Letters to the Editor
July 16, 2011

Jefferson's views on public debt

Leonard Boasberg wrote on Monday about his opposition to a balanced-budget amendment ("Balanced-budget amendment: A path to economic ruin"). He notes the lack of a balanced-budget comment in the Federalist Papers. He also argues that government borrowing is not different from citizens' borrowing in order to buy a home or an automobile.

What he fails to note is that such loans are amortized, whereas the government sells interest-bearing notes. If the government would finance by selling amortization notes, that alone would act as a break against runaway government spending. Perhaps he should have quoted Thomas Jefferson, who wrote that "it is incumbent on every generation to pay its own debts as it goes" and that "the democracy will cease to exist when you take away from those who are willing to work and give to those who would not."

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Schools often crucial to students' health

Regarding a letter on Sunday ("Hot meals don't make good students"), I am also familiar with what it was like in this country after World War II. It was a period of unprecedented prosperity, job growth, stable housing, and safe schools that produced students who could enter the job market with the expectation that their lives would be better than their parents'. Most families at that time had two parents in the home.

None of this is true today, which is why the breakfasts and lunches that the poorest students receive are often the only decent food they get. This is not about test scores and attendance. It's about the health of these young people.

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Proving the odds can be overcome

I was moved by Kevin Harden Jr.'s story as recounted on July 4 ("From defendant to prosecutor in seven years"). I was moved not only by his triumph, but also by what he had to overcome to succeed.
For some, it may be difficult to muster up sympathy for the person Harden was as a youth. He was arrested seven times in three years - including for dealing drugs. But it is crucial to understand the reasons behind his criminal past and the ways it could have been prevented.

That is why our foundation awards fellowships to practitioners who work alongside and inside government and other systems to more effectively help vulnerable children and their families before their lives unravel. Our fellows work to find solutions that can help more kids have an outcome like Harden's.

I also applaud District Attorney Seth Williams for understanding young people deserve second chances. As Frederick Douglass said, "It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men."

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Professor's sad tale best left private

I was appalled after reading the article by Michael Vitez about Marian Filar ("Aging professor's students help him recall the rhythms," July 7). As a former student of Filar's, I remember him as a brilliant, demanding teacher whose artistry and technique were impeccable. I felt sick after reading in detail, complete with photographs and video, about his struggles with dementia.

This was an invasion of his privacy, and did not belong on the front page, or any page, of The Inquirer. Those of us who loved and revered Marian Filar would much rather remember him not as a deteriorating old man, but as the wonderful pianist who inspired his students to reach for the stars, and as the hero of his autobiography, From Buchenwald to Carnegie Hall.

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Marijuana no worse than alcohol, tobacco

While I do not specialize in psychiatry or addiction medicine, I would like to comment on a July 8 letter, "Serious issues remain concerning marijuana." With respect to significant impairment of motor and cognitive abilities and the adverse consequences on the developing brain, the same may be said of alcohol. As for effects on the respiratory system, marijuana is probably no worse than tobacco. As for marijuana's being a gateway drug to other addictions, consider again alcohol and tobacco.

I am not attempting to make a case for the legalization of marijuana, but I feel that some form of intelligent regulation rather than criminalization for possession would be more in order.

Lester H. Wurtele, M.D.
Wyncote

Further praise for DeBernardinis

Karen Heller's praise for Mike DeBernardinis was well-deserved ("A rec-center resurrection," Sunday).
When he was Recreation Department chief under Mayor Ed Rendell and I needed Mann Music Center concert tickets, provided free by the department, I would call Mike at any hour, knowing he'd answer his own phone. Accessibility goes a long way toward success in public service. It's easy to understand why all the city's pools are open.

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**Pops concert great, but missed Ellington**

I hope the Philly Pops is able to survive the Philadelphia Orchestra's calamities and continue indefinitely as a city institution.

That said, I was more than disappointed that a recent concert celebrating American music featured only one composition by an African American ("I Will Survive").

Philadelphia is majority African American, and the United States is a country rich in black musical history. If there was room on the program for Glenn Miller, surely there was room for Duke Ellington.

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