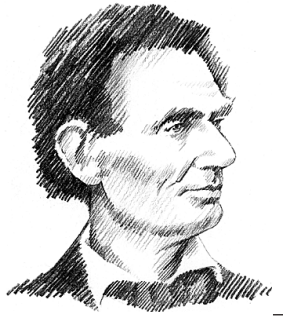


THE STATE JOURNAL-REGISTER

## Journal Register

"The Journal paper was always my friend..."  
— A. Lincoln, June 18, 1864



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"We want the Register to be the people's paper."  
— Publisher's statement June 19, 1881

### OUR OPINION

## Steidl should be pardoned

**RANDY STEIDL WON HIS FREEDOM** two years ago when he was released from Danville Correctional Center after a federal judge vacated his 1987 double murder conviction.

But as Steidl has learned in the time since then, there is a long distance between freedom from prison and true freedom. While his conviction was deemed wrongful by a judge, it remains a glaring black mark on his record, a nearly insurmountable obstacle as he tries to find employment and lead a normal life.

With prosecutors having ruled out a second trial due to lack of evidence, Steidl lives in a state of legal limbo: not exactly convicted of murder, but not acquitted. That will be Steidl's status permanently unless Gov. Rod Blagojevich grants him a pardon.

We think it is time that the governor does so.

**STATE JOURNAL-REGISTER** reporter Sarah Antonacci caught up with Steidl last week in Springfield, Mo., where he has a job with a container corporation. He got that job, he explained, because he showed the company a collection of published news articles about his ordeal. He lives in fear of losing that job because his past job searches have been futile.

"I feel there would be better job opportunities had I not had this conviction on my record," Steidl said. "You try to explain that you were wrongfully convicted and that you're innocent and people say, 'Then why weren't you acquitted?'"

That is a question that we and many other people have been asking ever since the details of Steidl's trial came to light.

Steidl was convicted in 1987 of the July 1986 murders of Dyke and Karen Rhoads in Paris. Firefighters found the Rhoadses stabbed to death when they responded to an early-morning fire at the couple's home. Herb Whitlock also was charged in the killings and, in a separate trial, was found guilty in Karen Rhoads' death. He remains in prison, though efforts are under way to free him as well.

**THE TWO MAIN WITNESSES** in Steidl's trial both recanted their testimony within two years of his conviction. One of those witnesses gave police three separate descriptions of the events on the night of the murder, and the prosecution used a combination of those stories in its case.

No physical evidence placed Steidl or Whitlock at the scene of the crime, and a woman who spent the night of the murders with Steidl testified on his behalf. Steidl had complained about poor representation by his lawyer, and the judge who later vacated his conviction agreed that he had not been properly represented.

Sentenced to death (because of poor legal representation, a judge later ruled), Steidl steadily worked the appeals process hoping that eventually his story would be heard. In 1991, his case was assigned to Springfield attorney Michael Metnick. Metnick, investigator Bill Clutter and attorneys Kathy Saltmarsh, John Hanlon and Peter Rotskoff found shocking evidence about Steidl's trial. Eventually, Northwestern University's Center on Wrongful Convictions joined Steidl's cause, which soon became a national news story.

**NOW, EVEN AN INVESTIGATION** of the investigation of the Steidl case has generated controversy, as a state police investigator received a \$360,000 civil rights settlement after he claimed his superiors had, for political reasons, thwarted his effort to find the truth.

This is an ugly case about which we may never know the truth (though we hope the ongoing state police investigation succeeds). We do know that, according to U.S. Judge Michael McCuskey, "acquittal was reasonably probable if the jury had heard all the evidence." With no new trial planned (or warranted), Steidl will not get his shot at acquittal.

A pardon will make Steidl not just free from prison, but free to pursue life.

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### CHRIS BRITT

MOTORCYCLE DEATHS SOAR AFTER FLORIDA REPEALS HELMET LAW

IN AMERICA, WE HAVE THE RIGHT TO BE INCONSIDERATE, MORONIC AND A MENACE TO SOCIETY.



