

OPINION

The Inquirer offers news, which strives to present unbiased, factual reporting, and opinion, which showcases viewpoints. Here is what you'll find on these opinion pages.

Editorial

An opinion about a matter of public interest or policy that is researched and written by our Editorial Board, a group of journalists separate from the newsroom who meet frequently to discuss and debate issues. Unlike news stories, which are fact-driven and written by reporters, editorials advocate, champion, argue, critique, and offer solutions.

Column

Columnists are allowed to include their opinions and viewpoints when presenting their reporting. Inquirer columnists include Will Bunch, Trudy Rubin, and Jenice Armstrong.

Op-Ed

An op-ed — a name taken from their traditional placement in newspapers “opposite the editorial page” — is an essay or commentary piece that presents the opinion or perspective of the author. Many are submitted to us by Inquirer readers and writers with insight on the news, but we also solicit op-eds from authors on specific topics.

Letter to the Editor

A reader's written opinion submitted in response to an article in The Inquirer or another issue.

For more on how we work

The Editorial Board includes the managing editor for opinion, columnists, and opinion writers and editors. The board routinely discusses issues of the day to decide what to editorialize about and, during election campaigns, which candidates or ballot measures to endorse. News reporters and editors do not participate in these discussions. The board's opinions are not a consideration in news coverage.

The Philadelphia Inquirer

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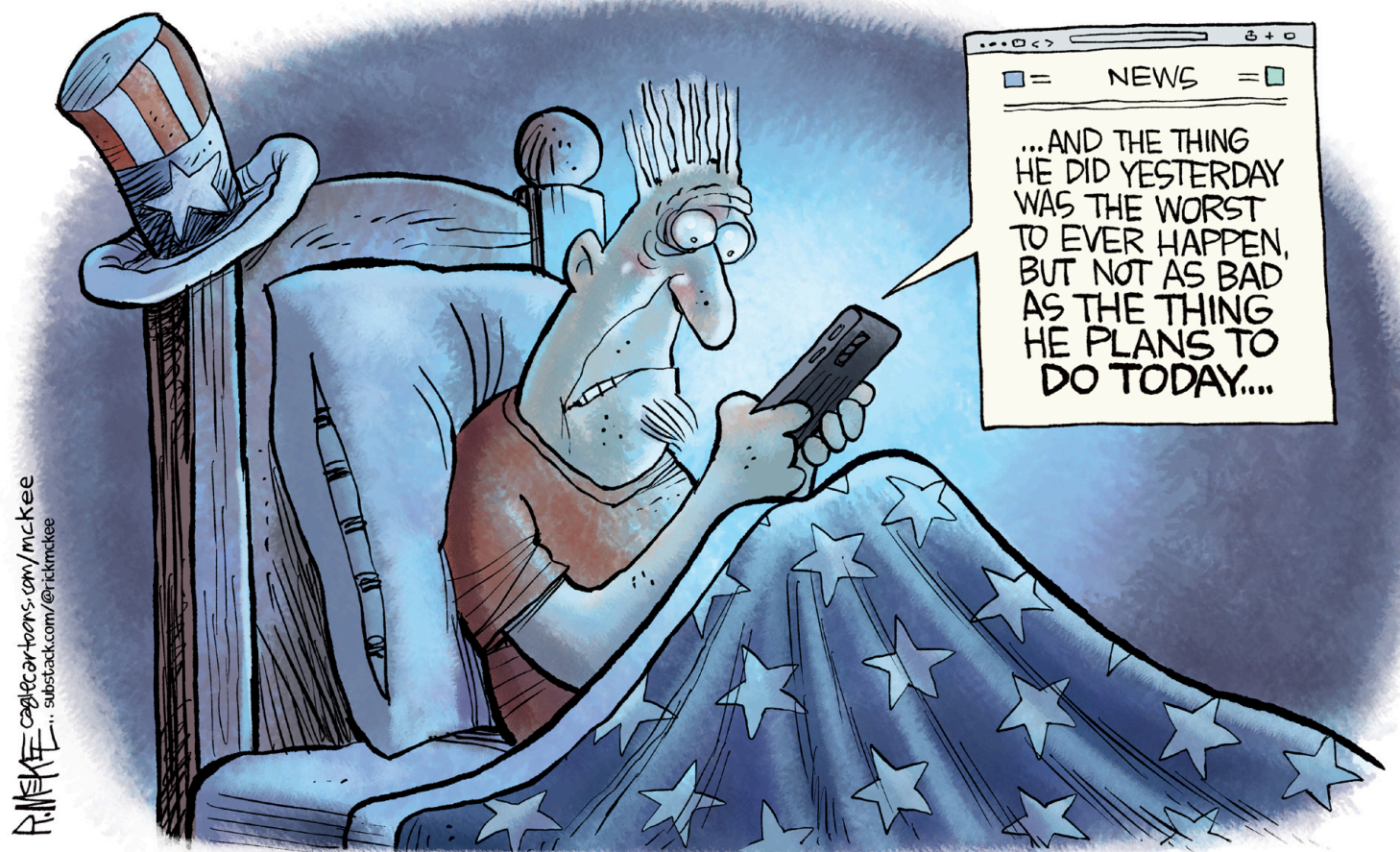
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THE MORNING ROUTINE

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Send letters to letters@inquirer.com. Limit length to 200 words and include home address and day and evening phone number. Letters are published in The Inquirer six days a week on the editorial pages and online at www.inquirer.com/opinion/letters/

Families deserve more

In its recent editorial on the school district's rightsizing efforts, The Inquirer Editorial Board got this right: The process matters. But a fair process requires something Philadelphia has never had: an authorizer with no financial stake in the outcome.

