

## Sunday's

## Editorials, Columns &amp; Letters

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## Paper 'n Ink:

Better times...

Lynn Brisendine

It's a tough, tough world out in the international arena. And this country has been playing an expensive game trying to keep bad guys from doing who knows what to our citizens, both outside and inside our borders.

We spend a lot of money on a daily basis buying friends who are quick to turn on us with the least provocation inside their own nations.

I, of course, am not privy to diplomatic information concerning some of these "friends" who take these dollars to allow us certain considerations in moving around their territories chasing some really bad guys.

We did this in an all out war to overturn a human monster, a dictator in every sense, while securing the countryside to round up and kill terrorists pledged to do us harm.

The Iraqi War took many United States military lives. Our Armed Forces also saw too many soldiers grievously wounded. Those facts are the most expensive price we paid to take down a really bad guy who controlled, at the time, the fourth largest armed force on this planet. Those lives given, and wounds that continue to cause problems, must be remembered as soldiers pay a high price in the cause to protect you, me and our families.

A high cost is added with the amount of treasure we have expended in these places so foreign to our way of living.

We left Iraq, at least we have removed the bulk of our forces. We continue to fund various Iraqi programs in an attempt to keep a "friendly" government on our side. As an aside, it has been reported many times that the Iraqi leadership has played both sides of the fence and courted the terroristic regime in Iran.

Now we are beginning the same procedure to extricate our troops from Afghanistan, a place where today's friend is possibly tomorrow's enemy. Too many U.S. casualties, both in lives lost and others irrevocably harmed, has been a high price in that rocky place filled with Taliban and heroine.

This war on terror, which we have fought since 9/11/01, has seen overt and covert operations in neighboring countries as well. Principally, those actions have taken place in Pakistan, another nation that loves to hate us, well everything about us other than our dollars.

Twelve years of war added to other expenses in these miserable places have seen us spend too much.

It will be interesting to see what bringing our men and women home while also cutting the huge expense will do for the United States.

So how much have we spent? I found this on a search engine this week. "The most recent major report on these costs come from Brown University in the form of the Costs of War project, which said the total for wars in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan is at least \$3.2-4 trillion."

Just for this year in Afghanistan alone (again from the quoted report above), "The Obama administration has largely stayed on course: after two years of congressionally budgeted assistance, around \$2 billion per year, the administration requested an increase -- to \$2.5 billion -- for fiscal year 2013."

To paraphrase and update an old D.C. saying, "a few billion here and a couple of trillion there, and pretty soon you're talking real money."

Leaving Afghanistan will take the bulk of our troops out of harm's way and that has to be the best of the deal. But, stopping the drain of significant expenses has to be an opportunity for this country.

Perhaps we can see budget cuts slowing the debt and funds being used to rebuild an aging, and in too many areas, damaged infrastructure we all depend on every day.

That being said, other bad guys continue to raise the specter of coming entanglements. Iran, North Korea, Syria, these also are bad actors on the international scene who mouth insults and threats on almost a daily basis.

Still, the time we have to bring our troops and money back to friendly territory may help us regain a robust economy.

## Making a Difference

By Gina Kelly Ellis

Do you spend much time looking around at the fields around us? It is the time of the year when the land is being plowed and getting ready for the next crop year. You drive around and you can see fields with neat furrows running the length of the field. The land is being cultivated to be made ready to be used for the next batch of seeds to be planted. Cultivate is a cool word. Cultivate means "to prepare to be used." You could also say that to cultivate something enhances its potential for improvement. If land is just left to lie after a crop, it will blow when the winds come. It will erode when (if) the rains come. I know that some of you are reading this and thinking about minimum tillage, but even with that, there is preparation that has to be done!

God wants to run the plow in your life. He wants to make your life more usable in His kingdom. He wants to be able to sow seeds in your life and know that they will produce. There is a verse in 1 Corinthians where Paul talks about how the plowman (or farmer) "ought to plow in hope of the threshers." What he is saying is that, as farmers plow their fields thinking about the crop that is to come followed by the harvest, so ought we to live our lives thinking about the harvest, or heaven, to come. I like that analogy. No farmer plows without thinking about what he is going to put there and nurture to harvest. In the same way, we need to be looking at our lives with an eye toward the future. Plow the fields that God has placed in front of you. You do this by following His direction in every area of your life. He has a plan for everything. Trust Him. Follow Him with your hand to the plow as He places people in your life who need to know Him. If you are plowing along, the seeds that are planted will grow and blossom and produce bountiful crops.

Also, allow God to plow in your life. He wants to cultivate you for fruitfulness. Allow Him to do this by listening for His voice, reading His Word, and spending time with His people. As you look around you at the tractors moving from one field to another or in the fields, kicking up dust, think about your own life as that field that needs plenty of cultivation by God to really make a difference in this world!



## Good Teams Not Always State Champs

Texas Journalist...by Willis Webb

Recently, there was an email that got my attention because a place where I invested a lot of time, effort and feelings — Jasper — was in second place.

It listed some of Texas best high school football programs that, while consistent winners, have never won a state championship. And, let's face it, every high school that fields a football team craves to win a state title.

There are five classes for state high school football and two divisions in each class (based on enrollment), making 10 state crowns possible, Class A through 5A. Greg Tepper, who wrote the story, is associate editor of Texas Football, the crown jewel of Dave Campbell's greatly successful sports publishing empire. The summer edition of the magazine each year details the aspirations, talent and background of every high school for the upcoming fall football season of this most revered sport in Texas.

