

Courage of child abuse victims serves justice after three decades

They called them “prayer whippings.” A name coined from the abuse suffered, and the prayers that went up for the sibling undergoing the beating.



Samantha Perry

They were foster kids. Those taken from their homes and already feeling unwanted. Instead of being placed in a loving environment they were left in a living hell. Pleas to Child Protective Services went unanswered. Running away did no good. They were brought back — and the abuse intensified.

The mistreatment was physical and sexual. They were bullied to the point of being terrified. They became scared to speak up, scared to talk back and scared to tell the truth to authorities.

This fear resulted in a three-decades old secret — one that covered up deceit, lies and the murder of a World War II veteran.

It's late Thursday morning, and I sit at a conference room table in the McDowell County Courthouse with four former foster children who lived in the home of Hobert Melvin Miller. We are awaiting the sentencing hearing of his son, David Miller, who is charged in Hobert's death more than 30 years after it occurred.

Three of the foster children are siblings — Jenefer Miller Crim, Richard “Shorty” Miller Jr. and Melissa Fisher. A fourth, Phyllis Green, is not a biological relative, but also suffered

abuse as a foster child in the Miller home.

All speak of Hobert with love and affection. Jenefer, Richard and Melissa are his biological grandchildren, but they saw him as a father and called him “Daddy.” Phyllis, too, speaks highly of him. They tell me he was a good person, a “hard-working man,” and one who earned a Purple Heart during his service in the war.

David Miller gets no such accolades. Jenefer points to her leg when she talks of being left scarred after being repeatedly shot with a BB gun. The others nod their head in empathy and agreement as they, too, remember the incidents of abuse.

Jenefer's abuse had a far-reaching consequence. In addition to the acts of physical violence, she was sexually assaulted by David Miller and impregnated by him while still a teen. She left the home before the age of 18, and kept the identity of her child's father a secret.



In the quiet of the McDowell County conference room, the former foster kids speak of the abuse in matter-of-fact tones, but a silent sorrow remains in their eyes.

She remained scared, keeping her silence to protect her child from the life of violence she had known. But in 2010 her son died at the young age of 27, and Jenefer had nothing holding her back from finally telling the truth. Two years later she made a call to the McDowell County Prosecuting Attorney's Office. She told them about the years of abuse, the child born by incest and the murder of the man she knew as a father.

In the quiet of the McDowell County conference room, the former foster kids speak of the abuse in matter-of-fact tones, but a silent sorrow remains in their eyes. At times they talk over each other, remembering the violent acts and chiming in with more details.

I ask about the “prayer whippings,” recalling the term being used by Prosecuting Attorney Ed Kornish in his remarks during David Miller's sentencing hearing on the sexual assault and incest charges in August

of last year.

They tell me how David Miller would often make them “strip down,” and then beat them with a mining belt across their bodies. The children who were not being struck had to “help hold down the one getting beaten,” Melissa explained.

“He would beat you across the head, across the face — wherever the belt landed,” Shorty recalled.

During these incidents the other children would pray for the one being abused, thus they coined the term “prayer whippings.”

Because Jenefer's son died an unattended death, an autopsy was performed and DNA samples taken. It was this DNA that gave proof that David Miller was the father and led to a quick conviction in his incest and sexual assault trial. The jury deliberated only 13 minutes before returning a guilty verdict.

He was scheduled to go on trial for the murder of his father, but then agreed to plea to voluntary manslaughter.

The Miller children were at the home on the night of Hobert Miller's death. They tell me, in detail, how he was shot by David Miller. They remember Hobert's last words and last breath, and how they were then slapped by David and told to “Shut up crying.” They recall being put in a bedroom and not being allowed to speak with West Virginia State Police

troopers who arrived at the house that night to investigate. Later, they were given a lie to tell police during questioning the next day.

As children, they complied because they were scared and beaten down by a life of bullying and abuse. But as adults they spoke up.

More than 30 years after crimes were committed the Miller siblings faced their childhood demon and told investigators the true facts in an effort to right the wrongs of the past. And they succeeded.

Shortly after noon on Thursday, the Miller children sit quietly on a front row bench in the courtroom of Circuit Court Judge Rudolph J. “Rick” Murenky. They show no emotion when David Miller says he throws himself “on the mercy of the court.”

Murenky rejects the plea for mercy, and sentences him to the maximum punishment — one to five years. There are no gasps, exclamations or outbursts. Instead, the siblings appear to sit in quiet contemplation.

Miller, dressed in bright orange prison garb, is led from the courtroom in handcuffs and shackles. As he is walked toward the door, a young boy seated with the defendant's family tells him good-bye.

