy who has spent his entire life toiling away in one fashion or another in the newspaper business, I hope you decide that The Lufkin Daily News is "worth saving." I also hope that if you think the answer is no, you tell us what we can do to change your mind.

I happen to believe that newspapers are worth saving. I also believe Lufkin and The Lufkin Daily News are better together.

Greg Weatherbee is publisher of The Lufkin Daily News. His email address is **greg.weatherbee@lufkindailynews.com.**



Abbott's big government voucher crusade not a conservative one

REP. GLENN ROGERS, R-GRANFORD
GUEST COLUMNIST

It is shocking that our so-called conservative state officials are continually pushing for bigger government. They ought to be reminded that conservatives believe in limiting the government, rather than expanding the bureaucracy or welfare state.

The late Sen. Jesse Helms described the issue well: "Conservatism is a hard choice for a society that has become accustomed to big government and big entitlements promoted by liberals." In the case of school vouchers, it seems to be a big entitlement program promoted by "conservatives."

Following Election Day, Gov. Greg Abbott visited a small private school in Tyler to host a press conference on his billionaire donors' pet project: school vouchers. He claimed hardcore proponents would hold the majority in the Texas House next session and would get the voucher bill across the finish line.

Later in the week, Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick announced the voucher bill was his top priority; he even suggested Abbott declare it an emergency item. As the governor stood in front of a reportedly financially struggling private school, promising this and that, it just seemed so contrary to the core ideals of the Republican Party to see him push for a new entitlement program.

Texans need to think it through. The voucher crowd frequently demands: "The money should follow the child." But guess what will ultimately follow the money? Big government. When has the government ever handed out "free-money" with no strings attached? Conservatives turned down Medicaid expansion in Texas due to the federal strings attached and a concern of an expanding government. As reported in the Texas Tribune, Abbott called it a "tax increase waiting to happen." Vouchers are no different.

We must be wary of the publicization of our private schools. Private-schoolers and homeschoolers, do you want the Texas Education Agency meddling in your child's education? Do you want your kids to be required to take standardized tests? Do private schools want their finances, curriculum, and outcomes open to public oversight? The hoops the TEA makes public schools jump through are a great burden, especially small and rural schools. Imagine if struggling private schools also were subjected to the TEA's authority.

Abbott claimed Texas could have the "best public schools in America and also school choice." He said it is wrong to "pit one against another." So I wonder why the governor is holding public school finance (including teacher pay raises) hostage until he gets school vouchers passed.

The Texas Constitution demands the Legislature maintain a free and efficient public school system, yet the governor neglects public schools and seems focused only on helping private schools. If he is so serious about having both systems strong, why is he not prioritizing the 5.5 million kids in the public school sector as the Constitution demands?

Abbott also claimed that Republicans and Democrats support vouchers. But last session, a bipartisan majority in the Texas House blocked vouchers. And just this election, voters in various states were given the choice at the ballot box — Nebraskans repealed their school voucher program, Kentuckians defeated a voucher proposal, and Coloradans defeated a constitutional amendment for "school choice." Arizona is faced with dealing with the severe budget shortfall brought on by vouchers.

If Abbott is concerned for low-income students, why is he pushing for universal vouchers, where even the wealthy elite can get a government coupon?

If he is so committed to both private and public school students, why aren't his press conferences at Texas public schools? The educators and parents in Brock ISD, Aledo ISD, Graford ISD or Perrin-Whitt CISD would surely like to host Abbott to tell him their concerns directly.

So, I have a proposal for Gov. Abbott. I propose we meet at a public school in rural Texas to engage in a public discussion on the sole issue we disagree on: school vouchers.

Texans deserve to understand this issue from both sides of the debate. Abbott owes it to rural Texans to present his clear stance on the matter and sell his idea to community leaders. I look forward to a lively discussion and look forward to introducing Abbott to our fine rural Texas educators.

dallasnews.com/opinion/commentary/2024/11/13/gov-abbotts-big-government-voucher-crusade-is-not-conservative/

Rep. Glenn Rogers, R-Graford, represents District 60 in the Texas House of Representatives. This column previously ran as a Letter to the Editor in The Dallas Morning News.

MALLARD FILLMORE — **By Bruce Tinsley**

