

Give us the green light

...it's time to streamline traffic signals nationwide

Somewhere in the vast recesses of the federal government there has to be an office that parcels out assignments to various agencies to go out and prove that what is obvious to the rest of us is, in fact, really true.

A coalition of federal, state and private transportation groups has concluded after a survey of 378 traffic agencies in 49 states that the nation's traffic signals are badly timed and poorly coordinated.

We believe we speak for the rest of us when we say, yes, that's really true.

The study found that most agencies have no master plan for their traffic signals; they just set them and forget them until they break or burn out. It also found that most agencies didn't have the staff to monitor traffic signals outside of normal working hours, meaning the people who are supposed to fix the problem are probably stuck in rush-hour traffic with the rest of us. And most don't do routine reviews of their traffic signals more often than every three years.

In short, most cities don't know

whether their traffic lights are aiding or impeding traffic and have no way of finding out.

The ideal, of course, would be for metropolitan areas to have centralized traffic computers that automatically adjust traffic signals to handle the volume and coordinate signals on key arteries to speed the flow of traffic. Doing this nationwide would not be cheap; the coalition estimated it would cost something like \$965 million.

There would be benefits in the form of less pollution and fuel consumption, not to mention the savings in driver frustration and downtime spent commuting, all of which suggests a source of funding.

Congress is considering an \$88.9 billion energy bill that consists largely of tax breaks and subsidies for Big Energy and agribiz. Surely those companies wouldn't miss a measly \$965 million so the rest of us can get around town faster and thus conserve a little energy of our own.

Seems obvious.

Scripps Howard News Service

Red menace

...traumatizing kids with scarlet ink

We all know that America's children have easily bruised little psyches, but we didn't realize how fragile until Associated Press education writer Ben Feller checked in with this dispatch.

Parents at Daniels Farm Elementary School in Trumbull, Conn., objected to the teachers using red to mark and grade the kids' schoolwork. Red, they said, was "stressful." So now the teachers are prohibited from using red ink.

And Daniels Farm is not alone. Wrote Feller, "The color has become so symbolic of negativity that some principals and teachers will not touch it."

True, red is the color of danger, fire

engines and stoplights, but that's the whole point: The color demands attention. That's apparently a little too in-your-face for the younger generation.

Feller quoted one principal as telling his teachers to mark papers with "pleasant-feeling tones." The preferred "pleasant-feeling tone" for grading papers, it turns out, is purple, which he confirmed with pen manufacturers.

Maybe the little scholars are onto something. Perhaps the soaring federal deficit wouldn't be so alarming if we referred to "drowning in a sea of purple ink."

Scripps Howard News Service

CURRENT QUOTES

"Trees are good symbols for what you did. You can't forget the past of a tree. It's in the roots, and if you lose the roots you lose the tree. But the nature of the tree is to always reach for tomorrow. It's in the branches."

President Clinton, on the survivors of the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing and the relatives of those killed.

"They found his head one week, and his body another week. It's still too much to think about."

Juanita Espinosa, whose cousin, 2-year-old Zackary Chavez, was killed in the bombing.

WASHINGTON TODAY

Voinovich surprises all by derailing vote on U.N. nominee

By JAMES KUHNHENN
Knight Ridder Newspapers

WASHINGTON — Ohio's Sen. George Voinovich has a reputation as an unyielding fiscal hawk. The Republican once voted against a water spending bill because it cost too much, even though it included a number of Ohio projects.

He's made a name for himself in the Senate — for better or worse — for bucking President Bush on tax cuts, arguing that they would increase budget deficits.

But few expected him to become a Republican thorn on Bush's foreign policy. Yet, that was his burden on Wednesday, a day after he derailed a Senate committee vote on John Bolton, Bush's nominee for United Nations ambassador.

Voinovich is a slight man with a weathered face and an unassuming manner. But he has more political experience than most senators. He's been the mayor of Cleveland, the governor of Ohio and is now the senator from one of the most crucial states in presidential politics. During a Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearing Tuesday, Voinovich stunned Republicans and Democrats by announcing that he was reluctant to vote right then for Bolton after hearing a litany of Democratic complaints against Bolton's management style and claims that he's bullied and threatened underlings.