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Bluefield Daily Telegraph

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“And he said to me, It is done. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give to him that is thirsty of the fountain of the water of life freely.”

(Revelation 21:6 AKJV)

Smart choice Spencer can help Bluefield

The Bluefield Board of Directors made a good decision last week in the hiring of former Tazewell County Administrator Jim Spencer as the city's new community and economic development director.

Spencer, a 20-year veteran of Tazewell County government, was a visionary in knowing what needed to be accomplished in order for Tazewell County to grow and succeed during his long tenure as county administrator. He was also incredibly skilled at obtaining millions of dollars in state and federal grant and loan funding for critical infrastructure improvement projects during his earlier tenure as administrator of the Tazewell County Public Service Authority. In fact, he oversaw more than \$130 million in capital projects for Tazewell County during his years of service and initiated several programs for area businesses.

Spencer was a valuable asset to Tazewell County, and was known for thinking outside of the box. He was not afraid to dream big when it came to economic development and tourism-related initiatives, being most recently involved in the creation of the new Spearhead Trail system in Southwest Virginia, which includes a local trail system in Pocahontas, Va., near the existing Hatfield-McCoy Trail system in Bramwell.

He also created the Business to Business Showcase, a program that allowed local businesses to network with other businesses in Tazewell County, and his team also developed a Virtual Marketing Assistance Partnership tool that was awarded the Governor's Technology Award and the Southwest Virginia Technology Council's Excellence in Government Award in 2012.

Spencer developed valuable connections in both Washington and Richmond, Va., during his long term as county administrator in Tazewell. He is also an advocate of regionalism, and made repeated attempts during his tenure with Tazewell County to cross the state line and engage his West Virginia-side neighbors in projects that would benefit both states.

This is just the type of experience and aggressive can-do attitude that we need to help spark renewed economic development and growth in the

This is just the type of experience and aggressive can-do attitude that we need to help spark renewed economic development and growth in the city of Bluefield. Mayor Tom Cole said the city board have been working hard to find and ensure that the right team members are in place to help promote a more prosperous future for Bluefield. And Spencer is an excellent addition to that team, which also includes new City Manager Dane Rideout.

The road ahead won't be easy for the city's new leadership team, and a number of challenges remain. This includes finding a new grocery store for Bluefield, and the critical need to develop Exit 1 off of Interstate 77. One needs to look no further than Exit 9 in Princeton to see what could and should be happening at Exit 1 in Bluefield.

A decision also is going to have to be made on what to do about the long-stalled Colonial/Roundhouse Square Intermodal Center, a project that was originally started by the previous city board. Working to promote downtown revitalization, and finding ways to help advance the progress we've seen to date at the new downtown Depot District, also should be a top priority. The city also needs to find new ways to take advantage of ATV traffic that is traveling through Bluefield to reach the Hatfield-McCoy and Spearhead trail systems.

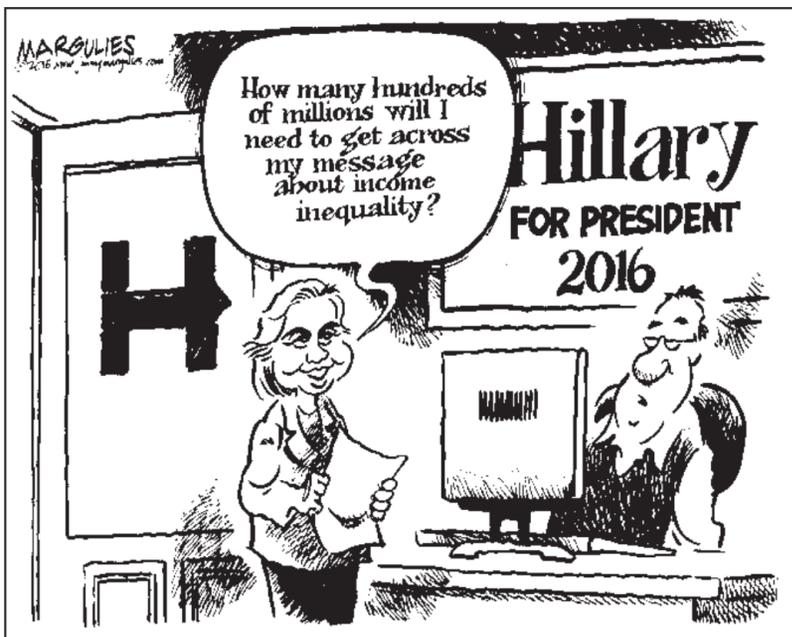
We believe Spencer can and will bring a lot of exciting and new ideas to the table. We applaud the city board for having the foresight to hire Spencer. We believe this is a positive step for Bluefield, and a move in the right direction.