Cartoonist Chris Britt can be reached at 788-1558 or chris.britt@sj-r.com. Visit sj-r.com and click on "Opinion" to see more editorial cartoons from Copley News Service.

## LETTERS, FAXES & E-MAIL

### Wal-Mart is the new whipping boy of liberals

Well it seems to me that Wal-Mart is now the whipping boy of liberals. Sunday's Letters to the Editor had two letters attacking Wal-Mart.

Mr. Henneberry is afraid of traffic and water runoff. According to him, we already have these problems in the area, but it could get worse if they build the new Wal-Mart.

I would suggest to Mr. Henneberry that when the new Wal-Mart is built, these problems will go away because Wal-Mart will pay to correct them.

The second letter from Mr. Franks seems to indicate that Wal-Mart is evil and running roughshod over America. The basis of these charges is that The Walton Family, as majority owner, has become wealthy, and the average employee earns \$9.68 per hour.

So, Sam Walton and his family work for years risking their money to build his company into a world class corporation, make money for his stockholders, employ hundreds of thousands of workers, bring low-cost goods to its customers and as a result builds personal wealth.

Wal-Mart also has been a good neighbor that pays its taxes and contributes to the good of the community.

Based on these facts, I can see why Mr. Franks thinks Wal-Mart is running roughshod over America. And finally, Mr. Franks, as a true liberal, makes the condescending statement that Wal-Mart employees are too ignorant to realize they are being taken advantage of.

We ignorant and brainless little people are so lucky to have a Mr. Franks guide us here in Springfield. ... Wonder what the rest of the country does?

One final comment. If the rank and file union members were upset with Wal-Mart, why are there so many union members that shop there?

Marshall Selkirk  
Springfield

### Sangamon County Fair chaotic at closing time

Last Friday night, my wife and I attended the Sangamon County Fair and, for the most part, had a great time — until exactly 11 p.m. Literally at that precise moment, the carnival abruptly shut down (people who were just seated on the rides were told to get off; lights on rides were turned off, etc.), and there was a mass exodus to the grass field free parking area.

This was a chaotic scene of drunken fairs-goers, foul-mouthed teenagers, sunburned parents and weary children, all hurrying toward their cars and heading for the one exit row from the parking area. Seriously, one exit row? Come on!

We were unlike many in their cars, trucks and motorcycles who lifted (or purposely just broke through) the rope-like parking barriers so that they could maneuver, like starved science rats, toward their cheese: freedom! While we had that same goal (freedom), we had to wait 60 minutes before being paroled from our parking prison. We got out of our parking space very quickly but literally did not move while in line for more than 30 minutes. I didn't hear many horns honking, but there were plenty of expletives flying through the fields of New Berlin.

And where were the attendants that helped guide cars to their parking spots in the first place hours earlier? Answer: nonexistent. They were sorely missing.

Kudos to one young man with initiative who went out on his own to do his best to direct traffic himself. He was hugely outnumbered, but I appreciated his willingness to take it upon himself to try to help others out of this traffic nightmare.

I urge future Sangamon County Fair officials (or county police) to lessen the impact of the gridlock that immediately follows the grandstand performance and the end of the carnival to make the entire fair experience more enjoyable.

James Martin  
Bloomington

### Officials allowed two men to stop baseball game

I bit my tongue as I watched the events unfold at Kiwanis Park on Friday, June 16, because I thought those directly involved had the situation under control. As it turned out, it was the ones who caused the problem that ultimately controlled the outcome.

Because of that fact I must express my opinion on the situation.

Briefly, here is what took place. A Kids First Sports baseball game was in progress when a man stood at the third base line fence and constantly spoke very loudly and inappropriately to the players and coaches of both teams, the umpires and the spectators.

The umpires came over and told him to settle down. They also warned him that if he continued he would be ejected. He continued and was ejected. The "who is in control?" battle then began. Eventually, the police were called to take control of the situation because it was obvious that two men were in control (One left the fence area and another stepped in).

