

EDITORIAL BOARD:
DAVID E. DIX, PUBLISHER
ROGER J. DI PAOLO, EDITOR
HEATHER CONDLEY RAINONE, MANAGING EDITOR
CHRISTOPHER BURKEY, NEWS EDITOR
Serving Portage County
since 1830

OPINION

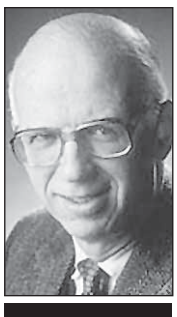
'Most miseries lie in anticipation.'

— Honore de Balzac

Loss of Daschle a blow to health care plan

Washington Post Writers Group

WASHINGTON — In a striking repetition of the up-and-down pattern of the Democratic primaries a year ago, President Obama filled one Cabinet vacancy on Tuesday but saw another one embarrassing-ly come open.



DAVID BRODER

I had just begun a column congratulating him on recruiting Sen. Judd Gregg of New Hampshire as commerce secretary when news broke that Tom Daschle, the former Senate majority leader who left lots of taxes unpaid, was withdrawing as the nominee for secretary of health and human services.

The immediate loss is much greater than the gain, but the payoff on Gregg, the third Republican in the Cabinet, will be substantial

down the road.

For now, however, the Daschle fiasco is the worst embarrassment Obama has suffered since winning the election. Daschle was no ordinary appointee and HHS is no ordinary job.

Along with Hillary Rodham Clinton, whose campaign taught Obama the ups and downs of the presidential race, Daschle was the best credentialed, best-connected Democrat slated for the Cabinet. He was one of the earliest Washington establishment figures to endorse Obama and he provided from his old staff many of the people who helped Obama rise.

Daschle's assignment was to shepherd Obama's health care plan to passage, a task that has only grown in urgency since Hillary and Bill Clinton failed in their effort 15 years ago. As a skilled legislative craftsman who had made health policy a specialty in recent years, Daschle was given special status, with a White House office and title along with

the Cabinet post.

Daschle's withdrawal not only costs the administration and the country his skilled services, it leaves Obama and the administration with egg on their faces.

He is the third person introduced and praised by Obama who was forced to bow out before the first month of the administration was over, following Bill Richardson, who was supposed to be commerce secretary, and Nancy Killefer, the choice for chief performance officer.

Even when the White House belatedly learned of Daschle's tax troubles, it misjudged the political fallout. Despite the glaring contradiction between Obama's proclaimed ethical standards and Daschle's lucrative expense-account life that led to his tax underpayment, Obama said he "absolutely" stood by his choice. One day later, he accepted Daschle's resignation. This is a blow to Obama's credibility that will not be easily forgotten.

For now, recruiting Gregg for Commerce is scant consolation for the loss of Daschle. But in months to come, Gregg will be worth celebrating. He is one of the smart guys on Capitol Hill, especially when it comes to fiscal policy. And he provides Obama with a third strong Republican Cabinet member, joining Defense Secretary Bob Gates and Ray LaHood at Transportation.

Gregg and North Dakota Sen. Kent Conrad, respectively, the top Republican and Democrat on the Budget Committee, have been pushing for the creation of a bipartisan commission that would tackle the looming bankruptcy of the three big entitlement programs — Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid. Conrad told me he deeply regrets the departure of his partner and does not know where to find a substitute.

But help may be on the way. Lamar Alexander of Tennessee, the No. 3 man in the Senate Republican leadership, quietly

joined the Budget Committee last month. When I asked him why, he said it was to "help move the Gregg-Conrad commission proposal forward."

Moreover, Mitch McConnell of Kentucky, the Republican leader of the Senate, told the National Press Club that a bipartisan deal on entitlements is something he thinks can and should happen in this Congress.

Obama said the same thing when he visited The Washington Post just before the inauguration, and now he has in Gregg someone who can help him lobby Congress to move that project forward.

The problem is likely to be in the House, where Speaker Nancy Pelosi remains opposed to the commission idea and where Republicans are adamant against considering tax hikes along with benefit reductions in any kind of "grand bargain."

It will be a heavy lift, but there are willing hands.

