

On the subject of...

Awful Irony

by Viki Eggers Mason



THE TRUTH IN BLACK AND WHITE

The Aberdeen Advocate

Now, brace yourselves, dear reader friends. Some weeks ago, I got the disturbing news that our city hires and fires folks according to the whims of aldermen! It is difficult to believe, I know, but I've managed to scrape a few facts together which seem to confirm the unsettling rumor.

For some years, I have been critical of the performance of our recently terminated dog catcher. I first learned about Steve Staten from Dee Cooper, an animal advocate who used to frequent the meetings of Aberdeen's aldermen begging them to pay attention to the plight of dogs in the local pound.

At the time, the facility, if you could call it that, was far from a "shelter." It was merely a large, open pen in which hapless dogs, from pit bulls to puppies, were thrown and left to fend for themselves. Around the perimeter of the "pound" were heaps of skeletal remains of animals which hadn't survived

their imprisonment. It was, to say the least, nightmarish.

It was Dee Cooper who finally rallied the local animal lovers and laid the framework for what is now called the Friends of the Aberdeen Animal Shelter. In the past three years, this group has managed to find funding and free labor to build a new facility which is finally fully functional. The group also took on the responsibility of providing guidance to our animal control officer, a task nobody had bothered to undertake in the past.

It was more than obvious to me at the time that our animal control officer was neither properly trained nor supervised. It was just as obvious that he had friends in high places. Staten would disappear for days without feeding or watering the animals in his care. He was regularly accused of lifting well-kept

dogs from the safety of their own backyards while he left the mangier curs to run the streets unmolested. There were even allegations that those cute, cuddly, friendly dogs that went missing from loving homes would often re-surface for sale at the Wren Flea Market.

These allegations were never proven to my satisfaction and I bring it up here for the sake of demonstrating that Staten might have been justifiably fired for any number of reasons for any number of years. He was not. To their credit, the FAAS worked heroically with Staten until, in the last months of his tenure, he became almost dedicated to the work of controlling animals.

Before you leap to your feet in protest over the fact that just weeks ago I was moaning and wringing my hands over dogs running at large, I

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State needs Voter I.D.

By Contributing Editor Don Rowe

Voter ID is one topic sure to split the electorate here in Mississippi, as it has for many years. And, although nine Southern states require varying forms of voter ID, our state legislators have, for over a decade, failed to pass legislation which would require voters to show a driver's license or other form of identification at the polls.

Voter ID proponents claim a viable system to identify voters on Election Day is needed to combat rampant voter fraud and abuse, while its critics say it would be unfair to older African-American voters who, in the past, have

been intimidated and discriminated against at the polls.

On the federal level, the Help America Vote Act (HAVA) is a step in the right direction, as it requires a state voter database be maintained by the Secretary of State's office which will have a link to each county and will remove voters from the old county voter rolls when they register in a new county or when they die. It also stipulates all states require some form of personal identification from first-time voters who registered to vote by mail but who failed to provide proper ID verifi-

cation with their mail-in voter registration. However, this act fails to cover the remainder of the electorate.

Taking matters into their own hands, no less than 24 states have enacted more stringent voter ID requirements than the feds mandate in which all voters are required to provide identification prior to voting. In addition, according to figures released by the National Conference of State Legislatures, seven of those 24 states require a photo ID, including Florida and Louisiana.

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Awful Irony

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need to take you back a few months. On April 15th, *The Advocate* featured a story about a man who was hired by the city even though he didn't have the single most important qualification – a driver's license. He too, it would appear, had friends in high places. Otherwise, he (a convicted felon) would never have been considered for even menial city chores, let alone the chore of driving some of the city's most imposing equipment and working at the very dangerous duty of maintaining our power grid. Fast forward a few weeks.

Steve Staten, our hesitant animal control officer, somehow managed to uncover a loathsome bunch of thugs who keep pit bull terriers for the single purpose of using them for fighting other dogs. (In Mississippi, you may kill your dog if you wish, but you may not torture it. Dog fighting for fun and profit is a FELONY here and is frowned upon by all reasonable humans.) In a stunning surge of competence, Staten made his discovery known to local police officials who arrested, among others, the son of our "connected" lineman! (Oops. Now Staten has fallen afoul of his friends at City Hall and is working without a safety net.)

Suddenly, our animal control ordinances which call for the immediate slaying of all vicious animals get tossed in the trash. Now, we must preserve these (valuable?) fighting dogs until the trial is over. The animal shelter folks must house, feed and deal daily with these fierce beasts who escape regularly in order to maul other shelter animals. (The Friends of the Aberdeen Animal Shelter have veterinarian bills approaching one thousand dollars thanks to the butchery of Junior's two "pets.") The result of this mess was a conscious decision NOT to pick up any other animals until the pit-bull problem was resolved. Ultimately,

our shelter's burden was lifted when the Tupelo Shelter took the problem dogs. We were back in the business of controlling animals at last.