We also congratulate Spencer and wish him the best of luck in his new challenge ahead.

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Let's make some noise

Finally, thanks to Hillary Clinton, we “average” and “ordinary” Americans are getting our day in the sun.

Folks, this is a big responsibility. The only viable Democrat so far in the 2016 presidential sweepstakes is depending on our telling her what it is we really, really want. We have to get this right.

The first thing she did after issuing her “I am running” video, which did not exactly give us any reason to vote for her but made her look pleasant, was to head in a van dubbed Scooby to Iowa, via Chipotle, to talk to “ordinary” Americans. (Notice she did not go to Garrison Keillor's hometown where all the men are good looking, the women are strong and the children are above-average.)

She said she wants to begin a conversation with us. OK. (The conversation she had with us in 2008 is so yesterday.) As Howard Fineman of The Huffington Post said, her Iowa trip was a little like the Advanced Placement girl going down to the high school basement to visit the shop class.

But she actually made news right at the beginning of her campaign, suggesting it's time to get unaccountable money out of politics even if it takes a constitutional amendment (which could not possibly pass in the toxic political climate we live in). Never mind that she would like to raise \$2.5 billion to get elected.

The woman who has been front and center in our polarized politics for decades is hoping to reinvent herself as just one of us. Never mind that Wall Street loves her and she is worth millions of dollars. Let's just say that everything has been said about Hillary but not everyone has said it. Her aides



Ann McFeatters

On the other hand, she has had a different hairstyle every day of her life and many, many pantsuits, necklaces and earrings.

say she wants us “average” and “ordinary” Americans to really get to know her as a warm and caring person, which is true. She is also political, ambitious and calculating, none of which is bad but which she is less eager to demonstrate for us.

On the other hand, she has had a different hairstyle every day of her life and many, many pantsuits, necklaces and earrings. Reinvention is she.

Hillary says she has four main goals: Building the economy of tomorrow, strengthening families and communities, fixing the political system, and getting unaccountable money out of politics.

So far she has polished her clichés to perfection. “We have to figure out in this country how to get back on track.” “I've been fighting for children and families my entire life.” “I want to be the champion who goes to bat for Americans.” “The deck is stacked in favor of the rich.” She needs some new clichés.

We don't want to be churlish about the first woman with a real chance to be president. But New York Mayor Bill DeBlasio is right: No endorsement until we see what she actually proposes to help struggling Americans. How would she solve the problem of CEOs making 300 times the rest of us and hedge fund managers paying less taxes than nurses and truck drivers?

At the least, will she

endorse a \$15-an-hour wage for fast food workers? Empower unions? Sign new trade deals? Close loopholes in the tax laws? Back universal child care? And how would she get past Republican opposition in Congress?

Hillary's real political challenge will not be today, tomorrow or even this year. It will come in the general election in the autumn of 2016, when the mammoth GOP field has been weeded out and one Republican emerges. He (there is no she) will be well-financed and will position himself as a change agent. Hillary is essentially running for a third Democratic term in the White House and may be somewhat shopworn by then.

Republicans will chant, as Marco Rubio rather rudely pointed out in announcing his campaign in a slap at both Hillary Clinton and Jeb Bush, “Yesterday is over.”

The November 2016 election is likely to be hard-fought and close. There is no inevitable conclusion. We hope it will be fought over vital national issues, not personal mud.

In the meantime, we of the average and ordinary persuasion must do our best to keep the focus on our needs, shouting to make ourselves heard above the cacophony of clichés.

Ann McFeatters is an op-ed columnist for Tribune News Service.

Write to us ...

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The *Daily Telegraph* will not knowingly publish pen names; nor will anonymous letters be used under any circumstance.

Issue of respect: Police dashcam video raises driver conduct questions

How do you react when pulled over by police for a traffic violation? Do you get angry and rant? Become defensive? Plead innocence? Do you spill out a laundry list of excuses for speeding or running a stop sign? Or do you simply say "Yes Sir" and "No Sir," while handing over your license, insurance and registration?

Traffic stops can reveal a lot about an individual — an acceptance of responsibility for wrongdoing or a blame game of "It's not my fault because ..."

A few months ago I was tipped off about dashcam footage of a prominent West Virginian and current gubernatorial candidate who was stopped by police for speeding. The traffic stop occurred in Lewisburg in December of last year, but its legend grew far and wide in the ensuing months.