OUR VIEW

Big gamble

Strickland budget's lofty goals laudable, but how to pay for them remains at issue

With his new biennium budget, Gov. Ted Strickland has its priorities right, but the funding it takes to get there looks like a gamble at best.

The proposed \$55 billion budget, if enacted, would boost the state's share of support for education, particularly strengthening the funding of primary and secondary schools with an additional \$925 million, improve access to health care for children from families unable to pay, and freeze tuition temporarily at Ohio's public universities, all this amid a projected budget deficit of \$7 billion and a promise to not raise taxes.

To get there, the governor is relying on an expected \$3.4 billion in federal stimulus money from the federal government. He proposes to use the nearly \$1 billion left over in the state's rainy day fund, the one set up to help cover times of emergencies. He also wants to raise fees on 120 state services, which his budget shows, bringing in an additional \$236 million over the course of two years. He also proposes sharp reductions in state employment.

For the next two years, the fiscal projects may be on target or at least close to it, but what then? The governor, of course, hopes the economy will rebound spurring tax revenues to pick up and eliminate the deficit. Betting on that outcome, given current trends, seems a big if.

We do appreciate the emphasis in the budget on increasing funding for primary and secondary education. The governor emphasizes primary and secondary education, increasing the state's share from \$7.17 billion to \$7.18 billion the coming fiscal year and to \$7.44 billion next year. It calls for reimbursing districts for tax revenues lost due to the elimination of the personal property tax, which is being phased out as part of the 2005 tax overhaul and is expected to be replaced by a new tax on business sales.

The budget, in fact, amounts to a school reform measure that establishes goals to achieve over the course of eight years. These include calls for extending the school year from 180 to 200 days, lengthening the school day and implementing statewide all-day kindergarten.

It would use the ACT as the mandatory test for passing diplomas substituting it for the current mandatory Ohio graduation test, the value of which has always been controversial with the schools and their faculties.

