

The Mercury News

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April 21 Readers' letters

From Mercury News readers

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Sewage spending is complete frivolity

Seriously, a \$130,000 annualized salary for a photographer to take pictures of a sewage plant? ("Price tag for San Jose's sewage plant climbs," April 18). Are you joking? This is a gut-wrenching, jaw-dropping microcosm of the whole, utterly epitomizing our nation's, states' and municipalities' complete and catastrophic inability to control spending.

And for someone to possess the sheer audacity to actually try to rationalize such an expenditure only goes to exemplify how frighteningly deep-rooted and entrenched this behavior has become in our governments, at all levels.

As long as such frivolity continues to be sold as necessity, our nation's imminent credit rating downgrade is a foregone conclusion.

Robert Callaway

Campbell

Despite cost, plant a needed upgrade

As a taxpayer who has been involved in the planning process for rebuilding our wastewater treatment plant during the past three years, I was disappointed with the article on April 18 criticizing the price tag of this project. Anyone who takes the public tour of the plant will see infrastructure that is long outdated and falling apart.

I also defend the city's hiring of a photographer to increase public awareness of this vital upgrade project. We can't just "flush it and forget it." We need to

remember that the facility works around the clock to clean our wastewater, which protects our health and the bay. I have confidence that the rate increases are justified and that the city is spending my money wisely.

Carrie Jensen

San Jose

Prosecutor should own up to mistakes

The comment by San Mateo County prosecutor Alfred Giannini in Sunday's article in the Mercury News ("Report finds prosecutorial misconduct in Bay Area") comparing Northern California Innocence Project researchers to "Holocaust deniers" not only betrays his lack of understanding of NCIP's work but demeans his office and challenges the dignity and authority of California courts -- which as a prosecutor he has a special obligation to protect.

Mr. Giannini lashed out at the NCIP's report that on three occasions California courts ruled he committed misconduct that caused either a reversal of a conviction or a mistrial, saying he disputes "either the courts' findings in all three cases or the Innocence Project's summary of those opinions."

Mr. Giannini should own up to and learn from his mistakes rather than refuse to acknowledge the difference between fair and ethical conduct and clear prosecutorial misconduct.

Cookie Ridolfi

Maurice Possley

Northern California Innocence Project Santa Clara

Parks don't fit definition for funds

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Since the beginning of the Santa Clara County Park Charter Fund, special interests have lined up with outstretched hands for a piece of the pie. Don't be fooled, urban parks as defined by Supervisor George Shirakawa ("Local parks are appropriate for county park fund dollars," April 14) are really soccer fields and tennis courts, and not regional parks by definition.

The Strategic Plan, passed by the board of supervisors and developed over a year of public forums, classified more than 800 acres of parks within the present system as urban. The plan also defines county significance as lands that have historic value, uniqueness, natural resources, accessibility, among other qualities.

Maybe Shirakawa ought to read both the Strategic Plan and the County Master Plan to see how often regional parks are mentioned and remember how the Charter Fund was put there in the first place: by the efforts of special interests, a huge majority of county voters.

Tom Smith

Emeritus instructor, park management West Valley College San Jose

We must organize to protect nature

What will we tell future generations when they ask us what happened to the polar bears? Will we tell them that we just weren't organized enough to come up with a solution for them and the rest of the species that are in danger of being extinct?

It amazes me that so little is being done to save the very planet we exist on. Mother Nature can't speak for itself because if it did, then we would all be labeled murderers. Some skeptics believe that climate change isn't even occurring right now. Just because you can't see something doesn't mean it doesn't exist.

We need to get together as one. Animals and plants can't speak for themselves, so we must become the voice for them.

Inderjit Sidhu

Fremont

Program shows fun lost in education

The activities discussed in "Splash For Teens" (April 17) serve as a reminder of the thought-provoking projects that, sadly, are no longer integrated into today's public school curriculums. Since the introduction of No Child Left Behind, the focus of schools has shifted away from such activities in the name of achieving higher test scores, and some 10 years later, we've achieved nothing but rising dropout rates and a number of teens who feel disenfranchised with the entire educational process.

I applaud Dena Leeman for trying to bring some fun back into education. The leaders of our public schools need to realize that the goal of the system is to help students become competent, well-rounded adults, not just a number on a spreadsheet.

Christine Krepelka

Branham High School student San Jose

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San Jose Mercury News

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Editorials

Pot club limit is good compromise

The great pot club debate in San Jose is over. And while we wish a cap on medical marijuana outlets had been in place before 125 or so sprouted like weeds all over town, it's reassuring that a sensible compromise — 10 clubs — evolved from 18 months of intermittent political chaos.