The video was supposedly shocking and appalling, which, of course, intensified my reporter's thirst to get my hands on it. But it wasn't easy to nail down people, places, dates and times in the scuttlebutt universe. My sources were great, but information was scarce.

Finally, after weeks of working on the lead, I had enough details to file a Freedom of Information Act request. And, last week, the Lewisburg Police Department com-



Samantha Perry

A few months ago I was tipped off about dashcam footage of a prominent West Virginian and current gubernatorial candidate who was stopped by police for speeding.

plied with the FOIA request and provided me a copy of the dashcam video and traffic citation.

The video shows Jim Justice, West Virginia's richest man, owner of The Greenbrier and a current Democratic candidate for governor, being pulled over for driving 54 mph in a 40 mph zone in the town of Lewisburg.

The rumor mill was not on par with the video. There was no screaming, yelling, cursing or ranting. There was, however, disappointing behavior.

The first issue that becomes relevant in the video is that Justice's tags are not on file as being registered with the Department of Motor Vehicles. The officer clearly gives him a break on this, but does cite him for speeding — although he drops the amount from 54 to 44 mph in a 40 mph zone.

Most folks would be happy with

this, but not Justice. In the dashcam video, he twice notes that he is not "above the law," yet when the officer tickets him he calls him a "total lunatic" and "crazy."

Perhaps the most damning part of the video is when the young officer, polite and professional throughout the encounter, offers to explain the ticket to Justice.

Justice's response: "I want you to explain it to your boss."

When I received a copy of the video last week, I shared it with my Publisher Randy Mooney and colleagues in the newsroom. We realized immediately it was not an A-1, breaking story. Every day, many people act less than courteously at traffic stops. The video showed behavior that was, perhaps, not out of the norm.

Yet we also realized it showed the character of a candidate for governor, and that we could be called on

the carpet for not releasing the information we obtained.

It was a hard decision to make, weighing the desire not to be sensational with the public's right to know. In the end, we decided to release the video via this column so that we could fully explain our decision making process to the public.

And so it is now out there. Print readers of the *Daily Telegraph* can go to our website, bdtonline.com, click on the opinion section, and then open this column to follow the link to the video. The dashcam video is long, with much of it showing no action whatsoever, however we opted not to edit it in any way.

I encourage readers to watch the video, and form their own opinions.

Days after obtaining the video, I was at a law enforcement appreciation dinner held as part of the Bluefield College-Bluefield State College "Narcos" event. The event, attended by officers from across the two Virginias as well as the retired DEA agents who inspired the "Narcos" Netflix series, Steve Murphy and Javier Pena, honored those who put their lives on the line daily to protect and serve the public.

The dinner celebrated the important role officers' play in our society, and was an opportunity to show them the respect they deserve.

Looking at the sea of uniforms across the room, I was humbled to be part of the occasion.

One point underscored at the dinner and other "Narcos" programs, was that today's national climate is more dangerous for law enforcement officers than at any other time in history. It is sad and frightening to think of the dangers these men and women face simply because they wear a badge.

Watching the dashcam video once again, I was struck by the lack of respect for the young officer doing his job. And respect is, perhaps, the key word here.

Those in positions of power — and in the statewide spotlight — should lead by example. They should be role models for appropriate behavior, and strive to show good character in all they do.

On Dec. 5, 2014, Sgt. J.A. Vance was enforcing the speed limits of his town when he pulled over Jim Justice. He gave him a break on the tags and speeding, but also issued a rightfully earned citation. (One that, by the way, was later voided.)

Did he deserve the disrespect shown to him that night? I don't think so.

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"Be you not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship has righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion has light with darkness?"

(2 Corinthians 6:14 AKJV)

Beamer Ball

End of an era for Virginia Tech

It has been said that anything worth having is worth waiting for. Such was the case for the Virginia Tech Hokies. Frank Beamer won 24 games in his first six seasons as head coach at Virginia Tech. He lost 40 and had two ties.

In his first season, the Hokies were 2-9, one year after going 10-1 under Bill Dooley. Do that today and he wouldn't have gotten a seventh season. Possibly not even a second. He knows it to.

"I am thankful for the administration here at the time. I think they thought I was the right guy, just needed enough time to get it done," said Beamer, during his retirement press conference last Monday in Blacksburg. "I was going to do it the right way and I had what it takes to get it done."

"I doubt anybody could come through a time like that again in today's time when people want results. I don't know if I could have made it again like that."