"We come down here and we do what our hearts and our consciences tell us to," he said afterward.

His decision put off a committee vote until next month and assured Democrats that committee staffers would continue to probe Bolton's background. It was an unexpected obstacle to what was already a rocky confirmation process for Bolton.

In a new sign of weakening support, another Republican member of the committee, Sen. Lincoln Chafee of Rhode Island, said on CNN Wednesday that Republican senators on the committee should discuss whether Bolton should withdraw his nomination.

Until Voinovich's move on Tuesday, all eyes had been on Chafee and Republican Chuck Hagel of Nebraska, both of whom had expressed some discomfort with Bolton.

But as soon as Voinovich began to speak, Sen. Joseph Biden of Delaware, the top Democrat on the committee, said he exclaimed to himself: "I forgot all about Voinovich!"

Voinovich, who managed large bureaucracies as mayor and governor, said later that he places a high premium on "interpersonal skills and how we treat each other."

Some Republicans bristled that Voinovich objected even though he hadn't attended the two committee hearings devoted to Bolton's nomination. Voinovich apologized for his absence, saying he had other commitments as chairman of another Senate panel. The White House reached out almost immediately.

"In terms of Senator Voinovich, I understand he wasn't able to attend the testimony last week by John Bolton," White House spokesman Scott McClellan said. "We are more than



happy to answer any questions that he has, and we are in touch with him about those matters."

One little-known conservative Web site announced it would run radio ads against Voinovich in Ohio.

Administration officials on Wednesday tried to shift the debate over Bolton away from his relationship with underlings and back to his views on how to change the United Nations.

In an interview with CNN, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said: "I think we make a mistake if suddenly comments about management style become part of the confirmation process."

But clearly that's a key subject with Voinovich. In 1999, as a freshman senator, Voinovich put a hold on Clinton's nominee for U.N. ambassador, Richard Holbrooke. Voinovich, who is of Serbian ancestry, had concerns about Holbrooke's views on the Balkans. But, as he said Tuesday, he also had heard that Holbrooke had a reputation for arrogance.

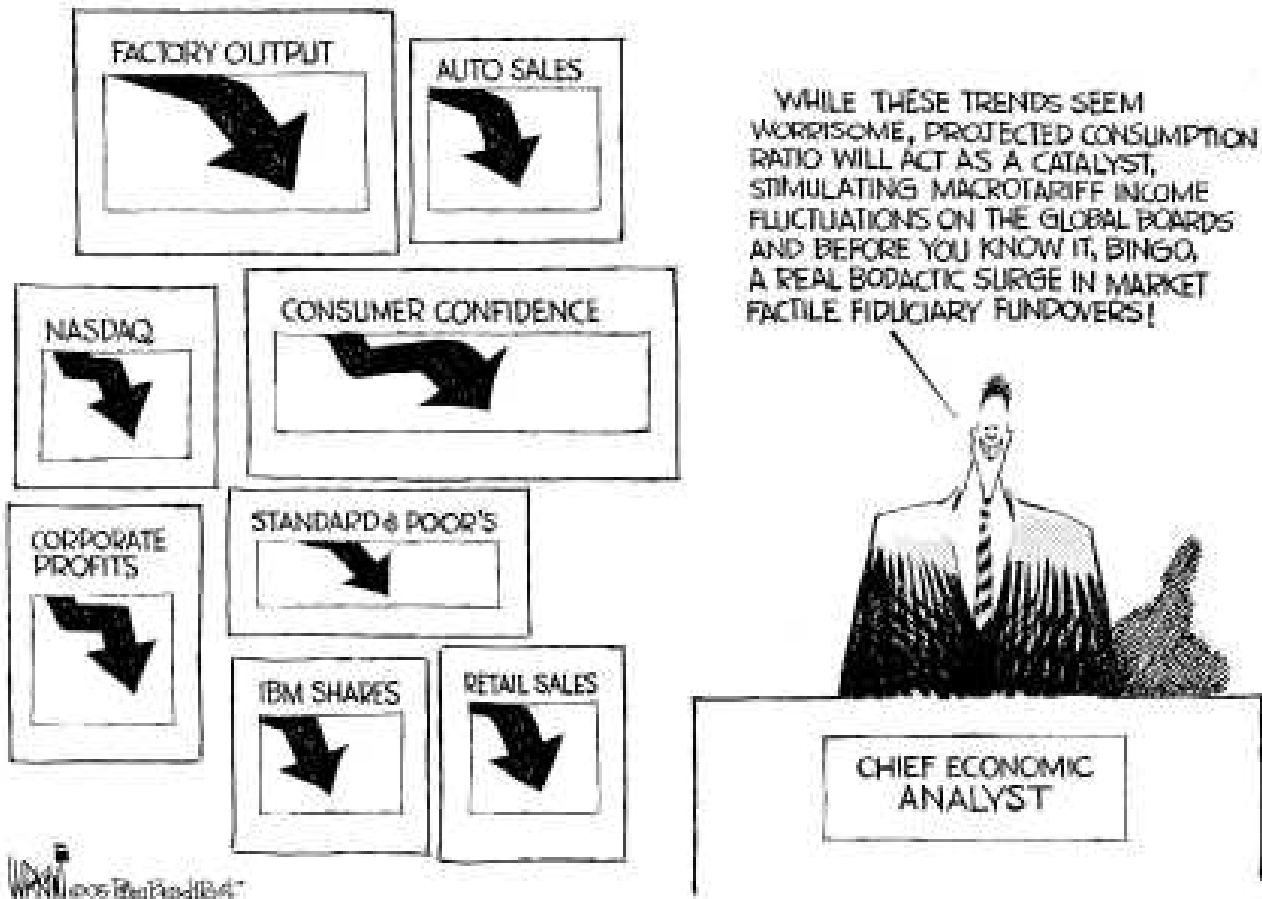
"I brought him in. I spent an hour and a half with him, talked with him," he recalled on Tuesday. "I said, 'You know, you're an arrogant guy. We've got problems at the United Nations, and the question is whether or not you're going to be able to go in there and work with other people to get things going, particularly since we have a little problem over there from public relations.'"