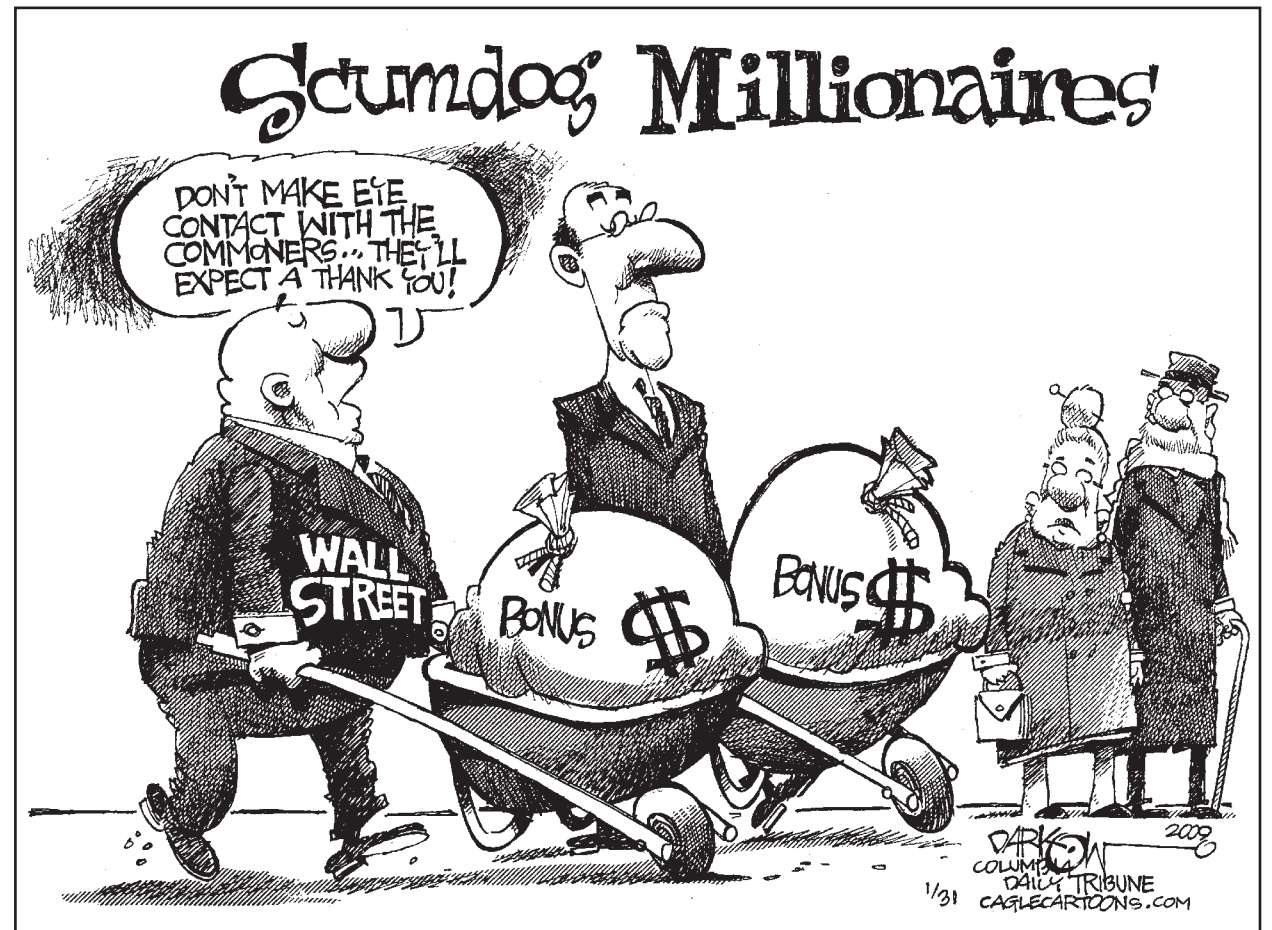
It sets an ideal size enrollment a school should have: elementary, 418 students; middle schools, 557 students; high schools, 733 students. It funds teacher-to-student ratios of 1:15 for grades K through 3, and 1:25 from grades 4 through 12. It establishes thresholds for providing specialty teachers, teacher mentors, tutors, summer school funding, and social workers based on a school's faculty size or the percentage of students in poverty. It provides each district \$25 per gifted student, \$250 per student for non-athletic enrichment activities, and \$165 per student for instructional materials. It bases teacher compensation on an index that considers the poverty level, gross income, property value, and college attainment rate of districts.

We like the goal of improving access to health care for indigent children and the goal of slowing the cost of the prison system by emphasizing rehabilitation and reducing the reliance on incarceration.

Although Ohio nationally is ranked by some as a high tax state, the Ohio legislative commission in comparing it with its neighbors puts Ohio about average with Indiana and Pennsylvania and below rates used in Kentucky. We do not advocate raising taxes, which would put Ohio at a competitive disadvantage in attracting new business. Ohio is gradually phasing out the personal property tax and has lowered the top rates of the personal income tax. To get by, until a recovery occurs, it might want to slow the pace of the phase-out.

The Strickland budget, as it makes its way through the Republican controlled Ohio Senate and the Democratic controlled Ohio House, is bound to be changed and may not come out resembling what the governor has proposed. He has set a direction, however, and that is important. The governor has laudably advocated for education, which is key for Ohio's future. How to fund it all remains the question.

We think the reorganization of state agencies proposed earlier by Rep. William Batchelder, the minority leader in the Ohio House bears careful consideration. Also, the state department of education should weigh whether another round of school consolidations is merited. Both might provide additional savings that could help Ohio reach the goals the governor has targeted.



LETTERS

Raiding tax dollars

I am writing in response to an article, "Budget Woes Likely To Lead To City Layoffs, Streetsboro ... Eyes Water Fund" (Record-Courier, Jan. 28). The short story is that Streetsboro City Council is trying to raid the Water Reserve Fund to feed its out of control spending habits.

For the past couple of years the city has lived beyond its resources, hiring and purchasing everything in its path.

In 2008, the practice reached fever pitch. As a former Streetsboro city councilman with years of experience, I find the lack of clear direction is unbelievable. People who know me will acknowledge two strengths; to this day I am current on the city's finances (a weird hobby) and I'll tell it like it is.