The police arrived and spoke to everyone directly involved for, in my opinion, much longer than they should have. The two men were still in control by continuing to stop the game from being played. About an hour after play had been stopped, the game (along with the second game of the double header) was called off. The two men left victorious and celebrating. Everyone else left wondering how the police could allow this to happen.

Two men sent a message to a crowd, which included impressionable young teens, that they could behave in this manner and no one, not even the police, could usurp their control. Not even beginning to drive a vehicle onto the grass leading to the field was enough to warrant any consequences. Result: POLICE 0, TWO MEN won.

Steve Lomelino  
Springfield

## Prepare for turbulence ahead in China

**BELJING** — With President Bush on the ropes, the most important person in the world right now may well be President Hu Jintao as he presides over 1.3 billion people and the rise of China.

But while China is one of the great successes on the world scene, Hu increasingly looks like a loser.

He has disappointed many Chinese intellectuals and Communist Party officials with his Brezhnevian approach to political reform.

Former President Jiang Zemin and former Prime Minister Zhu Rongji are among the party officials who are said by insiders to be unhappy with Hu's reign.

Hu has a brilliant mind and is pragmatic in economics and diplomacy, managing both well. But in politics he has been a throwback to the ideologues of the past (like his own patron, Song Ping), and he has attempted to tug China backward by clamping down on the news media, law, religion and the Internet.

China now imprisons some 32 journalists, more than any country in the world. A religious crackdown has led to underground Christians being arrested and sometimes tortured, particularly in rural areas. And China has tried harder than almost any country to neuter the Internet by filtering out obscene words like "human rights."

And yes, it is personal. I spent Friday outside the Beijing No. 2 Intermediate People's Court, as a New York Times colleague, Zhao Yan, was enduring a

farfetched secret trial on Hu's orders. Zhao, a researcher in The Times' Beijing bureau, already has been imprisoned virtually incommunicado for the last 22 months, and he may now face a decade or more in prison.

I was allowed into the courthouse by mistake — I drove through the gate with two colleagues, and nobody stopped us when we walked in — and it's a gorgeous building with more magnificent courtrooms than I've ever seen in the United States. But the courthouse was mostly empty, and finally we found out why: People aren't allowed in the People's Court. A group of indignant plainclothes police officers swarmed in and herded us outside.

The courthouse is a perfect symbol of Hu's vision of China today: a dazzling building with lavish facilities, but empty in every sense. It's all infrastructure, no software. It's as if Hu thinks that building a modern judicial system is about high ceilings and padded seats rather than about laws and justice.

The trial was conducted in secret, and we didn't even get a glimpse of Zhao. The trial ended in one day without a single witness giving testimony for either side. The verdict will be handed down soon, and it's almost a foregone conclusion that Zhao will be sent to prison for a long sentence.

This case originally arose after Hu was irritated by a scoop by The Times' Beijing bureau chief, Joseph Kahn, and ordered that the leaker be punished. The State Security authorities couldn't find the real source, so they arrested Zhao instead because they didn't like

his reporting about rural unrest.

I'm still a believer in China, partly because Hu and his aides have managed the economy so well.

Hu also has done well in canceling the agriculture tax and taking other measures to try to address the destabilizing income gaps in China (there, 1 percent of the population now controls 60 percent of the wealth, whereas in the U.S., 5 percent controls 60 percent of the wealth).

Yet ultimately, Hu's efforts to create stability by clamping down just risk more instability. Most Chinese don't want upheavals, but they are fed up with corruption and lies, with being blocked from Google and Wikipedia, with having to waste time studying political drivel like Hu's "Eight Honorables and Eight Shames" campaign. Wags call it "Hu shuo ba dao," a clever pun that translates as "utter nonsense."