Voinovich eventually removed his hold, and Holbrooke was confirmed.

McClellan said Wednesday that the president stood behind Bolton and blamed Democrats for "playing politics with his nomination."

Voinovich, however, praised Biden on Tuesday, saying that "on occasion he gets political, but I think today he's very sincere about his concerns about this."

Sen. Norm Coleman of Minnesota, another Republican on the committee, defended Voinovich. "He's very conscientious, concerned. That's his nature. He heard things that he didn't have an answer to, and we didn't give him an answer. That was not a political move on George Voinovich's part."



OHIO PERSPECTIVE

The school administrators need educating

By MIKE HARDEN
Scripps Howard News Service

Imagine this scenario: You are peacefully mowing the back yard when a distraught young woman stumbles out of a nearby tree line. She is dazed and disheveled. It is clear that she has been attacked.

Do you call 911? Or do you call the neighborhood civic association president to assess the potential collateral damage from getting police and emergency officials involved? It could affect the neighborhood's image, might even drive down real-estate values.

Of course you call 911, unless you also happen to be an administrator at Mifflin High School in Columbus.

At this writing, the aftershocks from the sexual assault March 9 on a 16-year-old girl who is a developmentally disabled student are rumbling across the United States.

Police recommend charging two male students with delinquency counts of rape and a third, who is accused of videotaping the attack, with pandering obscenity.

The Mifflin principal is being fired, and three of her assistants have been suspended for 10 days and will be reassigned to other schools.

The punishment for the latter three is insufficient. The Ohio Department of Education should yank their licenses as teachers and administrators. As "mandated reporters" of such crimes, the administrators should be charged with the appropriate misdemeanor for failing to do so. What they did was unconscionable. Had it been murder instead of rape, that sort of mentality would first look for a place to stow the body until damage-control measures could be mounted.

The school district would likely prefer that we believe the incident at Mifflin is isolated to the school.

Tension simmers between the high school's black American and Somali students. A year ago, two Mifflin students kidnapped a 24-year-old woman from her garage because they needed gas money. They locked the woman in her car trunk, doused her and the vehicle with gasoline and then set it afire. A third Mifflin student was later found guilty of using the slain woman's stolen ATM card.