As an example, three months ago when the city was publicly touting large cash reserves for the future, I sent word after reviewing the same reports that they were headed for a financial wreck. The latter appears to be true.

Now back to the water fund. This more than \$1 million in reserve has been collected from city water customers. We were once told by the county that a water tower was needed. With recent changes, that is no longer the case. So what to do with the money? Rather than reinvest it into an aging water system or substantially reduce the water

rates for its customer's, city council chooses to raid the fund due to its lack of spending discipline. This move is so extreme that they need to involve a county judge.

After review, I have again sent word that they could easily trim hundreds of thousands of dollars from the current budget and continue to provide essential services, leaving the water fund intact. The next question, what judge will become involved and will they fall victim to this thinking? The over 4,000 water customers are just waiting for this decision.

Stephen Kolar
Streetsboro

Memorable tribute

Our father, Raymond Mullett, passed away Dec. 29. Prior to the funeral, the Record-Courier had an article about our father being a volunteer fireman for 25 years, and how the Windham Fire Department would be transporting the casket to the cemetery in Windham.

We would like to start by thanking the R-C for the article and the photo of the fire truck transporting the casket. The article and picture will always be something special and heartwarming to remember about a sad and stressful time.

The Green Family Funeral Home went above and beyond with the arrangements. Dave Green spent much time and effort to get all the departments involved and make us very proud of our father's past.

We would also like to thank the Windham Fire Department for the transporting and acting as pall bearers at the service, the Mantua Shalersville Fire Department, The Hiram Fire Department, The Garrettsville Nelson Freedom Fire District, Community Ambulance and the Portage County Sheriff's Department.

The trucks and the firefighters at every intersection were very impressive and the family will always be grateful to those who participated. Even though most of them did not know our father they knew he was one of them and showed their respect by their participation.

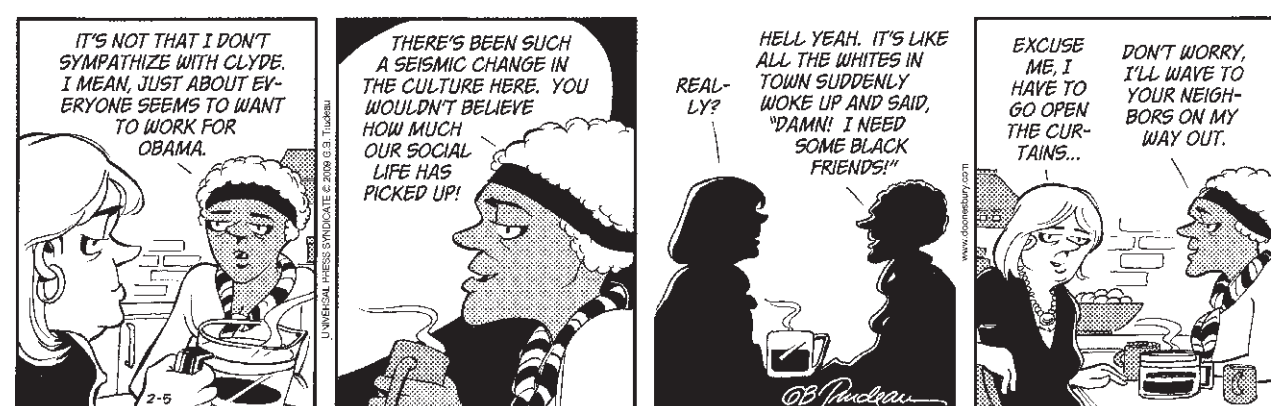
Windham American Legion Post No. 674 was there to honor a fellow veteran and do the military honors.

The Rev. Doug Snyder was the pastor of the Windham Congregational Church when our father and mother were still in Windham. He helped us remember some things about our father we had forgotten and his service was very uplifting.

It is hard to thank everyone for what they did, but we wanted everyone to know how much we appreciated their efforts. Anyone who wishes to see the video of the procession can go to greenfamilyfuneralhome.com, click on Obituary, then Raymond Mullett. At the bottom of the next page is the video.

Fred Fortney and family
Garrettsville

DOONESBURY



•Letters to the editor may be e-mailed to editor@recordpub.com