

commentary

from other pens...

Redrawn districts create desperate fights for survival

The redrawing of congressional boundaries each decade often creates desperate and divisive fights for political survival between incumbents that can test party loyalties and fray longtime relationships. It's particularly difficult when members of the same party face each other in a primary. Some members opt to run for other offices or retire to avoid facing a congressional colleague. "It invariably ratchets up the personal nature of the contest," political analyst Stuart Rothenberg said of battles between incumbents. "You're members of the same club. The personal overrides any other differences or issues that the candidates may have."

The primary race in Georgia between conservative GOP Reps. Bob Barr and John Linder is the battle that has drawn much of the attention. "It's pretty intense, it's pretty even and there's likely to be a good deal of collateral damage for all involved," Republican pollster Whit Ayres said of the contest over a newly redrawn district in suburban Atlanta. Political scientist Merle Black at Emory University in Atlanta agreed: "The race in Georgia has gotten really hot and rather nasty."

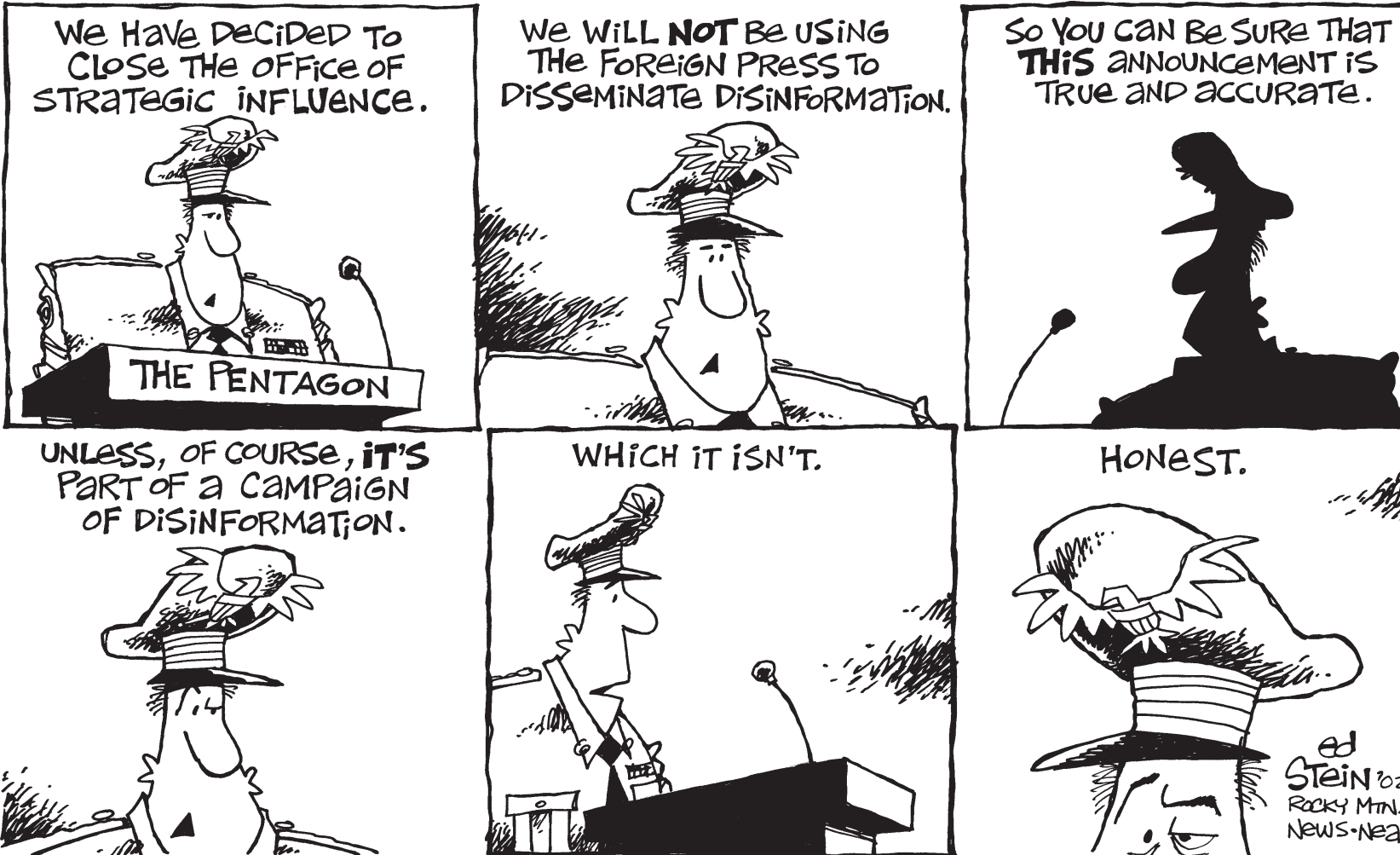
Barr describes the contest as a choice between an insider like Linder who stays in the background and votes conservative and someone who, like himself, who helps define the issues. Linder says people tell him the contest is like "choosing between a statesman and a politician."