Tepper's story dealt with high schools that are consistent winners, measured by state playoff appearances, but have never won a state championship.

Jasper's 41 appearances

without the brass ring garnered second place. The only Texas high school that has suffered more frustration than Jasper is Hondo with 47 forays into the playoffs with no state football crown.

Filling out the top 10 with Hondo and Jasper are Gregory-Portland, Alice, Freer, Rogers, Brenham, Harlingen, Childress and Holliday.

Another measure included in the analysis was all-time wins without a state title, which Hondo also leads with 654. Jasper, with 569 victories, tied for seventh with Brenham in those rankings.

Other top 10 schools are Harlingen, Ballinger, Sherman, Childress, Taylor, Cleburne and McGregor.

For the final 16 years of my newspaper career, I was treated to excellent football in Jasper where I published the Jasper Newsboy.

John Foster Dulles High in Fort Bend County, another school I was privileged to cover, made it to the state finals in 1964 only to be edged 7-6 by Rockwall, after leading 6-0 for much of the game. Dulles lost four early regular season games,

including one district game, before finding all the right combinations to win district, cruise through the playoffs and vault into the state finals where they gave a fierce battle to Rockwall before succumbing.

One player from that team played major college football. Ralph Senior, a defensive back, played at the University of Texas. Several others made it with smaller colleges. Obviously, Dulles was an extremely talented high school squad.

Those Dulles accomplishments came when the school district area was still beyond the choking grasp of Houston spillover, growth and urbanization of the once rural, agricultural area. Ralph grew up in a ranching family and I'm sure the chores he had helped his physical conditioning.

Jasper made it to the Class 3A finals in 2004 before being nudged 49-47 by Gilmer. Jasper had the ball and was rapidly driving down the field when the clock caught them and the game ascended into the "what if" category for Bulldog fans, a bittersweet memory. It also put a personal scare into me as my blood pressure went through

the roof and caused me to have to sit in the press box for a time after the game and let it go back down to something "feeling" normal before I dared get up and make my way out of the stands to my car.

One of the leaders on that Jasper team was linebacker Sean Weatherspoon, of late with the Atlanta Falcons of the National Football League after an All-American career at the University of Missouri. On top of his talent and fame, Sean is one of the nicest people you'll ever meet. Of course, opposing running backs, quarterbacks and receivers probably don't think Sean is such a nice guy because he can use his 250 pounds to figuratively take their head off.

Watching Texas high school football is a particular pleasure for me, and something I don't get to do very often any more. But, I still read about it in the newspapers with great relish.

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## Investing Money Sees Diversity as a Key Strategy... Some Helpful Ideas

By Jason Alderman

Ever wonder why Mom and Pop stores sell wildly unrelated products side by side, like umbrellas and sunglasses, or Halloween candy and screwdrivers? Customers probably would never buy these items on the same shopping trip, right?

That's exactly the point. By diversifying their product offerings, vendors reduce the risk of losing sales on any given day, since people don't usually buy umbrellas on sunny days or sunglasses when it rains.

The same diversification principle also applies in the investment world, where it's referred to as asset allocation. By spreading your assets across different investment classes (stock mutual funds, bonds, money market securities, real estate, cash, etc.), if one category tanks temporarily you may be at least partially protected by others.

You must weigh several factors when determining how best to allocate your assets:

Risk tolerance. This refers to your appetite for risking the loss of some or all of your original investment in exchange for greater potential rewards. Although higher-risk investments (like stocks) are potentially more

profitable over the long haul, they're also at greater risk for short-term losses. Ask yourself, would you lose sleep investing in funds that might lose money or fluctuate wildly in value for several years; or will you comfortably risk temporary losses in exchange for potentially greater returns?

Time horizon. This is the expected length of time you'll be investing for a particular financial goal. If you are decades away from retirement, you may be comfortable with riskier, more volatile investments. But if your retirement looms, or you'll soon need to tap college savings, you might not want to risk sudden downturns that could gut your balance in the short term.

Diversification within risk categories is also important. From a diversification standpoint it's not prudent to invest in only a few stocks. That's why mutual funds are so popular: They pool money from many investors and buy a broad spectrum of securities. Thus, if one company in the fund does poorly, the overall impact on your account is lessened.

Many people don't have the expertise — or time — to build a diversified investment portfo-

lio with the proper asset mix. That's why most 401(k) plans and brokerages offer portfolios with varying risk profiles, from extremely conservative (e.g., mostly treasury bills or money market funds) to very aggressive (stock in smaller businesses or in developing countries).

Typically, each portfolio is comprised of various investments that combined reach the appropriate risk level. For example, one moderately conservative portfolio offered by Schwab consists of 50 percent interest-bearing bond funds, 40 percent stocks and 10 percent cash equivalents. Usually, the more aggressive the portfolio, the higher percentage of stocks it contains (i.e., higher risk/higher reward).

Another possibility is the so-called "targeted maturity" or lifecycle funds offered by many 401(k) plans and brokerages.

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Jason Alderman directs Visa's financial education programs. To Follow Jason Alderman on Twitter: [www.twitter.com/PracticalMoney](http://www.twitter.com/PracticalMoney).