All Beamer did over the finals 23 years of his 29 seasons at Virginia Tech — with four games still left to play — was compile a record of 210-80. That includes 22 straight bowl game appearances, four ACC titles, three Big East crowns, playing in one national championship game and enough players, moments and memories to last a lifetime.

He certainly didn't hesitate to thank so many others that played a role in nearly three decades of excellence at Virginia Tech.

"I feel fortunate that I have been allowed to lead this program, but it is a lot of other people involved," Beamer said. "You don't do it by yourself, I learned that a long time ago. You had better get good people around you and I did and I have and I am glad to have had all those people with me."

It's not just the accomplishments on the field. Virginia Tech football is now a brand, with an expanded Lane Stadium that now seats more than 68,000 fans, and no where is game day more electric, especially when the team enters to the tune of "Enter Sandman."

The facilities, such as the new indoor practice facility, are second to none, and a monument to not only Virginia Tech football, but to Beamer himself.

"It is not every coach that goes in and you look out, and see the facilities that we have got," Beamer said. "It is all by alumni supporters, it is not any

There are already 10 open coaching positions across the country, and more to follow. Few, if any, are as attractive as what awaits in Blacksburg.

state money, it is their support and where the facilities have gone to."

Virginia Tech is now a destination. There are already 10 open coaching positions across the country, and more to follow. Few, if any, are as attractive as what awaits in Blacksburg.

"One thing I take great pride in is I think we leave this job as a very attractive job, the facilities and the ability to compete, I think we leave it in good shape in that regard," Beamer said. "I think we leave some fantastic players, some really good young players that we have watched develop and get better and better, I think the future is bright."

Beamer grew into the face of Virginia Tech. Following the horrific campus shootings in 2007, he was always visible, leaving behind the business of football for the values of life.

He described how he would like to be remembered, and it is exactly how most will. It would hard to find anyone, Hokie fan or not, who can find any bad to say about Beamer.

"He is who he is, honest, caring and respectful," he said.

A legend will move on in a few months. Another coach will take over, and the Hokies will play on.

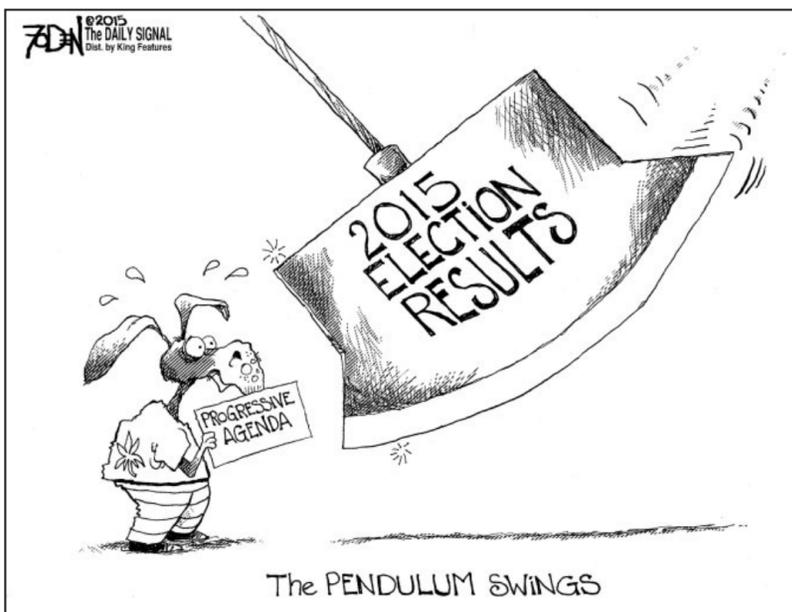
It was almost hard to watch as Beamer answered questions last week. His aged face was full of tears at times, but he fought through to the end.

I thank everyone for being here," Beamer said. "I love my players, I love my coaches, I know I am the most fortunate guy in the world and we have been blessed."

He was also a reporter's dream. He understood the role of the media and how it helped him in building his program to what it is today.

"I want to say thanks to the media," Beamer said. "I have always respected what these guys have had to do and I hope that has come across to them. I tried to work with them the best we could, I appreciate them too."

We appreciate you too Coach. May Beamer Ball live on forever.



Voters must demand civility

WASHINGTON — Are Americans becoming less compassionate? As we approach the "giving" season when we also pause to give thanks for what we have, the politics abroad in the land are worrisome.

The leading Republican candidate for president first said he wanted to dismantle Medicare, which provides health insurance for 49 million seniors. Then he said people should set up their own savings plans. We don't know what he means.