Now Staten, having been newly trained in matters of humane animal treatment, spotted what he considered to be a starving weimareiner while making his rounds. The dog, who should tip the scale at around 100 pounds, was skeletal at about 50. Staten gave the dog's owner a stern warning and promised to return in a month to check on the animal's progress. Thirty days later, when the dog showed no sign of improvement, Staten took custody of the dog and wrote the owner a \$100 ticket for animal cruelty.

As it works out, the weimareiner's owner is related to a local banker who, outraged, called his alderman, Jim Buffington. Buffington, in turn, called the animal control officer to insist the dog be returned and the citation torn to shreds. Staten, at long last committed to the business of rescuing abused animals, refused to do so. The trap sprang shut and Staten got the boot.

Please don't misunderstand. I am not disappointed that Staten is no longer with us. I'm told his replacement is a committed man with a fine work ethic. I like that. What I don't like is the notion that the competency of our employees matters less than their willingness to lick the boots of our elected officials. From police officers to dogcatchers, we seem to hire folks because we can manipulate them. Then we fire them just as soon as they make the odious mistake of putting the performance of duty before bending to the will of the little men around the board table. That's just bad business in my book and it shames me to know that my tax dollars are spent perpetuating this sleazy system.

It's easy to lose sight of the fact that the City of Aberdeen is a corporation in which you are a stakeholder. YOU select the board of directors and YOU are responsible for their actions and their inactions. As we approach another municipal election., the men you elected last time hope you will remember them favorably at the polling places next spring. I urge you to look hard and long at our operating procedures. Is this the way YOU want YOUR business run?



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Furry friends like those depicted above are available for adoption at the Aberdeen Animal Shelter. We welcome gifts and donations of all kinds. Currently, due to our feline population, dry kitten chow is desperately needed! Also, gifts of laundry detergent and chlorine bleach are always appreciated.

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State Needs Voter I.D.

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Drawing attention to the absurdity of not protecting our election system from fraud and abuse, Crystal Dupre, publisher of *The Meridian Star*, highlighted several serious flaws in our election system in one of her recent columns, a portion of which is quoted below.

“When my husband and I moved to Laurel a couple of years ago, we went to the courthouse to register to vote. Before we left home we gathered up some bills with our new address for verification of residence. We also double-checked to make sure we both had a valid driver’s license with us for identification. After all, I had to present two types of proof of residence before I could register my children for school. Certainly, it only made sense that we would need proof of residence to register to vote.

“Boy was I wrong! Upon entering the courthouse to register to vote, the very polite young lady working behind the counter handed each of us a form to fill out. After completing the forms and turning them back in, the clerk said, ‘Thank you. Your cards will be mailed to you in a few weeks.’ And that was it. My husband and I looked at each other fully expecting her to ask for identification or proof of residence. Instead we turned around and walked out of the office.

“We later found out that it is normal operating procedure for the circuit clerk’s office to register voters without any verification of information. In fact, the dysfunctional voting laws of the State of Mississippi forbid the circuit clerk’s office from checking for proof of residency and a person’s identity. Just as in Laurel, I once again experienced this same scenario on Friday as Donna Jill Johnson registered me to vote as a Lauderdale County resident. Before I go any further in this column let me say that Donna Jill did every

thing right. Under the laws of the State of Mississippi the circuit clerk’s office must follow this procedure.

“Instead of asking voters to show some form of ID, our lawmakers of the past came up with a novel way to keep the system ‘honest.’ At the bottom of the voter registration form, the voter is required to sign a statement swearing that the information is accurate. Good thinking. A person has to sign a statement that officials are prohibited, by law, from verifying. Now let’s think logically for a minute. If a person doesn’t have enough of a conscience to have a problem voting under another person’s name, do you really think that same person would bat an eye to sign a piece of paper that they know will be filed away in a drawer?”

“The registration process is not the only place where our state fails to ID voters. There is no need to carry a wallet to the polls on Election Day either. Again, this bill has been written, rewritten, debated and put back into committee multiple times. From my point of view, this is a pretty straightforward idea. When voters go to the polls to elect our representatives – those same representatives that determine how our tax money will be spent – the voters should be required to show some form of identification.”

To its credit, the Mississippi Senate has passed several voter-ID bills, but the heavily Democratic House has repeatedly failed to



protect the integrity of our electoral system – most recently this past spring when House Apportionment and Election Committee chairman Tommy Reynolds, a Charleston Democrat, allowed this bill to die in his committee.

