

## On the subject of...

## Puzzles

by Viki Eggers Mason



THE TRUTH IN BLACK AND WHITE

# The Aberdeen Advocate

Back in the days when I was in the business of growing communities, I spent more than a bit of time in training. There were retreats, seminars and workshops in bounteous plenty, all designed to sharpen our skills and make us better at not only building strong organizations but also keeping our “product” from erosion.

The second law of thermodynamics works every time – a system of any sort will run down and eventually cease to function unless you keep pouring energy into it by regularly winding the spring. Those were happy and fruitful years for me and, at the time, I had no idea I was training for battle in a small Mississippi village far, far away. Funny how things work out.

One important lesson from those training sessions stands out in my memory. It was in

Boulder, Colorado, on the campus of the University of Colorado that a group of Chamber of Commerce executives sat around a table in silence. We had each been given a small manila envelope containing various and sundry shapes cut from sturdy paper. Some pieces were white, and others were black. Our instructions were simple – build a square. We couldn’t speak to each other but we were free to pass puzzle pieces to our neighbors in silence.

For a time, we each fiddled with the pieces we’d been given but eventually concluded that none of our envelopes contained all of the necessary materials to construct a perfect square. Then we began to exchange pieces frantically. The woman sitting opposite me caught on first. (She ran the Chamber of Commerce in

Marlborough, Massachusetts. She never laughed – she loffed.) She pushed several pieces to the center of the table and waited for us to realize that according to our instructions, we only had to build ONE square and that we each held components of that single square. I eventually discovered that the small black circle I’d been given fit snugly into the center of our square. TA DA!

At this point, I suppose I could end this story and depend upon you to figure out how this applies to Aberdeen, Mississippi, but that would leave me with most of a Sunday afternoon with nothing to do but clean house and fold laundry. (After considering the alternatives, she happily typed on.)

In 208 days, we will be

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## Innovation and reform badly needed

By Contributing Editor Don Rowe

Running off at the keyboard wondering if electricity comes from electrons, does morality come from morons?

On a more serious note, former Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich made it official Saturday – he is not running for president of the United States. Much like Hillary Clinton, whose political career and personal life have been called into question on more than one occasion, Gingrich was and continues to be a controversial political figure who (depending on which side of the aisle you reside on) evokes extreme partisan

feelings.

Elected to the House from Georgia in 1978 after two previously unsuccessful campaigns, Gingrich was re-elected 10 times. Eleven years after his arrival in the House, he succeeded Dick Cheney as the House Minority Whip in 1989 when Cheney was appointed Secretary of Defense. One of the Republican Party’s best known conservative political leaders, Gingrich is remembered as the co-author of the “Contract with America” and was the driving force behind the surprising 1994 mid-term election where the GOP gained 54 seats to give the party a House majority for

the first time in 40 years. A former college professor and a prolific author, Gingrich went on to serve as Speaker of the United States House of Representatives from 1995 to 1999.

Gingrich’s leadership, personal life and his ethical lapses, however, soon became a source of friction in the conservative wing of the Republican Party. After leading the GOP effort in the mid-90s to cut the federal budget, Gingrich was blamed for causing parts of the Federal government to shut down after the party refused

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# Puzzles

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going to the polls to elect leaders for Aberdeen's future. It is my fervent hope that we will elect NEW leaders since the ones we have now have proven themselves to be poorly suited to the task. These men have had many years to grow this community but they have failed us stupendously. Under their leadership, we've seen our tax burden rise while our property values plummet, our schools have failed, our police force has been rendered helpless, and our power company has been crippled by corruption. We need new ideas, new energy and a whole new attitude if we are to survive. All of which brings me to the point of this article. We have work to do.

There are a series of exercises which must be done and done quickly.

First, we must determine where we are in relation to where we want to be. I'm guessing we want to be a successful community with a vital, thriving economy. We don't want good schools. We want exceptional schools. We want excellent law enforcement and fire protection. And we want to have faith in our elected officials. (Actually, this item ought to be at the top of this wish list since it is only with integrity in government that any of these things can ever come to pass.)