The other leading Republican candidate, who topped the polls for at least 100 days, wants to throw out millions of immigrants who have been living and working in America for years. He wants to wall off the nation to keep undocumented foreigners out.

Another presidential candidate, Ohio Gov. John Kasich, is running into stiff opposition from conservative Republicans because he expanded his state's Medicaid program, the only health insurance many poor Ohioans have.

In Kentucky a businessman won the governor's race despite alienating a lot of Kentuckians, refusing to talk to some reporters, riding around in a gold Cadillac and promising to take away Obamacare from half a million Kentuckians and reject federal funds for Medicaid.

In our politics today there's increasing contempt for those who need help. It's alarming.

On the other hand, a study by Indiana University's school of philanthropy expects total charitable giving in America to increase 4.8 percent this year and 4.9 percent in 2016.

And while Ohioans firmly rejected an initiative that would have legalized marijuana, including medical marijuana needed by severely epileptic children — which a majority of people favor —



Ann McFeatters

Hillary Clinton shouldn't say, even jokingly, that Republicans are her 'enemy.' Carson shouldn't compare Obamacare to Nazism.

that rejection was attributed to a provision that inexplicably would have created a marijuana monopoly for 10 groups of investors.

So the evidence is mixed. What is probably going on here is frustration and anger at political stalemate along with a poignant cry to "give us new faces." Washington is broken. The immigration system is broken. The health care system is broken. The concept of fair wages is broken.

By extension, the politicians are saying America is broken. But that's not what Americans think. They think the problem is leadership.

This is the problem: If next year's presidential election were held right now, Hillary Clinton would get 47 percent of the vote and Ben Carson, the retired neurosurgeon, would get 47 percent.

Of course, a lot will happen in a year.

But it's clear that Americans are almost evenly divided between those who think government can and should solve the major problems society faces and those who want private enterprise to take charge, almost unfettered by government restrictions. Half the people want political compromise; half do not. Half the people want to make drastic cuts in government services no matter who gets hurt; half the people are willing to put up with bureaucracy and even waste, fraud and abuse to keep such services coming.

There is no short-term way to "fix" this. Whoever wins

the White House next November will struggle to get anything accomplished ... unless we change how we think and talk.

Hillary Clinton shouldn't say, even jokingly, that Republicans are her "enemy." Carson shouldn't compare Obamacare to Nazism. Voters must not give credence to Donald Trump's insistence he should be president because he's the loudest, rudest and richest. Marco Rubio can't assume his youth, heritage and dismissive attitude toward his onetime mentor mean he deserves the presidency.

Voters must demand civility and thoughtfulness. They must insist on serious policy proposals and in-depth knowledge about our problems. An Iowa man recently said, "I'm for Ben Carson because he doesn't yell." Really, that is not the gold standard for choosing the most powerful leader in the world.

Nobody promised democracy would be easy. But it's been around for a long time; there's no reason it can't work as it is supposed to work.

Families can learn to live with their differences. If Americans stop the name-calling and work out disagreements with practical solutions, we can get along.

More pragmatism, less ideology and more compassion won't mean losing our American values but rather keeping them.

Ann McFeatters is an op-ed columnist for Tribune News Service.

The scourge of prostitution: Who's keeping an eye on local STD rates?

We watch them walk the streets in zombie-like precision. Their eyes may be listless and their bodies tired, but they muster the energy to wave at men who pass by on Bluefield Avenue.

With a wall of windows, our third-floor conference room gives us the perfect view of the debauchery on the street — prostitutes plying their wares, and customers taking them up on their offers.

Initially, we watch in surprise. But as the months pass it becomes routine. We recognize the regular workers, and take note when new women hit the street. We take photos with our cellphones of the Johns picking them up. It's a sad, horrific, yet mesmerizing commentary on the drug abuse plague in southern West Virginia.

In years past, hookers were a somewhat uncommon occurrence in the coalfield counties. The few who worked the area were well known. Journalists knew their names; everyone knew their faces.

Nowadays, not so much. Strangers now tread the concrete sidewalks. We watch them daily and still can't keep track of the myriad of personalities. At one time, Mercer Street in Princeton was known as the place to go for a cheap, half-hour-or-less hookup. In 2015, this option is available just about everywhere in the county.



Samantha Perry

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We know that drugs are the scourge that fuels the problem. Women — or their boyfriends — need money for a fix. They can earn it on the streets.

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We know that drugs are the scourge that fuels the problem. Women — or their boyfriends — need money for a fix. They can earn it on the streets. Undiscerning men will pay the price for a quick thrill.

Meanwhile, a public health threat spreads with each encounter — sexually transmitted diseases.