This was an unusual debate. Individual council members and Mayor Chuck Reed all had strong feelings, but they were all over the map. None of the usual predictors of political

positions — pro-business, pro-labor — seemed to be at work. And in the end, there was more of a consensus than the 6-5 vote for the cap implied, since some of the “no” votes wanted more clubs and others wanted none at all. While the time this took was frustrating, it was refreshing to see elected officials clearly grappling with personal beliefs rather than pushing a political agenda.

What could not stand was the status quo. On that, everyone seemed to agree — particularly police Chief Chris Moore,

who would have been happy with a ban but believes 10 is a manageable number of clubs to regulate. The compromise was heavily based on city staff's proposal. And the marijuana tax voters approved last fall should cover the costs of regulation.

Now we'll just hope that regulation can get the outlets back to the original, humane intent of Proposition 219, which was to make marijuana available to people suffering from illnesses whose misery the drug can alleviate.

Nobody knows what fraction of the current clubs' clientele that comprises. But unless a massive new AIDS outbreak among 20-somethings has mysteriously gone unreported, we're going to guess there are a lot of people with prescription cards that are either fake or purchased from a doctor after a very cursory physical — perhaps just a quick check for a pulse and a wallet. Regulation can help to establish better practices by the clubs and get the drug cartels out of the business of supplying them.

Major changes needed in air-traffic control system

Airline passengers have more reason for white-knuckled takeoffs and landings these days. There's ample anecdotal evidence that air traffic controllers have become laissez faire about their work, including catching 40 winks at their desks from time to time.

More breaks for controllers and closer supervision seem like obvious moves. But there may be a deeper cultural problem to deal with. On Sunday a controller was caught watching a movie when the sound went out on a radio frequency. (At least it wasn't “Snakes on a Plane.”) His supervisor knew about it.

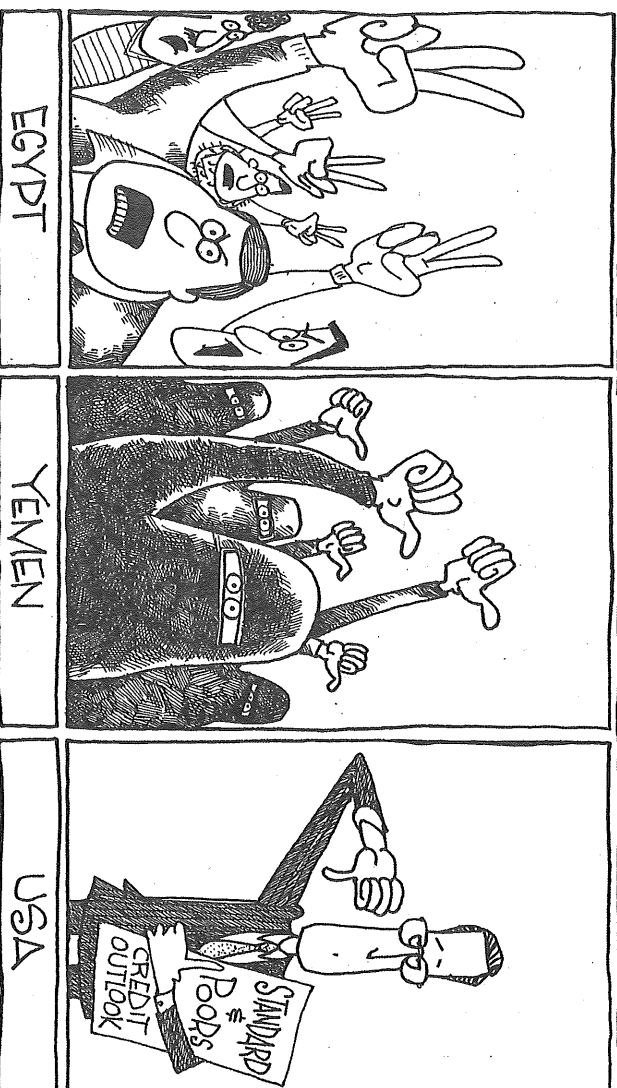
A rash of incidents involving snoozing controllers has alarmed the public, caught the attention of lawmakers and, for good reason, embarrassed the Federal Aviation Administration, which is scrambling to alter policy. We can't even keep the first lady safe. A government plane carrying Michelle Obama dived to a landing at

traffic controller's error, according to the Washington Post. Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood, whose seat should be feeling pretty hot right now, said: “On my watch, controllers will not be paid to take naps.” Just the fact that he had to say it is astonishing.

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Cartoonist's view

LAND SIGNS to GOVERNMENTS!...



SIGNE WILKINSON/PHILADELPHIA DAILY NEWS

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