The most closely watched race for Democrats is in a southeast Michigan district that stretches from Ann Arbor to the Detroit suburbs. Democratic Rep. John Dingell, the senior member of the House after serving almost five decades, has the backing of much of the party establishment, while Rep. Lynn Rivers, who entered Congress in 1994, has the support of several national women's groups.

"This is about who has done and will continue to do the best job representing the people of southeast Michigan," said Lon Johnson, campaign manager for Dingell, who was elected in 1955. Dingell, ranking member and former chairman of the House Energy and Commerce Committee, has support of much of the Democratic establishment. The Rivers campaign claims to have a stronger record in the environment, gun safety legislation and abortion rights, said Martha McKenna, a spokeswoman for Rivers, who's gotten endorsements and is likely to get money from women's groups that support abortion rights. Republican and Democratic incumbents are set to face each other in four districts on Nov. 5:

- Democrat Jim Maloney and Republican Nancy Johnson in Connecticut.
 - Democrat David Phelps and Republican John Shimkus in Illinois.
 - Democrat Ronnie Shows and Republican Chip Pickering in Mississippi.
 - Democrat Tim Holden and Republican George Gekas in Pennsylvania.
- In another district, freshman Republican Rep. Mark Kennedy of Minnesota has postponed a decision on whether he will face veteran Democrat Bill Luther or move to another district. As for intraparty battles, Democrats have the Michigan primary battle Aug. 6 and a primary contest May 21 in Pennsylvania between Reps. Frank Mascara and John Murtha. Two more Michigan Democrats, Dale Kildee and Jim Barcia, are in the same district, but haven't announced their plans pending resolution of the Michigan redistricting plan. At this point, Republicans have two primary battles of incumbents — the Georgia race Aug. 20 and another in Indiana on May 7 between Reps. Stephen Buyer and Brian Kerns. Final redistricting decisions may create more incumbent matchups in other states.
- The incumbent matchups within the same party are races usually take place when the opposing party controls a state's redistricting process. In Michigan, the Democratic delegation fought the redistricting that pairs Dingell and Rivers. Dingell campaign manager Johnson said: "The fact these two Democrats have to run against each other is a shame."

EDITOR'S NOTE — Will Lester covers politics and polls for The Associated Press.



Thoughts on aging

I don't know about you, but I'm still thinking about age. Last week I shared how I aged two years on my last birthday. Now I think I'll share these thoughts entitled "The Senility Prayer" by an unknown author: "God, grant me the senility to forget the people I never liked anyway, the good fortune to run into the ones I do, and the eyesight to tell the difference."

Isn't that great! Here's some more: "Now that I'm 'older' (but I refuse to grow up), here's what I've discovered: ONE - I started out with nothing, and I still have most of it. TWO - My wild oats have turned into prunes and All Bran. THREE - I finally got my head together; now my body is falling apart. FOUR -



lorna g. t.