Hepatitis B and C, syphilis, gonorrhea, chlamydia — pick your poison. All are present in the region, and are being taken home to innocent spouses who are unaware their significant others are catching “cooties” for 40 bucks in a back seat.

How great is this scourge? We at the *Daily Telegraph* would like to know, but therein lies the problem.

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For many years the *Telegraph* had a great working relationship with the Mercer County Health

Department. We worked with them hand-in-hand on stories ranging from STDs to rabies to influenza. If we needed information they provided it, allowing us to get quick, accurate reports to readers.

But things have changed. The previous administrator of the health department retired, and new faces moved in. Now getting data on STDs is not so easy.

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At one time, Mercer was ranked among the top counties in the nation for its high rates of Hepatitis B and C. How does it rank now?

Also, in recent years, Mercer saw an increasing number of syphilis and gonorrhea cases. Is this spike continuing?

Both are good questions. Ones we would like to have answered. But that has proven problematic of late.

For the past several weeks, I have had a *Daily Telegraph* reporter call

and stop by the health department on various occasions in an effort to report on these numbers.

Regrettably, no one seems to have the answers. They have some numbers, but when asked about rankings statewide and nationally, no one seems to know.

This is beyond worrisome. Who, if anyone, is minding the STD rate in Mercer County?

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After yet another failed attempt at gathering these numbers last week, I filed a formal Freedom of Information Act request with the health department. In it, I requested a specific breakdown of STD numbers per month from January to June of this year, and from five and 10 years ago.

The response was a bit surprising. Instead of hard numbers I received a tersely worded response via fax that directed me to go to a website, which, by the way, did not have all the data we requested.

The handwritten response on the fax, from new Mercer County Health Department administrator Susan Kadar, read as follows: “We instructed the BDT previously on how to get this info from the state EPI site. We do not keep compiled info here as it is obtainable there. I am sorry but I do not have the time to do this research for the BDT.”

Sincerely, Susan.”

Wow. If Mercer County health administrators are not keeping “compiled info” here, who is watching the numbers? Are we counting on officials in Charleston to keep an eye on our rates? There's a leap of faith.

(To view the actual response to the FOIA request, check out this column at bdtonline.com.)

Apparently, no one at our local health department knows if our STD rates are spiking, falling or staying about the same — or if they do, they are not telling the press, who can communicate it to the public.

How scary is the thought — the reality — that our new public health administrator does not “have the time” to keep the citizens informed of the very real health threat from STDs?

Worried about syphilis? Go online. This is your tax dollars at work.

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Meanwhile, the hookers continue to walk the streets. Johns stop. Doors open. In a half hour or less, the women are back on their corners.

What diseases are being spread? If only we knew.

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Asst. Managing Editor Charles Owens

“In the multitude of my thoughts within me your comforts delight my soul.”

(Psalms 94:19 AKJV)

Mercer trailhead

Long-awaited project advancing

Hundreds of visitors are traveling to our region each week to ride the Hatfield-McCoy Trail system. But there still isn't an official visitor center or welcome center in place to properly greet these out-of-town visitors before they enter the trail system. With hope that will be changing soon.

The long-planned trailhead center for Mercer County is finally moving forward, although a couple of key decisions must still be made by a local committee that is composed of county commissioner Gene Buckner, Budd Clapp and Danny Simmons. The trailhead itself was proposed three years ago, and funding for its construction has been secured by the Hatfield-McCoy Trail Authority. But an engineering firm must still be selected for the project, and officials have to come to an agreement on a location. The two sites being considered for the project are Coaldale Mountain along U.S. Route 52 and Simmons River Road past the entrance to Montcalm High School. Buckner says the committee hopes to select an engineering firm at the next board meeting on Aug. 13. He says the committee will decide a site for the trailhead project by November.

The trailhead also is referred to as a visitors center. The new 2,000-square-foot facility will include accommodations and parking where visitors to the trail can park their vehicles and unload their ATVs and equipment before entering the trail system. The facility will also serve as an official welcome center for ATV riders coming

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into the region from Interstate 77, according to Hatfield-McCoy Executive Director Jeff Lusk.

The estimated cost of the visitors center is approximately a half million dollars. Construction on the trailhead center will be funded by a \$500,000 West Virginia Recreational Trails Program grant. Lusk is hoping ground can be broken and construction on the project can begin by next spring.

“We want the site selected, the building designed, the utility layout done and everything ready to go to bid by late fall with the idea of breaking ground and starting construction in the spring,” Lusk said. “My hope and expectation is that the whole project would be done by this time next year.”

