

STATE GAZETTE

OPINION

‘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’

Letter guidelines for the State Gazette

1. Letters on topics of general public interest are welcomed.
2. All letters to be considered for publication must include the name and address of the writer and a daytime telephone number where the writer may be reached during normal business hours.
3. All letters must be signed. The name and town of the writer will be published.
4. Letters on topics of general public interest must be 250 words or less.
5. Letters may be mailed, faxed or e-mailed. The mail address is: Letters, The State Gazette, P.O. Box 808, Dyersburg, TN 38025. The fax number is 731-285-9474. The e-mail address is srouse@stategazette.com.
6. Only one letter of general public interest each month from writers who submit more than one letter a month will be considered for publication.
7. Regarding letters about candidates: All letters of endorsement of or opposition to candidates will be published as Paid Election Letters and are subject to a fee of \$25 for up to 150 words, plus an additional 50 cents per word beyond 150. To ensure publication, Paid Election Letters must be received by 5 p.m. Tuesday one week before an election. Paid Election Letters are to be paid for by the letter writer. If paid by another entity, that information must be stated properly according to election laws. Payment for the appropriate amount must be received before a Paid Election Letter will be published. Paid Election Letters must include the writer's complete mailing address, which will be published with the letter as required by Tennessee election laws.
8. Letters regarding ballot issues other than candidates are subject to the same guidelines as letters on topics of general public interest. The deadline for ballot-issue letters is 5 p.m. Tuesday one week before an election.
9. These guidelines notwithstanding, the editor will make the final determination on the suitability of all letters submitted for publication.

A DIFFERENT TAKE ON THE NEWS

BEVERLY HILLS—God bless America, and how's everybody?

Sam Bradford was the first pick of the NFL draft in New York on Thursday. What a day. His net worth jumped \$40 million in one day, prompting President Obama to warn Wall Street to get behind quarterback reform before it's forced on them.

Al Pacino starred as Jack Keovorkian in an HBO movie Saturday. The premiere was a huge event in New York. They had an after-party at the Four Seasons, where the celebrity gift bags included complete instructions in case your series gets canceled.

The Pittsburgh Steelers tried to trade Ben Roethlisberger Thursday after he got suspended for six games. He's a changed man. He spent the last six seasons as a passer and a runner for the Pittsburgh Steelers, but now he's just a blocker for Tiger Woods.

Terry Bradshaw ripped Ben Roethlisberger for irresponsible behavior with women and on his motorcycle. Four years ago he crashed his Harley without a helmet. The paramedics found a pulse on him, so he qualified for a federally guaranteed home loan.

Lane Bryant lingerie ads for full-figured women were refused by ABC Friday. The network said the cleavage on the full-sized women was excessive. You must forgive ABC, the only time people in show business get to see natural breasts is at Thanksgiving.

London's Heathrow Airport resumed flights Thursday after a five-day layoff due to volcanic ash in the air. It's grimy up there. Arriving male passengers get off the plane looking like they're in blackface and now their fraternities have been suspended.

Arnold Schwarzenegger did TV ads promoting California tourism. The timing must be exact. We have to get the tourists here after the mudslides and before the brushfires or else they'll qualify for free trailers and we'll never get rid of them.

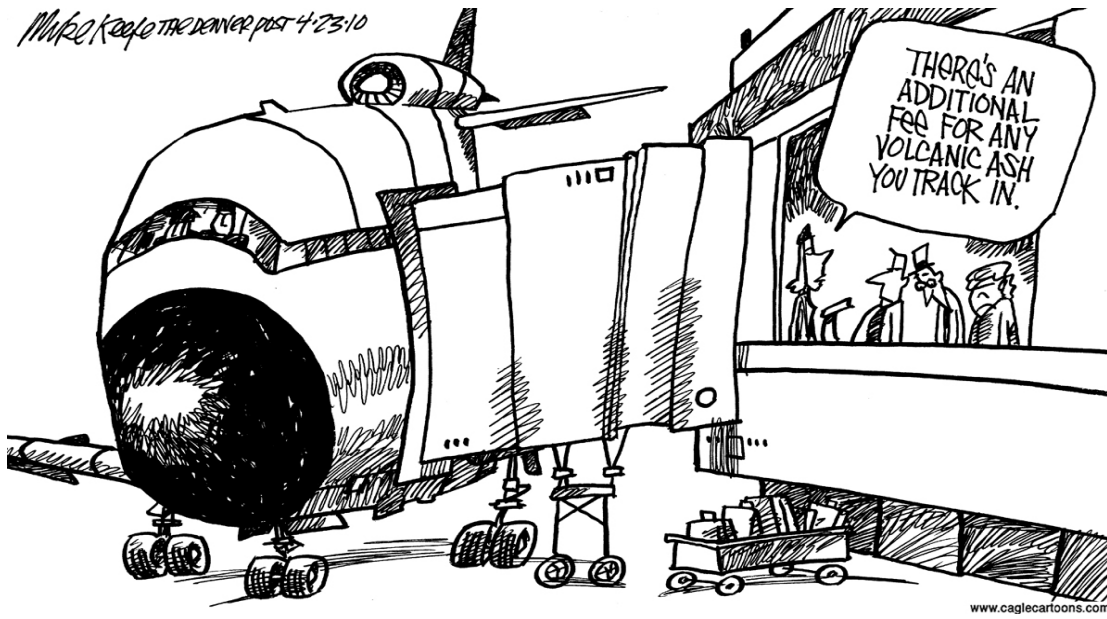
Arizona passed a bill Monday not allowing anyone on the state ballot who can't provide a U.S. birth certificate. It's time somebody took a stand. Right now you need more documentation to be a greeter at Walmart than to be President of the United States.