As a result, the Magnolia State continues to lag behind the rest of the nation, but thanks to an ill-advised lawsuit filed by Democratic Party attorney Ellis Turnage, Mississippi voters may soon be required to provide a photo ID on Election Day. According to a recent ruling by U.S. District Judge Allen Pepper, it appears that every voter in Mississippi will be required to re-register in order to vote, at which time they would have to declare their party affiliation. Each political party would then decide whether to allow independents to vote in its primary.

Pepper’s ruling came as the result of a federal lawsuit filed by the State Democratic Committee against the Mississippi Election Commission – Gov. Haley Barbour, Secretary of State Eric Clark and Attorney General Jim Hood. The Democratic leaders’ intent was to close the pri-

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State Needs Voter I.D.

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maries and allow only registered Democrats to cast ballots because Republicans have, for years, voted in the Democratic primaries in an attempt to get so-called “weaker” Democratic candidates nominated and thus increase Republican candidates’ chances in the general election.

Pepper, who was appointed by President Clinton, agreed that Mississippi’s “unconstitutionally antiquated” primary election system fails to prevent Republicans from “raiding” the Democrats’ nominating process and he granted the plaintiffs’ request to permit political parties to control who may or may not vote in their primary elections. But then he took things one step further when he apparently required Mississippi voters to provide an ID in primary elections.

(There seem to be some disagreements whether Pepper’s ruling actually “ordered” or merely “suggested” the photo ID requirement.)

“Without the requirement of a photo ID, there would be room for dishonesty which would call into question the security of the election process,” Pepper wrote.

Unfortunately, Pepper’s ruling, if upheld by certain court challenges, doesn’t go far enough, for if we have to show a photo ID to cash a check or rent a car, then we should have to be willing to prove who we are when we exercise our most basic freedom – the freedom to vote.



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“Politicians are like diapers. They both need to be changed regularly and for the same reason.”
...author unknown

From our Email In-box....

The ant and the grasshopper.

OLD VERSION:

The ant works hard in the withering heat all summer long, building his house and laying up supplies for the winter. The grasshopper, meanwhile, thinks the ant is a fool and laughs and dances and plays the summer away.

Come winter, the ant is warm and well fed. The grasshopper, on the other hand, has no food or shelter, so he dies out in the cold.

Moral of the story: Be responsible for yourself!

MODERN VERSION:

The ant works hard in the withering heat all summer long, building his house and laying up supplies for the winter. The grasshopper, meanwhile, thinks the ant is a fool and laughs and dances and plays the summer away.

Come winter, the shivering grasshopper calls a press conference and demands to know why the ant should be warm and well fed while others are cold and starving. News networks CBS, NBC, PBS, CNN and ABC show

up to provide pictures of the shivering grasshopper next to a video of the ant in his comfortable home with a table filled with food. America is stunned by the sharp contrast.

How can this be, that in a country of such wealth, this poor grasshopper is allowed to suffer so?

In a photo-op, Kermit the Frog appears on Oprah with the grasshopper, and everybody cries when they sing, “It’s not Easy Being Green.” Jesse Jackson and Al Sharpton stage a demonstration in front of the ant’s house where the news stations film the group singing, “We shall overcome.” Jesse then has the group kneel down to pray to God for the grasshopper’s sake.



Nancy Pelosi and John Kerry exclaim in an interview with Larry King that the ant has gotten rich off the back of the grasshopper, and both call for an immediate tax hike on the ant to make him pay his fair share. Finally, the EEOC drafts the Economic Equity and Anti-Grasshopper Act retroactive to the beginning of the summer. The ant is fined for failing to hire a proportionate number of green bugs

and, having nothing left to pay his retroactive taxes, his home is confiscated by the government.

Then Hillary gets her old law firm to represent the grasshopper in a defamation suit against the ant, and the case is tried before a panel of federal judges which Bill Clinton appointed from a list of single-parent welfare recipients. Not surprisingly, the ant loses the case.

The story ends as we see the grasshopper finishing up the last bits of the ant’s food while the government house he is in, which just happens to be the ant’s old house, crumbles around him because he doesn’t maintain it.

The ant disappears in the snow, while the grasshopper is found dead in a drug related incident. The house, now abandoned, is taken over by a gang of spiders who terrorize the once peaceful neighborhood.

Moral of the story: Be careful how you vote!



The Aberdeen Advocate

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"Ever wonder why folks are so concerned with animal cruelty? Because the government is not. Why? Because animals don't vote." ...Paul Harvey



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