Once we know where we are going, we must take a thorough inventory of the resources at our disposal. When I say this, I'm thinking primarily of human resources. The brain trust in Aberdeen is rich and full. We have hundreds of citizens abundantly qualified to lead us into the future. We must identify them and muster them into service. We not only need candidates to represent each of Aberdeen's five wards, we also need a mayor. Additionally, we need to press others into action. We need to seat a committee for the purpose of creating a strategic plan for our community which will include a number of separate plans detailing short-range and long-term objectives for each of the following arenas: an economic development plan; a plan to anticipate and address the necessary changes to our infrastructure; and an emergency management/disaster plan. We also need to find a group of people

who are committed to integrity in the planning and zoning process in order that we might protect property values for future generations.

Before we can ever hope to bring new industry to Aberdeen's wobbly economy, we must first address our biggest problem – the school system. We desperately need a legitimate school board. Since three of these seats are appointed by the aldermen, we will need three eminently qualified individuals who have business and educational experience. (I nominate Preston Belle, Ralph Saxton, Fulton Ware or Dwight McComb.) Then we need to draft two who are willing to stand for election who will bring to the table the same qualifications and sense of commitment. It is *not* necessary that any of these people have children in Aberdeen's school system – it may even be better if they don't. We need to lead with our heads, not our hearts or our emotions. We need to work smart.

Lest you think this "rah-rah" speech is really a preface to announcing my candidacy for public office, please know that such an announcement won't be forthcoming. Actually, following the next municipal election I plan to retire from public service. I expect *The Aberdeen Advocate* to ramp down next summer and, while I may still maintain my website and opine there from time to time, I will no longer be spending 20-plus hours each week struggling to inform and inspire you. If you have not grasped the gravity of our situation by May of 2008, you probably never will. If you elect any of the same candidates to office, you will have wandered beyond hope and shall have sealed your fate. At that point I will fold my tent and ride off into the sunset. I have a book or two in me I think and a terribly neglected family to which I must attend.

But that's next year. This year, we must devote ourselves to salvaging this lovely little berg.

Recently, I read a handy little booklet published by the Mississippi Center for Public Policy entitled *Governing by Principle*. In it, there are listed 10 principles worthy of great consideration now, as we attempt to climb out of the civic dungeon



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in which we have been imprisoned by the current leadership. They are:

- 1) Government exists to protect rights, not to create them.
- 2) The legitimate power of the government begins and ends with the people, while its authority comes from the Creator.
- 3) Just because a problem exists doesn't mean the government should try to solve it.
- 4) Long-term and cumulative consequences should be considered more carefully than short-term benefits.
- 5) Government has nothing to give anyone except what it has first taken from someone else.
- 6) Individuals are ultimately responsible for governing themselves and for the consequences of their decisions.
- 7) Free enterprise, not government, is the engine of personal economic prosperity.
- 8) The free market should not be distorted by government-designed dictates or advantages.
- 9) Government has a responsibility to protect the foundational institution of society, the marriage-based, two-parent family.
- 10) Parents, not government, are responsible for the education and upbringing of their children.



These principles, applied with much thought and copious elbow grease, can and will turn our community around. But like most tools, they won't apply themselves without our help. Business as usual will only expedite our journey toward corporate failure. Are you willing to share your little puzzle piece with your community for the betterment of all, or will you be apathetic and selfish? It's entirely up to you, after all.

# Innovation and reform badly needed

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to submit a revised budget because they didn't have the needed votes to overturn what promised to be a Bill Clinton veto. Adding insult to injury, he was mocked and severely criticized for his role in the government shutdown when he reportedly told a room full of reporters he had forced the issue to get back at Clinton because the President had made him sit in the back of Air Force One on a return flight from Yitzhak Rabin's funeral in Israel.

Ethical charges also took their toll on Gingrich, 84 of which eventually led to his admission that he had violated House rules, federal tax law and had lied to the ethics panel which was conducting the investigations. This and other issues led to a near revolt among GOP House members in 1997 and Gingrich eventually resigned as Speaker, as well as from the House, shortly after the 1998 elections in which the Republicans lost five House seats.

Since his resignation, Gingrich has remained active in national politics and holds many influential positions on various national think tanks. He is a political analyst and consultant who appears regularly on TV, primarily Fox News, and has authored no less than a dozen books, mostly on government-related subjects and historical fiction.

