

Commentary



Poor Robert's Ruminations

Shorts

BY ROB WHITTLE

The William & Mary football team gathered in the field house in pre-season, having been summoned by their new coach about whom they knew very little. The outgoing coach, Marv Levy, had told them not to worry – he thought this new guy knew what he was doing.

From the viewpoint of Jack, the right guard, this new dude was unimposing – skinny and bespectacled. And why was he carrying a bucket of water to the podium? Coach Lou Holtz began speaking, informing his players how it was going to be in that season. In the back row, three players were chatting and giggling among themselves when Holz interrupted his speech and called the offenders to the front of the room. That got the players' attention.

"Watch this very closely," Holz intoned as he dipped his fist into the bucket of water.

"What did you see happen?"

"Uh, nothing," replied one of the offenders.

"Not exactly nothing," Holz corrected. "The water parted for the second my fist went in and then it went right back to normal. That's what's gonna happen and how much we'll miss you when I throw your butts off this team."

Holz would meet with each player one-on-one before the season started. Jack, who had gotten married the semester before, entered the office with some trepidation. Holz chatted him up, putting him at ease. Toward the end of the conversation, Holz nodded toward the wedding ring on Jack's finger.

"Is that going to be a problem for you once we start playing?"

"No sir," Jack replied. "I just remove it and put it in my locker when we play."

There was a long silence between coach and player until Holz said, "Go on, get out of here."



ROB WHITTLE

You know those framed sentimental sayings that people put up in their beach houses, usually trying for something profound and moving? A house I recently visited had them all over the walls. One in particular was so stupid that it annoyed me every time I looked at it:

"You can shake the sand from your shoes, but it'll never leave your soul." Huh?

A retired friend of mine says he doesn't ever know what day it is until Sunday. "That's when the big paper comes."

In a Ken Follett novel, an ultra-conservative character opined, "Saying that poverty causes crime is like saying marriage causes adultery."

In today's hyper-researched AI-generated marketing campaigns, I sometimes long for the old days when creative directors were kings. Picture "Mad Men's" Don Draper, elegantly suited and hair slicked back, in an ideation session with Phillip Morris executives, attempting to differentiate Lucky Strikes from other brands.

"What's different about Luckies?" Draper demands.

"Well, as with all brands, we cut and cure the tobacco, then we toast it..."

"That's it!" Draper exclaims. "Lucky Strikes are toasted!"

And thus, a winning ad campaign was born. No focus groups, no running it up the corporate flagpole. Done.

"A man who doesn't return the shopping cart to its proper place at the Safeway will never amount to anything." – my grandmother

The writer is CEO of Williams Whittle Advertising and is the author of two historical novels, "Pointer's War" and "Pointer and the Russian." He can be reached at rwhittle@williamswhittle.com.

Opinion

"Where the press is free and every man is able to read, all is safe."

- Thomas Jefferson

Photo of the Week



Mayor Alyia Gaskins visited Caen, Alexandria's sister city, in France to celebrate its 1,000th anniversary.

PHOTO/
ALYIA GASKINS

Letters

City's subpoenas of citizens are retribution for opposition

To the editor:

In November 2023, the city passed two ordinances known as Zoning for Housing. I was opposed to the ordinances and spoke against them at the City Council public hearing – as did more than 100 citizens – and in addition wrote letters to the editor of the Alexandria Times. After passage, a group of citizens filed a lawsuit against the city, asking that the ordinances be declared invalid.

I support and applaud the actions of those citizens, but have never met or spoken to them about the ordinances or lawsuit. I have and continue to actively support the Coalition for a Livable Alexandria, which supports the citizens who sued.

This week, I was served with a subpoena from the city demanding that I turn over years of any private emails and other correspondence that references the two ordinances. This would include all personal emails with anyone. My opposition is publicly available through the City Council docket and archived newspapers. Significantly, there is nothing I could say or do as a citizen that would determine the validity of the ordinances.

Why would the city want to obtain

private communications of a citizen who merely exercised their right to oppose an ordinance? They might be entitled to such information if I filed a lawsuit, but I didn't. The city has also subpoenaed all documents from several other citizen activists.

In deciding to subpoena my private emails, the city hired outside attorneys – McGuire Woods – to prepare, file, serve and now defend the subpoena. I suspect the outside attorney fees will be in the thousands of dollars. I note that the City Attorney's office has 21 employees; the majority are attorneys that should be capable of drafting a subpoena.

I volunteer with several nonprofits in Alexandria and they all need funds to help people. Rather than use my tax dollars to help the nonprofits, the city is spending huge sums of monies on outside counsel to issue subpoenas in retribution against citizens and groups who oppose ordinances.

I no longer have to look to the national news to witness retribution against people who differ. I only have to open my front door to the city's process server.

-Barbara Beach,
Alexandria

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