

ALBUQUERQUE JOURNAL



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AN INDEPENDENT NEWSPAPER

Published at Journal Center, 7777 Jefferson NE,
Albuquerque, NM 87109-4343, by the Journal Publishing Co.
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EDITORIALS

2 education bills promise to deliver for NM students

Two bipartisan bills on education made it through a House committee last week and are now headed to the House Education Committee for consideration.

For the sake of New Mexico students we hope lawmakers ignore the naysayers and defenders of the status quo and send them to Gov. Susana Martinez for her signature.

One — House Bill 22 — would require high schools to text the parents of students who fall behind or are facing a coming test. House Bill 23, meanwhile, would require students to apply to college, for an internship, to the military or for a job before graduating. The bills are sponsored by House Minority Leader Nate Gentry, R-Albuquerque, and Sen. Daniel Ivey-Soto, D-Albuquerque.

These are commonsense, bipartisan measures that should enjoy wide support because they have produced results where they have been tried.

According to the Fiscal Impact Report prepared on the texting bill, a 2017 study by Columbia University found weekly text-message alerts to parents about missing assignments, grades and class absences reduced student course failures by 38 percent, increased class attendance by 17 percent and improved district retention rates by 2 percentage points.

And at least one study found the mere act of applying and being accepted to college — remember they are not required to actually enroll — may change the way students perceive their qualifications as well as the value of college itself, according to that bill's fiscal impact report.

“Preparing students for postsecondary education is increasingly important as two-thirds of jobs created by 2022 will require some form of postsecondary education,” the analysis states.

Unfortunately teachers unions and an association of school boards oppose the texting bill, arguing it will create inequalities because some parents may not have smartphones and because school districts may not have enough money to carry out the text messaging.

The inequalities argument is silly. By that rationale, school districts shouldn't have computers because some students may not have computers in their homes. And while it may be true that some districts may not have the resources needed to carry out the proposed requirement, it would be worth getting the ball rolling on this program and figuring out how to cover the cost for those school districts that don't currently have the capability.

At its core, this bill is about providing parents with another tool to help their children succeed and a way to boost parental involvement in children's education.

As for the legislation requiring students to apply to college, the military, an internship or for a job, Rep. Debbie Rodella, D-Española, questions whether it's fair to keep students from graduating simply on the grounds of having failed to fill out an application, assuming they'd met every other requirement.

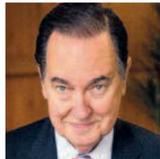
We'd argue that the benefit far outweighs any perceived inconvenience for students. This bill is aimed at nudging students to think about what they'll do after high school and to take steps to make that happen.

Together these bills promise to help students before graduation and after. Lawmakers who want them to succeed in school and life will vote yes on both.



Partisans on both sides will see what they want in memo

CAL THOMAS



Columnist

Partisans tend to read, watch and listen only, or mostly, to information and opinions that reinforce their beliefs. If information surfaces that counters those beliefs, it is usually disparaged, excused or ignored. That's human nature.

Such is the case with the “memo” released last Friday by the Republican majority on the House Intelligence Committee. The four-page document alleges, in the words of a Wall Street Journal editorial: “The FBI and the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court appear to have been used to influence the 2016 election and its aftermath.”

If true, that is real collusion. Conservative partisans are rejoicing and having an “I told you so” moment. Partisans on the left are reading coverage and editorials in The New York Times and the Washington Post and drawing sustenance for their position that the memo is a “nothingburger” and does not undermine Special Counsel Robert Mueller's investigation into the Trump campaign's “collusion” with Russia to influence the election. That not a shred of credible evidence has been produced on this point does not deter them.

Critics of the memo, who tried to stop its release, initially contended it undermines and smears the FBI and the Department of Justice. No it doesn't. It suggests that a few higher-ups in those agencies used their power and influence in an attempt to keep Donald Trump from becoming president and after he was elected to undermine his presidency. Now that the memo has been made public, partisans on the left, who once claimed its release would seriously damage the FBI and the DOJ, now say there is nothing there. It can't be both a danger and nothing, so which is it? In Washington, having it both ways is a cherished tradition.

Politicizing a powerful federal agency is nothing new. Think Lois Lerner and her efforts while at the IRS to thwart tax exemptions for conserva-

tive and religious organizations, as well as a few progressives. Or recall how Richard Nixon and his attorney general, John Mitchell, politicized the IRS and Justice Department in an attempt to punish their political enemies.

The most damning part of the memo is the assertion that the FBI and Justice Department used a “dossier” authored by ex-British intelligence officer Christopher Steele and funded in part by the Hillary Clinton campaign and the Democratic National Committee in an attempt to smear Donald Trump. It was this dossier that the government agencies used to convince a FISA judge to issue a warrant allowing Trump campaign official Carter Page and possibly others to be spied on. The memo asserts those seeking the warrant did not tell the judge about the fingerprints of the Democratic Party and Clinton campaign on the dossier. That is worse than oversight. If true, it is criminal and possibly prosecutable behavior.