So it is just the school, right? A fish rots from the head down. "We hear of people being told not to call 911," said Rhonda Johnson, president of the teachers union, the Columbus Education Association. "There was a teacher at a North Side elementary school who passed out in a diabetic coma. The gym teacher found the woman on the floor of her classroom and dialed 911, and he was reprimanded by the principal."

Until the Mifflin incident exploded, Johnson said, she had been scheduled for a meeting this week on a case involving yet another Columbus teacher reprimanded for calling 911.

In August, at a district-sponsored Administrators Leadership Academy, she asked school administrators from across the city who they would least like to see show up at their school — the union, a school-board member, the superintendent of schools or the news media. The media won handsily.

The school district is paying Gayle Saunders, a special assistant and education administrative specialist, a six-figure salary to handle media relations. She could earn her money by dispensing the most simple of directives: When a crime against a student has been committed, forget image. Instead, act as a concerned parent would.

After all, after the attack, it was not a school administrator who called the police, but a concerned parent. How grievously sad it is that the parent was the father of the rape victim.

LETTERS

Don't assume gun ownership

Editor, The Messenger:

I am writing regarding the poll you are doing about when it is appropriate to shoot a stray dog on your property. You forgot to include the options "I don't own a gun" and "I would try to rescue the dog and find it a home." It is a worthless survey. You are only measuring gun owners who view dogs as invaders.

Judith Grant
Ervin Road, Athens

EDITOR'S NOTE: Poll participants may choose the option "I would never shoot a dog."

Stop animal research

Editor, The Messenger:

Thank you for featuring in Wednesday's paper a photograph of the vigil held by OU animal activists for animals in laboratories. Activists across the nation are staging a host of events this month designed to raise awareness on a controversial issue: animal experimentation.

World Week for Animals in Laboratories is an annual event that started over 20 years ago to expose the suffering animals endure in unnecessary laboratory experiments.

Each year in the United States, an estimated 25 million animals are subjected to maternal deprivation, drug addiction, poisoning, burning and blinding in archaic "experiments" paid for with our tax dollars.

More and more doctors are speaking out about the scientific invalidity of animal experiments since different species respond differently to drugs and disease, and since the laboratory setting cannot replicate human circumstances. There are many non-animal-based technologies that are far more effective and humane. It is time we pushed the animal research industry beyond Stone Age science and into a more sophisticated, and humane, future.

Kristie Phelps, program coordinator
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Vote for integrity

Editor, The Messenger:

This is a message for my Ohio retired teacher colleagues:

The Ohio State Teachers Retirement System recently sent us a ballot asking our vote for two (from a list of five) "retired teacher" candidates for their board. I urge

you to vote for Dr. Dennis Leone. My support for Leone arises out of a sincere appreciation for his magnificent "whistle-blowing" accomplishment in May 2003 on that obscene STRS fiasco.

Please know that I have no connection whatsoever with Dr. Leone, and no ulterior motivations for writing this letter. I first met Leone in Athens on April 13 at one of the Ohio Retired Teachers Association meetings. I am grateful to ORTA for hosting these gatherings.

Let me tell you however, how disappointed and angry I am with ORTA about their unwise endorsement (front page, ORTA Quarterly, Spring 2005) of Speas and Johnson, while completely ignoring Leone's humongous contribution. Please note, I am not saying bad things about Speas and Johnson. Unfortunately, ORTA's display of STRS's official logo between Speas' and Johnson's photographs might mislead some into thinking that STRS is recommending these two.

Upon my 1985 retirement from Ohio University's College of Engineering, ORTA asked me to join their group, saying they were our "watch dogs" — on STRS's behavior. ORTA failed us in 2003. Leone did what ORTA should have done and as a consequence, apparently earned their disapproval.

Having met several ORTA officers and staff at the Athens meeting, I understand that they are decent human beings. Perhaps during the 1990s financial delirium they became so imbedded in STRS's mania that they lost their way as our "watch dogs." We ORTA members need to learn how to keep our ORTA officials' feet on the fire — Leone fashion.

Please vote for Dr. Dennis Leone.
Charles Overby
Athens

The Messenger

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