

High court and same-sex rites

Yesterday it was Hillary Clinton. Friday it was Sen. Rob Portman of Ohio and, before that, Bill Clinton, Barack Obama, Joe Biden and even Dick Cheney. What they have in common is that each has come out in support of same-sex marriage.

The six are also all former or current elected officials, and, in some cases, may want to be in the future. So some measure of political calculation no doubt figured in their epiphanies. But whatever the motivation, their current views on the subject mirror the rapidly changing sentiments of the American people.

In a new ABC News-Washington Post poll, 58 percent said gay and lesbian couples should be able to wed, up from 36 percent a decade ago. Same-sex marriage is now legal in nine states, including Maryland, Maine and Washington, where voters approved the unions in November.

As it weighs two cases on gay rights this term, the U.S. Supreme Court should note the dramatic shift in public opinion and seize the opportunity to rule that the choice of same-sex couples to marry is a constitutional right.

One case asks whether the Defense of Marriage Act — which defines marriage as the union of one man and one woman — violates the Constitution by denying people in same-sex marriages federal spousal benefits, such as Social Security survivors payments and exemption from estate taxes. The other challenges the validity of a referendum in California that amended the state constitution to take away the right of same-sex couples to marry, a right that had been granted by the state courts.

Sixty-four percent of respondents in the recent poll want the issue of same-sex marriage resolved based on the Constitution rather than state by state. Cue the court. **N**

Consider how school sale would help community

As school districts on Long Island deal with declining enrollments, closing and selling schools will become a big issue. It ought to be done in ways that gain the most revenue for districts, to further their mission of educating public school students.

In the Lawrence school district, where elementary school enrollment dropped 10 percent from 2005 to 2010, voters face a referendum tomorrow on whether to sell an elementary school building for \$12.5 million. The school board voted to accept this high bid in January.

The proposed buyer, Simone Healthcare Development Group, plans to convert the facility into medical offices for about 60 doctors. The building was the newest and largest of Lawrence's elementary schools. In addition to the purchase price, this sale would put the property back on the tax rolls, generating about \$1 million a year, \$600,000 of which would go to the district.

Yet there is opposition because some board members preferred a \$10.5-million bid that would turn the facility into a girls yeshiva, though this would keep it off the property tax rolls. Opponents of the top bid argue that medical offices aren't conducive to the neighborhood, but medical offices create less hubbub than schools. Regardless, it's a question best left to the Town of Hempstead, which would need to approve a zoning change for medical offices.

Lawrence is a complicated district in which many children attend private religious school, including the children of some board members. This has led to a sense that some of those board members aren't entirely motivated by dedication to public education. But this is a simple vote, as it should be in any district that finds itself selling assets. The best move for the district and the children it serves is approving the sale of this school to the highest bidder, for its taxable use, and that's how voters ought to cast their ballots. **N**

Newsday "Where there is no vision, the people perish."

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LETTERS

Groups merge to assist veterans

With veteran suicides on the rise, and the need for improved access to mental health care making headlines for very different reasons, the article "The war after the war" [News, March 17] is very timely.

The number of people affected by mental health concerns during a lifetime is about 1 in 4, and that is among the general population. You add military service to that, and the grueling experiences that lie on the shoulders of military personnel and veterans, and the ratio must certainly be higher.

Recently, the Mental Health Association in Suffolk, Suffolk County United Veterans and Clubhouse of Suffolk have merged, in part because we recognize that the needs of these groups often overlap. Together,

these organizations are forming an advisory board to talk about what is needed to help those on Long Island.

There are still policy issues, coverage shortfalls for substance abuse care and issues with program accessibility that prevent veterans from getting the timely help they need.

*Kristie Golden
Smithtown*

Editor's note: The writer is the board president of the Mental Health Association in Suffolk County.

LI is sadly in denial about heroin use

I read with great disappointment your articles "Deadly turn to heroin" and "Antidote seen as lifesaving" [News, March 11].

My disappointment was not with the reporting, but because opiate and opioid substance abuse has not

been sufficiently addressed by policy-makers. Greater numbers of heroin overdose deaths should not be a surprise, and can be expected to increase, if authorities are correct in their assessment that a dwindling supply of prescription pain medication from illegal sources is driving the switch to heroin.

Newsday reports that 110 people on Long Island died from heroin overdoses in 2012. Based on Long Island's population, the deaths are about four times the national average.

Suffolk County Legis. Kara Hahn (D-Setauket) should be acknowledged for her efforts in bringing addiction to the attention of the public by introducing a bill to require the county health department to refer those treated with naloxone to addiction treatment centers.

In 1998, following an extraordinary increase in

Politics complicate the facts of rape

Ohio case shows how Internet-fueled emotion could hurt victim and suspects



Cathy Young

The sexual assault case that made the small city of Steubenville, Ohio, the center of national attention has ended in a well-deserved conviction for the two defendants. It has also shed a spotlight on some disturbing “boys will be boys” attitudes toward sex and consent that still infect our culture. But the Steubenville story and the response to it should also remind us that a noble cause, such as defending victims, can generate zealotry rife with its own potential dangers.

There is no question that the defendants Trent Mays, 17, and Ma’Lik Richmond, 16, committed sexual acts on a 16-year-old girl so severely intoxicated as to be barely conscious at times — and that consent is not possible under such circumstances. This was supported by ample evidence, including eyewitness’ statements and text messages from at least one of the young men.