Arizona's legislature passed a law letting local courts detain suspected illegal immigrants and deport them if they have no papers. Technology was oversold as a solution to the problem. We now know that the only virtual fence that works is eBay.



Argus Hamilton is host comedian of The Comedy Store in Hollywood

CARTOON COMMENTARY



STATEHOUSE REPORT

Scheduled execution of female prisoner raises tricky questions for governor

NASHVILLE - Tennessee could make history on Gov. Phil Bredesen's watch by executing the state's first female inmate in nearly 200 years.

Gaile Owens is set to die by lethal injection on Sept. 28. She was convicted in 1986 of having her husband murdered. Court documents indicate Owens hired Sidney Porterfield to beat her husband to death with a tire iron. Ronald Owens was killed at the couple's Bartlett home in February of 1985. Porterfield is also on death row.

Her attorneys allege that Owens was a victim of domestic violence who saw murder as her only way out of a 13-year abusive marriage. Her trial attorneys were not allowed to present that argument.

Her statutory appeals have run out. Owens' attorneys asked the Tennessee Supreme Court to modify her sentence to life in prison. The court ruled that it does not have the authority to grant that request. However, the three-page ruling notes that Bredesen is not precluded from considering the circumstances of her stormy marriage when considering whether to commute her sentence to life in prison.

Of significance is the way the Shelby County District Attorney's office handled Owens' case a quarter of a century ago. Records indicate she was prepared to plead guilty to her role in her husband's murder-for-hire in exchange for life in prison, but her case was not able to be separated from Porterfield's. He was unwilling to accept a plea, and so, prosecutors went for, and got, death sen-

tences.

Bredesen supports the death penalty, but he carefully weighs each request for executive clemency. Tennessee has executed five inmates on the governor's watch, four by lethal injection and one by electrocution.

The governor in 2007 commuted the sentence of Michael Joe Boyd of Shelby County to life in prison for reasons similar to those Owens' attorneys have raised, namely "grossly inadequate legal representation."

Tennessee has only executed six inmates since the death penalty was reinstated. Owens is one of two female prisoners on the state's death row. Nationwide 53 women are waiting to be executed, according to the Death Penalty Information Center.

Since 1976, 11 women have been put to death: three in Texas, three in Oklahoma, two in Florida and one each in North Carolina, Arkansas and Alabama.

Owens' case certainly deserves careful consideration and a thorough review of pertinent court documents and extenuating circumstances.

Unlike many death row inmates, Owens has never disputed her guilt. At issue is the fact that she was willing to plead guilty to her role in her husband's murder and spend



Mary Perren Russell is the state reporter for Metro Source, a division of Westwood One Communications

the rest of her life behind bars but was prohibited from doing so. She is not asking to be set free, nor should she be.

Owens' 37-year-old son, Stephen, has joined the call that his mother's life be spared. He was estranged from her for more than 20 years, having testified for the prosecution during her 1986 murder trial. Owens finally visited his mother in prison last year

and told her he forgave her for having his father killed.

"The harsh reality is that both of my parents have been absent from my life," Owens said at a recent news conference. "Sparing my mother's life can change that reality. Please do not execute my mother and rob me of this opportunity."

That decision is in Bredesen's hands, and it is not one he should and will not make lightly.

Unlike the jury that decided her fate, Bredesen will be able to take the circumstances of Owens' abusive marriage into account as he reviews the case. We will never know if the jurors who found her guilty and recommended she die for her role in her husband's murder would have done so had they known she was abused.

Bredesen holds a woman's life in his hands. Her fate deserves his careful, thorough consideration.

Letters to the editor

Send letters to editor to srouse@stategazette.com or to P.O. Box 808, Dyersburg, Tenn. 38025-0808. You may also bring them to the office at U.S. Highway 51 Bypass North, Dyersburg.

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