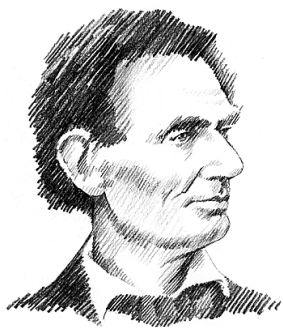


THE STATE JOURNAL-REGISTER

## Journal Register

"The Journal paper was always my friend..."  
— A. Lincoln, June 18, 1864



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"We want the Register to be the people's paper."  
— Publisher's statement June 19, 1881

### OUR OPINION

## Revisit death penalty debate

ILLINOIS SENATE BILL 3102 didn't generate a whole lot of headlines upon its introduction Feb. 6, and rightly so.

Introduced by Sen. Dale Righter, R-Mattoon, the bill seeks to impose a 30-day deadline for the Illinois Supreme Court to set an execution date for a death row inmate who has exhausted all legal appeals. The bill's true intent, though, is to force movement on the state's 4-year-old moratorium on executions.

"The point of this legislation is to not let justice be forestalled inevitably by inaction," Righter said. "The moratorium is inaction and nothing more than that, and what this would require is that we put in place a process where the law goes forward."

In effect, Righter's bill would force an end to the moratorium, which sounds very powerful until you factor reality into the equation. The reality is that Illinois' death row has been empty for more than a year now. And even when new death sentences are handed down, a condemned inmate's appeal process can take seven to 14 years, says state appellate defender Ted Gottfried. So even if this bill does become law, it may have no effect until 2018.

**BUT WHAT** this bill lacks in immediate impact it makes up for in symbolism. It is a reminder that, despite the death penalty reforms Gov. Rod Blagojevich signed into law last month, the status of the death penalty in Illinois remains in limbo. Blagojevich has shown no inclination toward lifting the moratorium, yet he says he supports capital punishment.

We can't support SB 3102 because we believe it will simply introduce new legal entanglements into the death penalty debate in Illinois. Attorney General Lisa Madigan's office already has said the bill might face a constitutional challenge.

We also believe, however, that this bill can be important because of its potential to force debate about the death penalty moratorium and, consequently, the death penalty itself in this state.

**ILLINOIS HAS MADE** great strides in addressing the problems that long plagued the system of applying the death penalty here. That system became notorious for having put 12 people to death between 1990 and 2000 while seeing 13 death row inmates exonerated and freed in that same period. The harrowing tales of inept defense, forced confessions and outright perjury led former Gov. George Ryan to halt all executions on Jan. 31, 2000, and form a commission to reform the death penalty system in Illinois.

The commission's work led to the changes signed by Blagojevich last month.

But after all the revelations of wrongful convictions and after all the public discussion that led to the reforms now on the books, there remains a nagging, lingering question that we believe must be addressed: Do Illinoisans still want the death penalty?

It has been 27 years since lawmakers here had to debate the merits of capital punishment itself, not merely the system that administers it. We think that in light of our history with death penalty cases in that time, it is time to revisit that debate.

**IN 1977**, there was overwhelming public support for bringing back the death penalty. But that was before we saw 13 innocent people walk free from death row; 13 innocent people who would have been killed if not for the work of a group of college students and other advocates. We can only assume that that has had some effect on public sentiment about the death penalty itself.

We are not advocating the abolition of capital punishment in Illinois. Nor are we calling for a swift end to the moratorium. What we do ask is that, when debate turns to the moratorium, our lawmakers look beyond the mechanics of applying the death penalty and re-examine their constituents' feelings on capital punishment itself.

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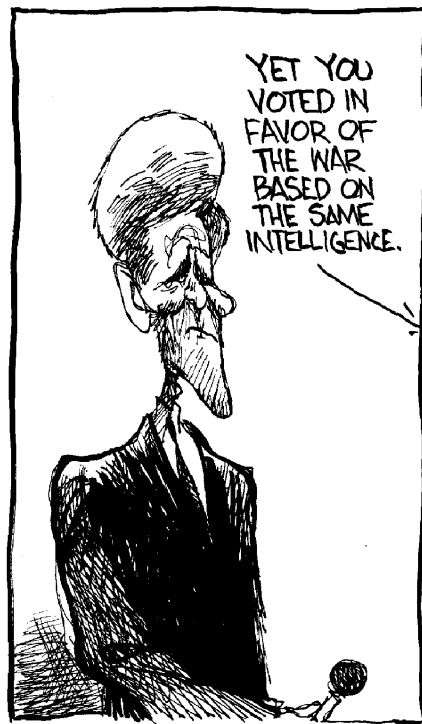
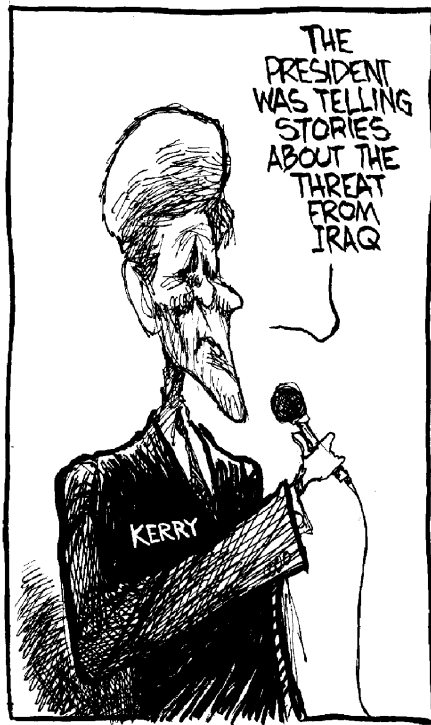
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### SCOTT STANTIS



