

# VIEWPOINT

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## The Beacon News

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We reserve the right to edit letters and to use them in any publication, digital form, or any service we offer.

## First Amendment thoughts

**"As long as our government is administered for the good of the people, and is regulated by their will; as long as it secures to us the rights of persons and of property, liberty of conscience and of the press, it will be worth defending."**  
Andrew Jackson

**"Where the press is free and every man able to read, all is safe."**  
Thomas Jefferson

## OUR VIEW

# A promise made needs to be kept

**T**hey made a promise. Aurora Mayor Tom Weisner and developer Jamie Bigelow stood before East Aurora School Superintendent Jerome Roberts two months ago and pledged a gift of 8.3 acres to the district. The timing of the announcement just days before a council vote made it clear this donation was a trade-off for supporting a Bigelow Home development on property that had been home to the Hi-Lite 30 outdoor theater.

We supported the plan. The donation represented an unrequired gift to the School District on top of the increased tax base that development will bring, and we were happy to see the district get the financial help it sorely needs.

Our concern here is with the politics behind the donation and with the way the deal has played out.

The 8.3-acre pledge was made at a made-for-the-media event and in a subsequent press release. It was a promise made, but not a promise kept.

Both the mayor's office and the developer say the donation likely won't be 8.3 acres after all. This is like the parent who tells his kid he will get a bag of candy, only to say later the bag will be short a handful or two. The treat is still sweet, but a little disappointing.

Bigelow Homes owner Perry Bigelow and his attorney said this week the public and the City Council shouldn't hold them to that 8.3-acre figure. And why not? Because the proposed size of the land donation was "approximate" and "depends on the plan that the council approves." To be clear, this was the first time anyone associated with this project publicly questioned the size of the donation.

Weisner said arriving at the 8.3-acre figure was as simple as a case of bad math. Blame the city. Blame him, he says.

The truth is the configuration of the available land at Hill Avenue and Montgomery Road would have made the 8.3-acre donation impractical, if not impossible, even before Bigelow turned in its development plans.

Yet the city insisted all along the figure was accurate despite repeated inquiries. That is, until this week, some 68 days after the donation was first announced.

They said 8.3 acres. Now it's something less, although nobody is saying what that something will be. There are some in the East Aurora School District who are disappointed — like that kid promised the bag of candy — and rightfully so. They have a stake in this promise, too.

The district, the city and Bigelow Homes need to make sure the spirit of this promise is kept. The School District should get the land or a cash equivalent.

There is nothing in writing that binds Bigelow to the donation turned pledge. While we believe the developer and the city are acting in good faith, both parties need to learn from their mistake and set in stone exactly what the School District will receive in this deal.

That information should be made available — to the City Council and to the public — before aldermen vote on the Hometown Farnsworth subdivision plan.

## VISUAL PERSPECTIVE



## COMMON SENSE

# When will they be Americans?

**A**t a new employee orientation session titled "Valuing Diversity," my fellow co-workers and I were asked to briefly offer some information on our personal ethnicity and traditions. What followed was a laundry list of ancestry, countries of origin, dates of immigration, ports of settlement and family-favorite foods. Faintly, I began to smell warm latkes, see the building of the Great Wall of China and hear the beat of tribal drums thumping in time. Then it was my turn to answer.

My great-grandparents traveled from Ireland to America in 1937. With the end of the Great Depression near, they sought economic opportunity and freedom in a country still in its infancy and arrived in New York with \$2 and big dreams.

My great-grandfather's cousin, Jameson, and his wife were headed to Chicago, and they urged my great-grandparents to join them. They settled on the south side of the city where my great-grandfather worked to help create Chicago's first subway and earn enough money to feed his six children. My great-grandmother spent her days raising good people in a rough neighborhood and is rumored to be the inventor of our family's recipe for soda bread.

That's what I would have like to have answered, except that it's not true ... or at least not the whole truth.

In truth, my blood swirls with the long lost memory of most Anglo-Saxon provinces and a smidge of something exotic. I have the green eyes and namesake of a true Irish woman, a nose and mouth often

placed as Lithuanian and the flat cheekbones of Native Americans. And so, when it was my turn to comment on my personal ethnicity, I stated, "I'm a bit of a mutt."

I am a conglomerate of so much varied heritage. I'm one-eighth this and one-sixteenth that. But nearly four full generations of my family have been established right here in America — not some far-off country. I've begun to wonder, is it even healthy to define myself by the stories and lives of my family who lived 100 or more years ago? As time passes and my children and their children are asked about heritage, when will they simply be Americans?

Don't get me wrong here. I do, indeed, place value on knowing where I come from. But I've realized that what this "Valuing Diversity" session was missing were the more recent bio-historical remarks about our flag-waving, Coca-Cola drinking, civil-rights advocating grandparents and parents. Their stories should count, too, and so should mine.

Of this I am certain; most of my traditions and beliefs are innately American. My dress — American; my food — American; my language — American (OK, Americanized English).

Unfortunately, in today's cynical world, openly displaying American pride often conjures up images of war veterans, the newly immigrated, or grade school essay contests. However, as intercontinental relations continue to be strained and the membership of America's fan club is falling all over the globe, perhaps it's more important than ever to embrace our recent past and add American to our laundry lists of personal descriptors. I am an American "mutt," and I'm proud.