My organization, Philadelphia Charters for Excellence (PCE), represents 70 brick-and-mortar public charter schools serving approximately 65,000 students — families who exercised their right to decide where their children would learn best. We take academic accountability seriously. When a school is not delivering for children, that must be addressed.

What we cannot accept is a system in which the Philadelphia School District serves as the sole judge of whether public charter schools — who are treated as direct competitors for enrollment and funding — should continue to exist. That is not accountability. That is a proven, structural conflict of interest. A 2023 independent legal review by Ballard Spahr confirmed it. The editorial board left this entirely out of its analysis.

Public education funding in Pennsylvania follows the student. Attributing a \$300 million operating deficit primarily to charter schools, while current state funding inequities and the district's own operational costs go unexamined, is an incomplete accounting and paints an inaccurate picture of what Philadelphia's public charter school students legally deserve.

PCE acknowledges and appreciates accountability. Our litigation is not an effort to avoid accountability, but rather to ensure standards are applied lawfully and consistently, not shifted in ways that disproportionately harm Philadelphia's most underserved communities.

Washington, D.C., built an independent charter authorization model in 1996. It works. Philadelphia's children deserve exactly that. Nothing less.

Cassandra St. Vil, CEO,
Philadelphia Charters for
Excellence

Charm exists everywhere

I am troubled that Black homeowners are made virtually invisible by The Inquirer's real estate and housing writers. A glaring example of the oversight is the recent article regarding the charm of vestibules.

I lived in a home with a vestibule flanked by two French doors and an intricately designed marble floor. As a child, my best friend and I would play jacks or pick-up sticks in this very special space during bad weather. One of my fondest memories of my vestibule is that it was the site of a two-foot-tall lemon plant grown

from a solitary lemon seed.

My family first bought a home in North Philadelphia in the early 1900s. Back then, it was a thriving community of aspirational Black homeowners. Over the years, negative narratives — i.e., slum, ghetto, and “Badlands” — have been attached to these neighborhoods by the mainstream media, and, in turn, there is little positive attention paid to Black homeowners. However, now that gentrification has taken hold, the unique qualities of these homes are suddenly in vogue.

Is it that The Inquirer writers have no connection to Black homeowners? Or is it that The Inquirer has no intention of being inclusive in its reporting of real estate and homeownership?
Karen Warrington, Philadelphia

An old debate

The Trump administration's announcement of a \$1.776 billion federal fund to compensate his political allies has blown open a much older debate. As Cornel West noted last week: If Washington can mobilize nearly \$2 billion to redress the politically aggrieved, it can no longer claim the cupboard is bare for the descendants of the enslaved.

The truth is that both Britain and America have a long history of paying massive reparations — they simply paid them to white enslavers. The question is no longer whether a fiscal mechanism exists, but who is deemed worthy of receiving it.

In 1833, British taxpayers took on a £20 million loan — 40% of the national budget — to compensate 46,000 enslavers for their “loss of property.” Today, that sum represents an economic power of roughly £106 billion (\$132 billion).

The enslaved and their descendants received nothing.

This generational wealth sustained families for centuries, including that of Richard Grosvenor Plunkett-Erle-Drax until 2024, whose family still retains Drax Hall, the ancestral Barbados sugar plantation.

America's record is identical. Under the 1862 D.C. Compensated Emancipation Act, enslavers in the nation's capital received up to \$300 per person. Even when enslaved men enlisted in the Union Army to fight for their freedom, the federal government paid a further \$300 per person to their former captors in the border states.

Again, the enslaved and their descendants received nothing.

While governments set, private blueprints have set a successful precedent. The Scott Trust, owner of the Guardian, committed £10 million to restorative justice to atone for its founders' ties to cotton grown by enslaved people. Harvard has committed \$100 million to address its historical ties,

and the University of Glasgow established a £20 million reparative initiative.

On an individual level, aristocratic descendants like Laura Trevelyan and David Lascelles launched the Heirs of Slavery collective to pour personal wealth into Caribbean educational funds, while in America, heirs of the DeWolf family, whose ancestors were the largest merchants of the slave trade in United States history, have funded community repair and reconciliation.

The fiscal mechanisms are ready. As Washington proves this week, the missing ingredient has never been the money. It has always been the political courage to do the right thing.

Richard Romm,
West Sussex, U.K.

Created equal

It is evident America is now desperately ill and in the throes of a second Civil War. The nine-hour prayer fest the White House is planning will fan the flames of this illness in a country dedicated to religious freedom. In my quandary of how best to communicate amid the epidemic of prejudice and ideological entrenchment we face, I decided to turn to America's roots, our Declaration of Independence, for guidance. In doing so, I found it interesting that Thomas Jefferson did not say all men are born equal. He used the word *created*, thinking, I believe, in theological terms — equality in relationship with their Creator, not in birth opportunities provided. Nothing in this brave declaration specified a god who favors one religion over another. Or, in fact, that one must adopt a faith.

In Matthew 22:21, when Jesus says, “Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's” — to me, Jesus references the distinction between our relationship with God and the inequalities of birth, surroundings, and opportunities. This underscores that life is neither fair nor just — that some are born with far more opportunities for success and fulfillment than others. But God wants justice and opportunity for each of us.

It is up to the officials we elect to create these opportunities for safety and fulfillment. Doing so necessitates the election of those with the capacity to lead with courage, compassion, common sense, and awareness of the underpinnings of mature, honorable thinking. Not leaders who pit faiths against each other. Maturity is marked by the determination to make life as fair as it possibly can be — opening doors for better lives for all of our children. Prejudice and exclusion, in the same camp as irrationally expressed rage, whatever its form, take us in the terrifying opposite direction.
SaraKay Smullens, Philadelphia