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## Stakes too high for Sharpton

The Rev. Al Sharpton's campaign, odd from its very beginnings, has proved at least one thing: He can attract a lot of votes in black districts, as long as the other candidates don't show up.

He came in fourth in Michigan's Democratic caucuses recently, for example, but finished a strong second in two black districts in Detroit. A major reason: Sharpton was the only candidate to campaign vigorously in Detroit's black neighborhoods. At a forum in a prominent black Baptist church on the evening before the caucus, for example, he was the only candidate to show up.



CLARENCE PAGE

Similarly, Sharpton carried the District of Columbia's black precincts in a straw vote a few weeks earlier, which did not result in any delegates to the party's convention. Howard Dean won the overall vote.

But in South Carolina, despite his campaigning there over the past year, Sharpton lost big time — even among black voters.

Despite a third-place finish, he won less than 10 percent of the total vote and less than 20 percent of the black vote and failed to win any delegates.

He finished behind John Edwards (45 percent) and John F. Kerry (30 percent), but ahead of retired Gen. Wesley Clark (7 percent), Howard Dean (5 percent), Joseph Lieberman (2 percent) and Dennis Kucinich (0 percent).

As a master of spin, Sharpton put a happy face on these little victories, as if they actually meant something.

"I think that this is a tremendous boost to our campaign," he said, noting that, at least, he ended up ahead of Clark, Dean, Lieberman and Kucinich despite having almost no money.

But, be not deceived. The Harlem minister with the James Brown coiffure does not have momentum. He has no momentum.

South Carolina was a telling blow. With its large black population, large enough to account for about half the Democratic turnout, Sharpton had positioned South Carolina to be his strongest state.

Yet most black voters decided their best bet was Kerry or Edwards. In fact, if you define a "black candidate" not by the color of their skin but the color of their supporters, two white men, Kerry and Edwards, appear to have made better black candidates than Sharpton did.

Why? Based on exit polls, their reasons were pretty much the same as we've heard from other Democrats this season. The issue of electability trumped all others. They didn't want to waste their votes on someone who posed less than a credible threat to George W. Bush's presidency.

That's not what black Democrats or very many other Democrats want this year, the year of the "ABB: Anybody But Bush" movement.

A lot of black Democrats still feel cheated by the long-count in Florida in 2000 and they're hardly alone. Many also feel outraged that Bush turned from a vow of "compassionate conservatism" to a "No Child Left Behind" program that appears destined to leave many children behind in schools funded even more poorly than they were before.

Black Americans are not monolithic. They don't rush to vote for a candidate simply because he or she is black. Sharpton has discovered that. But when any group of people feels put upon as a group, no one should be surprised to see them respond as a group.

That's politics. People vote for what they perceive to be their interests. White men, for example, consistently vote more than two-to-one in favor of white presidential candidates. Only 24 percent of white males consider themselves Democrats, a poll released last year by the centrist Democratic Leadership Council found.

Consciously or subconsciously, race remains a powerful factor in American politics. But that does not mean blacks will vote for just any black candidate, any more than whites will vote for just any white candidate. That may not be the lesson Al Sharpton intended to teach us but it is one he appears to have learned the hard way.

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## LETTERS, FAXES & E-MAIL

### Let a jury decide what ex-firefighter is entitled to

Dear Editor,  
"Local firefighter sues for sick day dollars."

When this guy's blood test from his motorcycle accident came back "drunk on duty" at that moment this "on-call chief" should have been fired.

If he is destined to sue, let him go to court for his job and benefits. Let a jury decide what he is entitled to, not his friends, co-workers and politicians. His case simply shows the "good ol' boy" networks, again.

As a society we must learn again that we must pay for our actions.

Greg Kruger  
Springfield

### Gift cards make you long for good old days

Dear Editor,  
We talk about the "good old days." In the "good old days," you could purchase a mall gift certificate for the amount of the gift.

Not so now. Technology has produced a gift card. That in itself is not bad, except the mall Simon gift card is going to cost \$1.50 over the amount on the card and if you don't use it within six months another \$2.50 will be deducted from the card. If that is not enough, there also will be 50 cents deducted from the card each time you call to find out what balance remains on the card.

I, for one, and my two sisters will not be purchasing a Simon gift card or any others that operate in the same manner.

If people would not buy cards with these terms we just might see ("the good old days") gift certificates again.

Norma Hubbard  
Springfield

### Atkins dieter objects to portrayal in editorial

Dear Editor,  
Obviously, the author of the Jan. 20 editorial is not well-informed regarding the Atkins Diet.