*Erin Sullivan-Shaffer lives in Plano. She can be reached at miangary@aol.com.*



Erin Sullivan-Shaffer

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### No thanks to school

Regarding East Aurora School Board member Juanita Wells' letter about an upcoming education fund referendum ("East schools need voters' help," Aug. 11): Ms. Wells "thanks" those who worked on the 1993 education referendum. The 1993 referendum passed by three votes after 27 years of voters saying no. I was PTA Council president then and helped organize phone trees, voting registrars and speakers that came to local PTA meetings to discuss the referendum. My children even helped in the referendum effort.

Her "thanks" ring hollow when you know she is a part of the same School Board that is driving us out of our home. East Aurora voters passed a referendum amount that we all thought would be equitable to all of us homeowners, but the only one who got a fair price was the School Board president. The rest of us were offered a much lower amount. Enough money is there that would have allowed us to buy a comparable home in a comparable neighborhood, but the School Board did not offer anyone else the fair amount they gave the board president.

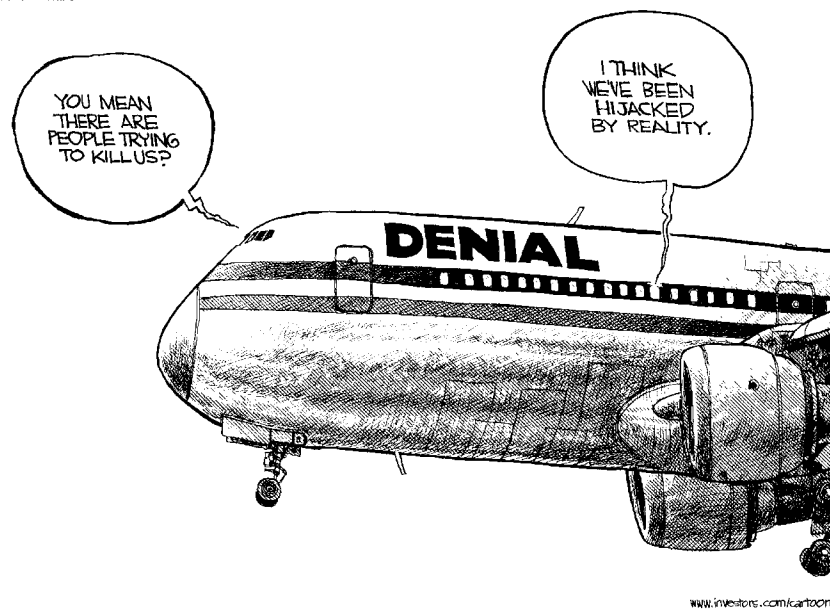
My husband and I put our kids through the East Aurora schools and volunteered a lot of time at the schools. We didn't do this expecting any rewards, but we also never expected that the school would now treat us so badly. As they say, actions speak louder than words and "thanks" doesn't make up for how you're hurting us.

**Katherine Russell**  
Aurora

### Laesch listens to issues

I attended the immigration town hall meeting recently held by Democratic candidate for U.S. Congress John

MIKE TILKOWSKI



Laesch. It originally was supposed to be a debate with Dennis Hastert, but since Mr. Hastert is absent at everything else having to do with his constituents, why should he attend an event where he could actually hear what they have to say on an important issue? Immigration affects everyone in this country whether they realize it or not.

Having a representative who really does not listen to or truly represent his constituents' beliefs is like not having one at all. At the town hall meeting, Mr. Laesch listened and took notes on everyone's opinions. How many current congressmen and women do that? I know Mr. Laesch cares about the opinions of the people in this district and that is why I support him. If Mr. Hastert will not even make an effort to listen to his constituents (which should be his most important job), then I will vote for John

Laesch, because I know he will. And by the way, where was Mr. Hastert?  
**Laura Glesing**  
Yorkville

### One war at a time

We read in The Beacon News from time to time of readers' desires to get more good news. Maybe this is because the Republican administration in Washington has brought us so much bad news.

Mr. Bush and his advisers are always eager to tackle the world's problems. The trouble is that they think they can solve problems by making them bigger. They got a military victory in Afghanistan, but then they neglected Afghanistan — and bin Laden — to send our guys into Iraq. They toppled Sadaam Hussein like a head then idol but thus unleashed Syria and Iran. Now Bad News Bush seems to be

eyeing Syria and Iran and perhaps Lebanon for further deployments.

May I suggest, before the next war, that Blundering Bush look at the population figures for the Middle East. I know that our guys will take on overwhelming odds — but why? As the poet wrote of the Crimean War: "Theirs not to make reply, theirs not to reason why ... " "Someone had blundered."

And as the founder of the Republican Party said during the Civil War when the warhawks wanted to go to war with Great Britain: "Let us have one war at a time."

**John Heinz**  
Aurora

### On party criticism

I've gotta disagree with Brad Alexander yet again. Says Brad in his recent OpenLine call: "... where are the Tom Cross' and the rest of the Republican Party members when it comes to our president's out-of-control spending? And our federal bureaucracy growing at an ever increasing rate under the Republican Party? And the wild spending that the Republicans in charge on Capitol Hill are doing? When are they going to start challenging that?"

Brad, I'm sick of it, and from what I've heard, I am far from alone in this sentiment. A lot of us wonder if the only thing that has any chance of waking up those in power in the Republican party might be a huge loss on election day. Music to your ears, eh?

By the way, when you say, "Oh, that's right, I forgot, you can't criticize your own party members. That's the new rule, that's the 11th commandment handed down by Ronald Reagan." Ever hear of a guy named Joe Lieberman, Brad?

**John Babush**  
Big Rock