Indeed, Hu's crackdown has been singularly ineffective, annoying people more than scaring them. Many Communist Party officials worry that crackdowns just anger and alienate the public; that is why some have talked of allowing people to let off steam through greater freedom of the press and more elections. In one province, a poll found that 85 percent of officials themselves wanted to speed up political reform.

But Hu seems paralyzed, altogether the weakest Chinese leader since Hua Guofeng in the 1970s. The result? Brace yourself for turbulence ahead in China.

Nicholas Kristof is a columnist for The New York Times.

## Earmarks not going away soon

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Jeff Flake, a 44-year-old third-term Republican congressman from Mesa, Ariz., last Wednesday burnished his credentials as "Miss Uncongeniality" in the House of Representatives. He introduced 12 amendments to the Transportation-Treasury-HUD appropriations bill removing earmarks of individual House members, including two by chief appropriator Jerry Lewis. All of Flake's efforts failed.



ROBERT NOVAK

That brought to 26 earmarks unsuccessfully proposed by Flake for removal from appropriations bills since May 24. There was no close vote and no serious debate. Republican and Democratic leaders alike voted to preserve earmarks. Ironically, the House Budget Committee on Wednesday approved a line-item veto enabling President Bush to eliminate earmarks.

Why would Republican leaders who vote for earmarks support the line-item veto? One explanation is that the presidential veto may lose on the floor Thursday. But even if it survives, would Bush risk antagonizing lawmakers who dispose of his spending requests? He could be caught up in the climate of intimidation causing House members to vote against Flake's amendments for fear their districts will be deprived of federal largesse. This is classic logrolling.

Flake last week asked why taxpayers nationwide should be levied \$1.5 million for the William Faulkner Museum in Oxford, Miss., (affirmed in a voice vote) or \$250,000 to turn the Strand Theater in Plattsburgh, N.Y., into a performing arts center (affirmed 366 to 61).

While Flake had dozens of earmarks he could challenge on the floor, he chose two submitted by Appropriations Committee Chairman Lewis: \$500,000 for swimming pool renovations in Banning, Calif. (affirmed 365 to 61), and \$500,000 for a Crafton Hills College athletic facility in Yucaipa, Calif. (affirmed 368 to 58).

On the day before these votes, Lewis was reported by Roll Call newspaper to have hired a Los Angeles white-collar criminal lawyer, Robert Bonner, to represent him in a federal investigation of his connection with a lobbying firm specializing in congressional earmarks. That did not inhibit Lewis from taking the House floor to browbeat Flake with the appropriators' theme song: "(Flake) seems to have much more confidence in bureaucrats downtown than he has in the members of the House."

On the day after these votes, reform Republicans in Congress were startled by a report in the Chicago Sun-Times, based on research by the Sunlight Foundation, that House Speaker Dennis Hastert earned \$2 million by the 2005 sale of land he purchased in 2004. Hastert last July earmarked \$207 million as the first appropriation for the proposed Prairie Parkway, located 5.5 miles from the property purchased by the speaker.

Earmarks increasingly are the source of corruption and ethical transgressions on both sides of the aisle in Congress. Yet the cardinals defend the practice, which has grown exponentially during the 12-year Republican majority. They argue that their constituents want pork, not reform.

There are Republican lawmakers who vote against the Flake amendments to keep their districts from losing federal funding. Appropriators stalk the House, taking names of colleagues who dare disrupt logrolling. Every time, however, a coterie in the House votes against pork. Their ranks include conservative reformers Jeb Hensarling of Texas, Mike Pence of Indiana, John Shadegg of Arizona and Paul Ryan of Wisconsin. They can kiss goodbye goodies for their districts.

At Charlie Palmer's restaurant last Wednesday, assembled Republican campaign contributors cheered as John Boehner was introduced as the majority leader who never has sponsored an earmark. Later that day, Boehner voted against each of Flake's attempted earmark removals. In the House, one conservative reformer commented to another seated beside him, "With this leadership, we never will get rid of earmarks."

Robert Novak writes for Creators Syndicate.