We, too, are hopeful that construction can begin soon on this long-awaited addition to the Hatfield-McCoy Trail. The visitors to our region who are riding the ATV trails in Mercer, as well as neighboring McDowell County, are more than deserving of an official welcome center. The development is a great way to officially welcome riders from across the U.S. to the beautiful mountains of southern West Virginia.

Letters...

Letter inspires GOP contribution

It is often difficult to decide if a frequent letter contributor is serious or only pulling our legs with his political discussions. In the July 29 paper, he discussed the pathetic Republican potential presidential field, particularly demeaning, or perhaps praising, its most noticeable members. He suggests that Mr. Trump is a source of entertainment, and typical of the party that produced one of our great presidents, Richard Nixon, destroyed because he scowled and had a five O'clock shadow, and Joe McCarthy who will forever be hated by liberals for accurately exposing the numerous communists in our government.

Also, the writer mentions the modest and great Vietnam veteran of four months who spent Christmas in Cambodia, suffered a buttock injury from a grenade he threw himself, and more recently helped finalize an agreement that may well “finish” the tiny nation of Israel and precipitate the greatest and perhaps last world conflict.

In any event, Mr. Trump has been quite successful in his business endeavors so far, causing endless envy and spite among liberals, who believe that wealthy people should only be so from giving 30-minute speeches for half a million dollars, pretending to be someone else in a movie, or exchanging favors with their favorite lobbyist. He has been bringing up some politically incorrect and uncomfortable truths that others have been frightened to acknowledge, such as illegal immigration designed to alter national political trends by promoting, with “other people's money,” as usual, dependence on government.

Thanks to the writer for reminding me to send a contribution to the campaign of Senator Ted Cruz, who seems to be the rare politician who actually does what he promises and has never, to my knowledge, been proven to be a “congenital liar.” This in sharp contrast to the chief Democrat candidate of the moment.

Stephen DeGray
Bluefield, Va.



Presidential race: Trashing civility takes a toll on the nation

WASHINGTON — This is an appeal, plaintive and heartfelt, for couth behavior.

That does not sound like much of a big deal, but, apparently, if you decide to run for president it is not uncommon to discard couth behavior as quickly as a sticky popsicle wrapper.

Being couth is described as having well-mannered, cultured, refined behavior. It should have been learned in kindergarten.

It is not in evidence on the campaign trail this year.

Former Arkansas Gov. Mike Huckabee likened the pending Iran anti-nuclear arms deal to the Holocaust, suggesting that it would send Israel to the doors of the ovens. This is uncouth. It is not even hyperbole. It is incendiary hooliganism.

It is a strong indication that Huckabee is so desperate for media attention that anything goes. Even many Israelis would be horrified at Huckabee's rhetoric.

New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie likes to berate his constituents unmercifully in public forums, including schoolteachers.

His aides used to follow him around to record on video his rantings or his “moments” to post on YouTube.

This is supposed to be “telling it like it is.” This is being a bully.

Texas Sen. Ted Cruz has taken to calling Senate Majority Leader Mitch



Ann McFeatters

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Donald Trump does not hesitate to call people ‘stupid.’ He relishes demeaning other people and other nations.

McConnell, R-Ky., a liar. He thinks this makes him seem “anti-Washington.”

It reveals him to be uncouth. Not surprisingly, he is one of the most unpopular members of the Senate.

Donald Trump does not hesitate to call people “stupid.” He relishes demeaning other people and other nations. That's what he does.

And, speaking of kindergarten, where bad behavior can spread like lice, the other candidates in the race seem to be doing their best to compete with Trump at his level.

People, what is wrong with civility?

Why are we encouraging this bad behavior?

Why have a majority of the candidates decided that we like this name-calling and constant repudiation of thoughtful, reasoned, intelligent debate? Is it any wonder that Americans are seriously worried about the future of this nation?

The amazing thing is that any decent people are willing to run, risking humiliation and their souls for public office.

It used to be called the politics of personal destruction.

It has escalated far beyond that so that it is destroying who we are.

In this month of county fairs and family reunions, we shudder to think of how many encounters will turn ugly because that is the only kind of behavior we see from most of our political leaders.

How about this for a change?

You listen to me. I listen to you. We agree that we disagree.

We see if we can find room for compromise.

We say we respect each other's right to his/her own opinion.

We smile. We shake hands. We remain friendly.

If the political debates turn ugly, if civility is trashed, let's resolve not to stand for it.

Let us demand that the candidates respect each other and, in consequence, the rest of us.

And now, let's get to those reunions

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