• commentary

Funny, I don't remember being absent-minded. FIVE - All reports are in; life is now officially unfair. SIX - If all is not lost, where is it? SEVEN - It is easier to get older than it is to get wiser. EIGHT - Some days you're the dog; some days you're the hydrant. NINE - I wish the buck stopped here; I could use a few. TEN - Kids in the back seat cause accidents. ELEVEN - Accidents in the back seat cause - kids. TWELVE - It's hard to make a comeback when you haven't been anywhere. THIR-

Will priests accused of abuse be held accountable?

Catholic cardinals in Boston, Philadelphia, St. Louis and Los Angeles have admitted that dozens of priests have been credibly accused of sexually abusing children. In the mid-80s a similar outpouring of accusations resulted in a scandal that was eventually put to rest, but not for long. In the years since then, dioceses have forced priests accused of sex abuse to get treatment and have settled around 1,000 lawsuits out of court paying from a few thousand dollars to millions per victim. Some people have suggested the cause of widespread sex abuse committed by priests is the church's requirement that priests remain celibate. Others have said that pedophiles seek careers as priests, rabbis or teachers to have access to children.

Both arguments likely have merit, but the real cause is the lack of moral conviction among people today. The way many people are shocked and outraged at child sexual abuse is the way people used to feel about couples that had sex before marriage and about homosexuals. But those activities are now widely accepted. People who suggest that such actions are wrong are viewed as old-fashioned, repressed, narrow-minded, bigots even. The Bible says self-control results from having God's spirit active in your life at Galatians 5:22, 23 which says, "The fruitage of the spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faith, mildness, self-control."

Yet priests who should be leaders of their congregations and claim to be men of God have shown no self-control. Some actions are wrong no matter what urges a person feels. But few people will say that with conviction and fewer are eager to mete out fitting punishment to those who violate civil laws much less God's laws.

Romans 1:24-27 says, "God, in keeping with the desires of their hearts, gave them up to uncleanness, that their bodies might be dishonored among them. . . . God gave them up to disgraceful sexual appetites, for both their females changed the natural use of themselves into one contrary to nature; and likewise even the males left the natural use of the female and became violently inflamed in their lust toward one another, males with males, working what is obscene and receiving in themselves the full recompense, which was due for their error."



sharon corcoran

• use it or lose it

God allows people to choose for themselves whether to obey his laws but makes it very clear which practices he disapproves. 1 Corinthians 6:9, 10 says, "Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men kept for unnatural purposes, nor men who lie with men . . . will inherit God's kingdom."

The Bible is clear in saying some sexual practices are wrong and that those who practice them do not have God's approval. But many people feel they are better equipped to decide for themselves what is right and what is wrong. As time goes on, society becomes more permissive, more people engage in loose conduct, and more and more people join in. Jesus aptly described today's trends in Matthew 11:16, 17 when he said, "With whom shall I compare this generation? It is like children in the marketplaces who cry out to their playmates, saying, 'We played the flute for you, but you did not dance; we weiled, but you did not beat yourselves in grief.'"

As society continues to water down morality, how long will it be before adults having sex with children is an accepted practice? It is still illegal, but many people have been reluctant to encourage harsh punishments for such crimes especially when those who commit them are people "in high places," such as priests.

Another reason for a reluctance to punish criminals is the thinking that they have an excuse for what they have done — they are victims of circumstances beyond their control. But are they really? What excuse can there be for raping children? Why should the victims suffer and the offenders be handled with kid gloves?

