The Bristol Press

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OUR VIEW

Thoughtful responses to Martin trial verdict

People around the country are reacting to the "not guilty" verdict for George Zimmerman, the neighborhood watch volunteer who said he shot and killed unarmed 17-year-old, Trayvon Martin, in self defense. Many are angry and, in some cities, that anger has erupted into violence, night after night.

Here in Central Connecticut, however, we were impressed with the thoughtful responses from local leaders, who looked at the six-woman jury's decision with sorrow and thoughtful consideration for its effect on our communities.

We were particularly impressed with words from Cristina Cataquet, fair housing advocate for New Britain's Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities. With an eye toward finding some good coming out of this tragedy, she suggested ways that our citizens, despite their differences, might live with each other in peace.

"If you tailor the needs of your community to the action, that will benefit everyone. If it means putting in an extra two or three lights, that can prevent so much. Even with such small changes, who knows what the outcome can be," she continued.

Significantly, she didn't suggest eliminating neighborhood watch activities.

"If someone is properly trained, properly supervised and actually has the proper experience, I don't think people should shy away from things like that," she said.

Zimmerman, readers may recall, had sufficient training in handling guns to earn a permit, but didn't seem to have much training in handling the unexpected — a young, black teenager wearing a hoodie. His comment, that "they" always seemed to get away with "it," doesn't tell us much about his thinking. Was it a racial comment or was he simply referring to young men — especially those in hoodies. Did he see Martin as a potential mischief maker? vandal? criminal? And does this speak to his personal experience with "them," whoever "they" are?

We do know that when the police dispatcher attempted to dissuade him from following Martin, he ignored the command. In other words, he either wasn't properly supervised or he wasn't properly trained to follow the direction of law-enforcement officials.

But we shouldn't judge neighborhood watch activities by this one incident. Most of the time, volunteers, out on the streets, walking through our neighborhoods, make them safer, just by being there. They are visible, armed with the ability to summon police and, by their mere presence, discourage the "bad guys" from gathering on street corners, harassing passersby or dealing drugs.

As Cataquet said, if they are properly trained and supervised, they are an asset to any city.

In fact, she added, "I wish I had a patrol watch in my town."

YOUR VIEW

Betts urges special session to override Governor Malloy's hospital bill veto

By STATE REP. WHIT BETTS

For almost 100 years, both Bristol Hospital and Waterbury Hospital have been vital pillars of our community. Their value to our families and communities is priceless, as they are our "safety net" for medical services.

In a blindsiding move, the governor vetoed last week, a bill that would have allowed non-profit hospitals to operate as for-profit entities. His veto is disturbing given the fact that staff from his office negotiated with Republican and Democrat legislative leaders on the bill's passage. His controversial decision puts in jeopardy, joint ventures that both Bristol Hospital and Waterbury Hospital were planning with Vanguard Health Systems Inc.

I am stunned and upset with Governor Malloy's decision to veto a bill designed to specifically strengthen Bristol Hospital and Waterbury Hospital, which are so committed to providing care to our families in the region. This veto, in conjunction with the lack of financial support from the Democrat-controlled state legislature, clearly undermines the ability of community hospitals to meet the medical needs of our families. I worry that this veto could potentially lead to additional job losses and cuts in medical programs.

Based on the reasons given for his veto I can only conclude that the Malloy administration is more interested in appeasing the special interests of labor union leaders than he is with preserving medical programs that meet the health care needs of families served by Waterbury and Bristol Hospitals.

On behalf of the people served by Waterbury and Bristol Hospitals, I urge House Speaker Brendan Sharkey and Senate President Pro Tem Don Williams to call for a special session to override this veto by Governor Malloy.

Surely the health care needs of the people of Connecticut are more important than pandering to the special interests of union leaders.

As always, I encourage you to contact me if you'd like to share your thoughts on this or any issue of concern. Please call 800-842-1423 or email whit.betts@housegop.ct.gov.

State Rep. Whit Betts, R-Bristol, represents the 78th District in the General Assembly.

THEIR VIEW

Texas rushes voter discrimination law into effect

SAN ANTONIO EXPRESS-NEWS

What's the rush?

The ink was barely dry on the U.S. Supreme Court's ruling on the Voting Rights Act, and there was Attorney General Greg Abbott saying Texas' voter ID law would go into effect immediately.

The problem: the ink has been quite dry for a while on another federal court ruling.

This one, in August 2012, said discrimination and voter suppression was written all over Texas' voter ID law.

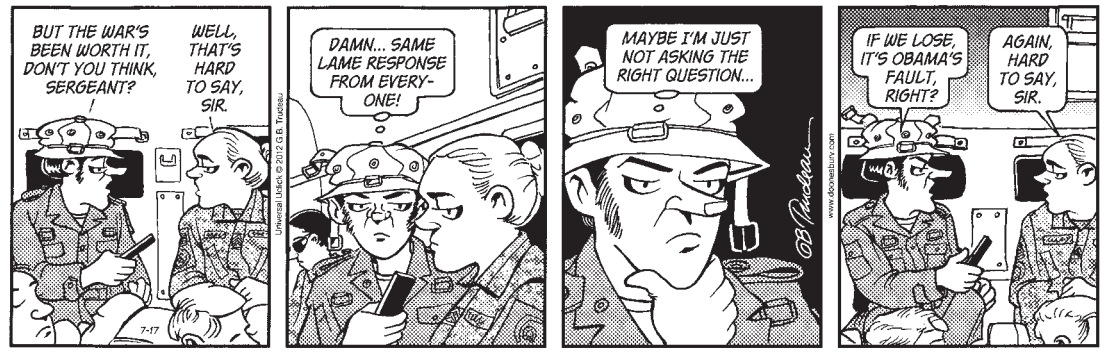
Yet, the state is now gearing up to implement this law, and county election officials around the state are surely scratching their heads. Why would a state, whose voting numbers are nothing to write home about, want to diminish them further?

Particularly since this is ostensibly to address voter fraud — a problem that substantially doesn't exist.

Abbott wants to be governor, by the way. And he likely sees campaign gold in Texans' anti-federal sentiments.

But here's what happened last year. Circuit Court Judge David Tatel in Washington, D.C., wrote an opinion in which he called out Texas on its requirement of photo ID for voting.

"It imposes strict, unforgiving burdens on the poor and racial minorities in Texas," he wrote, joined in the opinion by two other judges.

Things remain highly unsettled — all except Texas' desire to get as much mileage out of voter ID as soon as possible and to set in concrete redistricting lines that do not yet do justice to minority growth.

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