In an interview with Bret Baier on Fox News Friday, Intelligence Committee Chairman Devin Nunes suggested there is more to come, including release of a memo from the Democratic minority and possibly the full transcript of testimony by Deputy FBI Director Andrew McCabe before a closed meeting of the Intelligence Committee. McCabe signed one of the FISA applications and then-FBI Director James Comey signed three. Nunes contends the subsequent warrants issued by the FISA judge were based on flawed and incomplete information and thus would likely not have been issued had the judge been in possession of additional facts.

The Republican memo is not the end but rather the beginning to exposing behind-the-scenes maneuvering by liberals to keep Donald Trump out of the White House and put Hillary Clinton in it. The public has a right to know all the facts in this case, wherever they lead.

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Memo proves how far Republicans have fallen

EUGENE ROBINSON



Columnist

WASHINGTON — For the sake of argument, let's take President Donald Trump and his Fox News cheerleaders at their word that they really believe that the memo Rep. Devin Nunes, R-Calif.,

released Friday reveals a serious assault on our freedoms by the FBI and the Justice Department.

Nah. Just kidding. It's simply not possible, on any level, to take seriously the histrionics from Trump and his true-believer allies over the Nunes memo — except as evidence of how far the GOP has plunged into cynicism and madness.

A bunch of law-and-order, war-on-terrorism, lock-'em-up Republicans suddenly sound like spokesmen for the American Civil Liberties Union, so grave is their concern that our government might in any way trespass upon sacred due process. Imagine how such guardians of the Constitution would protest if, say, that self-same government were to hold suspects in detention for a decade or more without charges or trials. Wait, my bad: I seem to recall Republicans applauding with gusto when Trump, in his State of the Union address,

announced that the prison at Guantanamo Bay will remain open.

Nunes, chairman of the House Intelligence Committee, packed so much half-truth and distortion into four short pages that it's hard to know where to begin. His hope must have been that everyone would get lost in thick weeds of arcane detail, losing sight of the big picture. Which is not a picture at all.

The point of the memo is to suggest that in October 2016, the FBI and Justice Department — under Barack Obama — improperly obtained a secret warrant to conduct surveillance on former Trump campaign adviser Carter Page. We are supposed to believe the warrant was based on information in the “discredited” Christopher Steele dossier about Trump's connections with Russia. We are also given to understand that pertinent information was improperly withheld from the judge: the fact that Steele's firm was initially hired by Democrats seeking dirt on Trump. Nunes strongly implies, but doesn't quite say, that without the dossier, which was misrepresented by prosecutors, there would be no Russia investigation.

Ta-da! “This memo totally vindicates ‘Trump’ in probe,” the president desperately claimed in a tweet.

Stop laughing, readers.

The problem with Trump's self-exon-

eration, of course, is that everything the memo tries to make us believe is false. The dossier was not the only information the court relied on to approve the warrant. Steele is a respected former British intelligence agent, and some of the dossier's findings, though by no means all, appear to be accurate. The judge wasn't told that the dossier was funded by the Democrats, merely a partisan “political entity,” but the materials provided by the FBI made it obvious it was an entity opposed to Trump. The memo itself acknowledges — quietly — that the whole probe began with George Papadopoulos, another campaign adviser, months before Page even came into the picture.

Break this gently to Sean Hannity, who might blow his last remaining gasket: Even if the dossier had never been written, Trump and his campaign would still be under investigation.

If you don't believe me, take it from Rep. Trey Gowdy, R-S.C., whose partisan credentials are unimpeachable — he led the Benghazi inquisition — and who was dispatched by Nunes to review all the classified intelligence used to obtain the Page warrant.

“There is a Russia investigation without a dossier,” he said Sunday. “The dossier has nothing to do with the meeting at Trump Tower. The dossier has nothing to do with an email sent by Cambridge

Analytica. The dossier really has nothing to do with George Papadopoulos' meeting in Great Britain. It also doesn't have anything to do with obstruction of justice.”

Gowdy announced recently that he will not run for re-election this fall. I wonder which comes first for Republicans these days: The decision to retire? Or the pangs of honesty, duty and — one hopes — remorse?

Three other Republican members of the Intelligence Committee — Chris Stewart of Utah, Will Hurd of Texas and Brad Wenstrup of Ohio — joined Gowdy on the rounds of the Sunday shows to deliver what sounded like a coordinated message: Of course the memo is a Terribly Serious Thing, but it doesn't undercut special counsel Robert Mueller's investigation.

It sounded like a warning to Trump, who might be tempted to use the memo as a pretense to rid himself of the troublesome Mueller. This isn't the way Trump's fawning courtiers on “Fox & Friends” told him this whole gambit was going to work out. The whole Russia thing was supposed to be over.

Maybe he should change the channel every once in a while.

Robinson's columns, including those not published in the Journal, can be read at abqjournal.com/opinion — look for the syndicated columnist link. E-mail: eugenerobinson@washpost.com; copyright, Washington Post Writers Group.