We are all accountable for our actions before God, and He will not be fooled into thinking we have a good excuse when we do not. Hebrews 4:13 says, "And there is not a creation that is not manifest to his sight, but all things are naked and openly exposed to the eyes of him with

whom we have an accounting." God rightly expects us to be responsible for our own choices. If anyone wants to choose not to marry and to remain celibate, it is his right to do so. But if that is too difficult for someone, he should not just pretend to remain celibate while abusing children. 1 Corinthians 7:9 says, "But if they do not have self-control, let them marry, for it is better to marry than to be inflamed with passion."

The Bible does not say that only those who choose to remain celibate can serve him properly. Adam and Eve were told to "be fruitful and become many and fill the earth and subdue it" at Genesis 1:28. God gave them this command before they had sinned. They were perfect servants of God and were instructed to populate the planet which would certainly require that they have sex.

Some of Jesus' apostles were married and had families. The Bible contains instruction for single adults, married adults and children. All people are invited to serve God, not just those who stand at the front of a church with a fancy robe on.

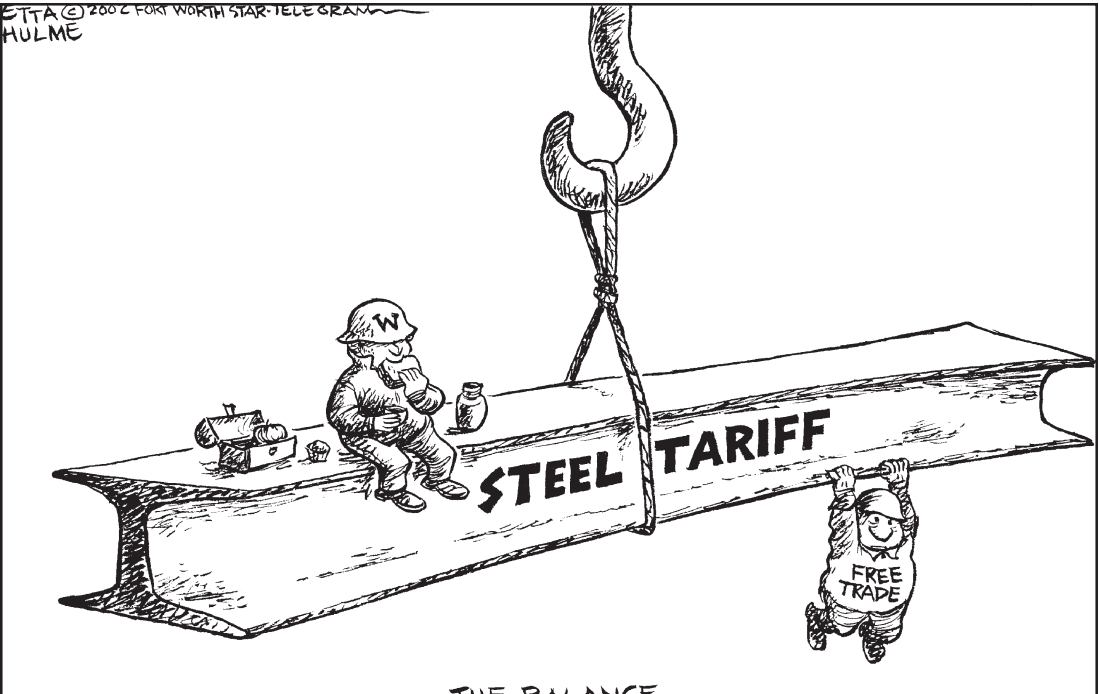
Likely there are many factors causing priests to sexually abuse children, but there is no excuse. What they are doing is wrong, and they deserve to be punished. If stricter punishments had been meted out when victims came forward before, it is likely there would be fewer victims now.

And when the Catholic church settles lawsuits, the money comes from the donations and from selling church property. The priests who committed these horrendous acts have not had to pay out of their own pockets.

It is shameful the lack of conviction concerning morality today. It would be even more shameful for further breakdowns to occur in the future.

Whether or not the priests who committed these horrible acts are held accountable in court or by their superiors in the church, they will be held accountable to God. And He knows they have no excuse.

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