As an Atkins dieter, I highly object to being portrayed as stuffing my face with bacon, pork rinds, butter and lard (Good Lord, do they even still sell lard?) ... or as Thor the Hungry Carnivore. If the author had taken the time to thoroughly research the Atkins Diet he/she would have known

that Atkins professes low-carbohydrate, healthy eating. Even my physician approves of this diet.

It isn't just about eating fat. It's about eating reasonable portions of meat/fowl/fish, fresh vegetables, salads, some dairy products and fresh fruit combined with an exercise program. Now does that sound too good to be true? If this diet wasn't so effective there wouldn't be such an outcry from marketers of high-carbohydrate foods and other diet programs.

Also, if it wasn't working the restaurants wouldn't be jumping on the bandwagon to appease the low-carbohydrate diners. Why was it OK for restaurants to promote the "heart healthy" diet but not the "low-carbohydrate" diet?

In this age of a very overweight population in the United States, it seems like a large media source such as your newspaper would be more interested in promoting a healthy diet versus condemning it without accurate information.

Perhaps this smacks a little bit of big brother ... the subliminal messages of unhealthy eating (snack foods, desserts, cereals) we are constantly receiving via the media and advertising market. Wouldn't it be great if these same advertisers started promoting fresh fruit, fresh vegetables, good dairy products and meat?

Can you imagine sitting in front of the television during the Super Bowl and watching a commercial with someone eating a nice fresh salad, an apple and a glass of water? Wouldn't that be a nice healthy change?

Sharon E. Bell  
Springfield

### State handouts eliminate motivation to work

Dear Editor,  
Is there any common sense regarding state budget cuts?

I am in total disagreement with Gov. Rod Blagojevich's statement in a recent article. He states we should do more for the people who have less, referring to the people who receive a monetary handout from state welfare programs.

There is no motivation to look for a job if the state will continue to hand over a monthly check for those who are not deserving or disabled.

State jobs are being eliminated for those who wish to work and money is being given to those who don't want to work. Does the state not understand that people who are physically able to work should be

given a small transitional period while that person looks for employment and not continue to receive welfare checks for year after year?

Let's limit the handouts and reward the working class, not the parasites.

Greg Norman  
Springfield

### Many factors influence students' test scores

Dear Editor,  
I read with interest your paper's recent article comparing the scores on standardized school tests of African-American students with white students.

It is very puzzling though to wonder why in the shadow of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday we have an article that is so contrary to what he stood for. Did he not dream for a day when the color of a person's skin would not label him or her one way or another? Should black children read that article and then look in the mirror do you think they would feel good about themselves? It is doubtful. How about throwing the race question away and look at some questions we can really do something about.

Why don't we compare scores of children who live in the same house as a mother and father who are married to each other with those children who aren't? Why don't we compare the scores of children who live in single-parent homes with those who live with two parents? Why don't we look at children who have an adult to greet them and supervise them in the afternoon versus those children who don't? Why don't we compare the scores of children whose parents are high school graduates with those whose parents are not? Or how about the scores of those children whose parents fix them something to eat in the morning with those who don't? Or could we evaluate the scores of those children who have unlimited television privileges to those who get maybe one hour a day or less?

Perhaps we could also study the comparison of those children who get eight to nine hours of sleep a night with those who get less. We could go on to study the scores of children who have lived in the same house with those who have had to move every so often.

Let's research questions and concepts we can actually influence.

Kirk W. Boyenga  
Springfield

### A lot of 'good' news in the paper, if you only look

Dear Editor,  
To some people, Sunday, Jan. 25 — with the dismal weather and forecast of more to come — was a great day for us who had a chance to read the warm and friendly articles in The State Journal-Register.

Let us cite a few articles that were up-building and "good news." The front page feature article on Art Brockschmidt and his bicycles and his many years of tireless service to make "the world a better place." Thank you, Dave Bakke, who wrote the article.

In addition to reading the latest war news, we were treated to the heartwarming story of Samuel Wilson, the Springfield native and former teacher who repairs Iraqi schools and is a true friend to Iraqi children by giving them soccer balls. Abbey Brown, you are a journalist with a truly human touch.

So I continued to read the Sunday paper as the snow and wind howled outside. I thought, "Wow, it just doesn't get any better," but, the "good" news continued with the article by Brent Bohlen describing the worthwhile things some of the state retirees are doing. Again, "wow."

Then, finally I saw the two pages of



Photograph courtesy of Samuel Wilson

### Springfield native Samuel Wilson of the 308th Civil Affairs Brigade gives Iraqi school officials soccer balls for the students.

names of hundreds of people who said, "Every child — a gift from God." This list was significant to us as our granddaughter, Alice, and her husband, Brian Hendricks, presented us with our ninth great-grandchild on Jan. 22, the 31st anniversary of Roe v. Wade. His name is Joseph

Douglas Hendricks. Do you see what I mean? It does continue to get better. SJ-R, thank you for making our day sunny, warm and friendly.

Lee and Marge Kilbourne  
Sherman