Despite his checkered past and being one of the most polarizing figures (like Hillary) on the modern American political scene, one thing is certain: Love him or hate him, there can be no doubt Newt Gingrich is an extremely intelligent person with a great love for his country. Like a great many of us, Gingrich's early years were spent up North, but he developed his political philosophy in the South and most Southerners (except the secular-progressives) would agree with what he proposes in his newest venture – the 21st Century Contract with America.

What do Gingrich's proposals have to do with little old Aberdeen, you ask?

As Gingrich so eloquently put it, "Transforming government from the world that fails to the world that works is an essential step toward limited, effective government. But it's about more

than making government cost less and perform better. It's about bringing the principals that have built America and made it great – hard work, entrepreneurialism, innovation and optimism to our greatest national challenges.

"America needs a continuing process of innovation and reform if we are to continue to be the most successful society in history. Americans can insist on real change, and we have done it before. The politicians, interest groups, elite (left-wing) media and bureaucrats can be forced to reform by the sheer weight of the American people."

Gingrich went on to point out there are 513,000 elected officials in America, so real change is a lot more than the White House or the Congress. "Real change has to occur all across America," said Gingrich, who illustrated his point with the following example:

"In 1950, Michigan was one of the most prosperous states in America. There were 1,800,000 people in Detroit, and Detroiters enjoyed the highest per capita income of any large city in the country. Today, Michigan is an economic basket case. Its unemployment rate is a crushing 7.2 percent—the highest in the nation. And to make matters worse, Michigan taxes are higher than the national average.

"So with no jobs and high taxes, it's no surprise that Michiganders are going elsewhere to live and work. Its population is declining so much that the wry joke in Michigan is that the last one to leave please turn out the lights. But there is a way forward for Michigan. It's not complicated, and it's not theoretical. It's a simple story, taken from Michigan's recent history, of government in the world that works.

"When former Gov. John Engler was leading Michigan, its economic outlook was much different. Gov. Engler brought Michigan to 3.2 percent unemployment, the lowest unemployment rate in the state's history. And he did so while cutting taxes and controlling spending. And Gov. Engler did something else that was critical to Michigan's prosperity: During his time as governor, Michigan regained its AAA bond rating. The reason this is critical is because a state's bond rating determines how much its taxpayers pay on the state's debt. The better the rating, the less taxpayers pay. The less taxpayers pay, the more money is available for tax cuts or other priorities.

"It's the virtual circle of prosperity of the

world that works: Lower taxes means more jobs means higher revenue from a bigger economy means controlled spending means a better bond rating. And a better bond rating means a lower cost of debt which means more money available for lower taxes which means the creation of even more jobs.

"That's the world that works. Now we get to the world that fails. In 11 short months after gaining power, Democrats in Michigan managed to lose the AAA bond rating....it was like a teenager getting a credit card and not realizing that he has to pay. So, today, Michigan is in the virtual circle of the world that fails: It's losing jobs, losing people and losing money, and now it has to pay even more to service its debt. And, predictably in the world that fails, the solution that Democrats in Lansing are proposing is a huge tax increase to close the gap between the state's higher costs and declining revenues.

"Higher taxes are precisely what Michigan does not need right now. So far, the battle over the tax increase has been a fairly partisan one—with a Democratic majority in the legislature and a Democratic governor pushing for the taxes, and Republicans....and others, pushing for lower spending.

"But this doesn't have to be a partisan battle. The guiding principles of the world that works aren't red versus blue. They're red, white and blue. Michigan simply needs to do what we know works and have the courage to carry it out. It's time for us to have an honest, tough-minded conversation about how we run our country. We've become obsessed with our division between red and blue – between elephants and donkeys – and it's paralyzing us.

"The way forward isn't red versus blue. It's a citizens' movement of red, white and blue. If we insist on these goals and insist on electing leaders *at all levels* dedicated to these goals, we will be able to leave our children and grandchildren an America of safety, health, prosperity and freedom that would make our parents and grandparents proud. We too will have done our duty to our country and our achievements as citizens will be worthy of the America we inherited.

"The way to build a better future for our children and grandchildren is for all of us to become warthogs for a change. Who wouldn't jump at that opportunity?"



# The Aberdeen Advocate

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