The reaction to the case of many Steubenville residents who blamed the girl and sympathized with the boys — star players on the high school football team — points both to lingering sexism (a “loose” woman is seen as fair game) and the ugly side of athlete worship. The fact that other teenagers witnessed the acts and did not interfere — and even took photos and videos that were disseminated online — is equally troubling.

The verdict by Juvenile Court Judge Thomas Lipps sent a strong message that this is unacceptable conduct. In another welcome move, Ohio Attorney General Mike DeWine has announced an investigation targeting other teens and adults who may be involved in a cover-up.

But many of the activists who championed the victim in the on-line media have engaged in their own problematic conduct, which the verdict does not justify. Though they exposed real problems, they also circulated unsubstantiated claims about the victim being deliberately set up for gang rape, and about



AP PHOTO/THE PLAIN DEALER, LISA DEJONG

Anonymous protesters outside the Jefferson County Justice Center and Jail in Steubenville, Ohio, last week.

other alleged multiple assailants and accomplices.

Likewise, many feminist activists and bloggers who have made Steubenville the latest emblem of America’s “rape culture” have often promoted their own brand of sexism, in which any man or boy accused of a sex crime is presumed guilty. The unfortunate truth is that — particularly in cases involving young, reckless, intoxicated people — the facts can be very difficult to sort out. Incapacitation clearly rules out consent; but if every person who has sex when

his or her judgment is alcohol-impaired is a victim, millions of men and women alike should be behind bars. To treat only men and boys as responsible while under the influence is not only unfair to them, it’s patronizing toward women and girls.

The mix of sexual politics and online vigilantism can lead to a lynch-mob mentality that gravely undermines the presumption of innocence — a cornerstone of justice that some feminist crusaders openly scorn. A few years ago, Wendy Murphy, a former sex crimes prosecutor and law

professor at the New England School of Law, declared, “I’m really tired of people suggesting that you’re somehow un-American if you don’t respect the presumption of innocence, because you know what that sounds like to a victim? Presumption you’re a liar.”

As it happens, Murphy was talking about an accusation of rape against members of the Duke University lacrosse team that was later exposed as a hoax — after three young men spent a year fighting false charges and being stigmatized as rapists. Today, the ubiquity of social media could make such wrongful accusations even more damaging.

Thanks to the women’s movement, we have seen major gains in the treatment of rape victims. Yet even in the 1970s, pioneering feminist legal scholar Vivian Berger, now a Columbia University emerita law professor, cautioned against “sacrificing legitimate rights of the accused person on the altar of Women’s Liberation.” It is a warning we should heed.

Cathy Young is a regular contributor to Reason magazine and Real Clear Politics.

emergency medical responses to heroin overdoses, I was asked to speak at a local school district drug and alcohol awareness seminar. It is disappointing that after 15 years, no discernible progress seems to have been made.

Anthony E. Conrard
Centereach

Editor’s note: The writer is the paramedic program director for the North Shore-LIJ Health Center’s Emergency Medical Institute.

Nassau should halt worker wage freeze

Last week, the Nassau Interim Finance Authority voted to continue the wage and salary freeze for county workers [“Freeze to continue, board says,” News, March 15]. This action gives County Executive Edward Mangano all the power he needs to place the brunt of sacrifice squarely on the backs of county workers.



NEWSDAY PHOTO / J. CONRAD WILLIAMS JR.

The Nassau Interim Finance Authority board meets last week to extend the county worker wage freeze.

The freeze supposedly saved the county \$40 million a year. Where’s the money? NIFA projects bigger deficits for the coming fiscal year than last year, so how is the freeze helping?

Instead of diligently and responsibly fixing the financial corruption brought on the county by this administration and all previous administra-

tions, Mangano is only interested in re-election. He promised to fix the broken assessment system, but he has failed to deliver. His sewer deal does nothing to solve any problem Nassau has now. The county’s so-called budget surplus is pie in the sky.

Last month, a federal judge ruled against NIFA, saying that the police wage freezes were il-

legal. But Mangano continues to waste taxpayer dollars on appeals. Shortly after that, a judge ruled against the county trying to pass the cost of tax refunds to the school districts. When is enough enough?

County workers are not the problem. We are members of the voting public.

Ebbie Kurian
Merrick

Editor’s note: The writer is a correction officer for Nassau County.

Some flooding fears are overblown

Making smart rebuilding decisions requires understanding of the real reasons that water has submerged our streets lately [“For sale (as is),” News, March 17].

Targeting low-lying communities, elevating homes and driveways, and modernizing storm drains will transition future large coastal storms from

expensive human catastrophes into simple inconveniences.

Most of us have never seen a winter with more large coastal storms and flooding. Yet Long Islanders have become hardened into thinking that if we didn’t lose power for 10 days, get two feet of snow, or have to wait on gas lines for three weeks, it must not have been a big storm.

The nor’easter that hit on March 7 was big, and it flooded 1,000 miles of coastline from the mid-Atlantic to Massachusetts. Assertions that there is a localized flood factor from the Old Inlet breach is a misdiagnosis that could lead to improper treatment and irresponsible spending of money desperately needed elsewhere.

Carl LoBue
Cold Spring Harbor

Editor’s note: The writer is a senior marine scientist at The Nature Conservancy on Long Island, an environmental protection organization.