

# Grins and groans

**THE ISSUE** | Grins and groans from news of the week.  
**OUR OPINION** | Grin to the leadership of Bill Carlson. Groan to Sarah Palin's decision.

## Grin

At last week's Corning-Painted Post school board meeting, the torch of leadership was passed.

Tom Tammaro took the reins of the district from Bill Carlson, who led the school board for four years.

Carlson took the helm at a time when the school board was in disarray. Public confidence in the school board had hit rock bottom after it was disclosed that former school board president Becki Baker and former superintendent Judith Staples were negotiating with Corning Inc. for the sale of the district's administration building and one of the two middle schools behind the board's back.

In-fighting was common among board members.

Carlson stepped into the breach and brought professionalism and civility back to the board. His quiet demeanor was far different from Baker's my-way-or-the-highway style of leadership.

Carlson had positive results to show for his leadership. Under Carlson's tenure, the district developed and adopted a master plan.

The board also voted to bring Mike Ginalski on board as superintendent.

Sure, the board has had its ups and downs under Carlson, but the achievements speak for themselves.

## Groan

Sarah Palin's decision to

step down as governor of Alaska is a head-scratcher. Palin, who gained the national spotlight as John McCain's polarizing vice presidential nominee in 2008,

announced last week she would not complete her first and only term as governor. Palin's term would have expired in early 2011.

Many are speculating this signals a presidential run for Palin in 2012.

The question now is, what will Palin run on?

Palin's resume consists of running one of the least populous states in the union for less than two years. Granted, President Barack Obama didn't have much more experience than that when he ran for president, but Obama has proven time again he's a brilliant orator.

Palin has proven time and again she's not brilliant at oration or anything else.

The problem for Palin, and for the Republican Party, is Palin appeals to voters who typically come out in the Republican primaries – evangelicals who vote largely on social issues.

That could propel Palin far into the primaries, or even as far as the Republican nomination.

Which is exactly what Democrats want.

Palin proved she was a drag on the ticket as vice presidential nominee. As the Republican nominee for president, Obama would eat her for lunch and set the conservative movement back 50 years.

## ARTIST'S VIEW



COMMENTARY | LEONARD PITTS JR.

## Flimsy excuses get flimsier

I have a proposal.

Next time some politician goes before the cameras with his figurative pants down around his metaphoric ankles and says, "I made a mistake," let's form a mob and drag him from the podium. You bring the lanterns, I'll bring the pitchforks.

South Carolina Gov. Mark Sanford is, of course, the latest. Having bought plane tickets, told his staff he would be away hiking the Appalachian Trail, left his wife and kids behind and flown to Argentina to rendezvous with his paramour, he apologized by saying he'd made a mistake.

Before we go any further, let me concede the obvious. Yes, all human beings make mistakes. That's how you know they're human beings.

But surely I'm not the only one to notice how "I made a mistake" has become the go-to explanation for every human hounddog in public office. It's been dragged out by or on behalf of everyone from Jesse Jackson to Kwame Kilpatrick to John Edwards to L.A. mayor Antonio Villaraigosa to former Pennsylvania Rep. Don Sherwood to Gary Hart to Eliot Spitzer to Sen. John Ensign to Bill Clinton.

It isn't the cheating I'm complaining about. Nor is it the lying (which is, after all, an integral part of the cheating.) And for our purposes today, we can even ignore the hypocrisy of

self-proclaimed moral champions – particularly family values conservatives like Gov. Sanford – getting busy with women who are not their wives.

No, what incites this diatribe is those four words of putative explanation: "I made a mistake." There is to them a connotation of honest error, unwitting miscalculation, accidental omission and "Oops, my bad."

They allow the offender to appear to accept responsibility for his offense while at the same time, minimizing it. He just misjudged. It just happened. He was just careless, inattentive or forgetful. He couldn't help it.

The excuse has never been flimsier than it is in the post-Bill Clinton era. I mean, if I put my hand into a fire because I've never seen fire before and I get burned, that is a mistake. If you see me get burned and then put your hand into the same fire, that's not a mistake. That's an idiotic calculation that somehow, the rules do not apply to you.

So what does it say about the politician who saw Clinton burn his public and political lives to bits, then turns around and does the same thing he did? I'll tell you what it says. It says he's a fool.

And it also says he's a man, though some might argue that's a synonym. But surely you've noticed that the list of cheating hearts in high office is rather, shall we say, testosterone-exclusive. It is not that women are paragons of marital

virtue. A 2008 study by the National Science Foundation found that 15 percent of women over 60 admit to having had an affair in their lifetimes and that the rate of female infidelity is actually growing faster than that of males.

And yet, when's the last time you saw a woman governor saying, "I made a mistake," while her husband stood there looking as if he might toss up his lunch any second?

Apparently, your average woman governor-elect has the good sense to tell Sven the Swedish pool boy that she's about to enter the public eye and their long lunches will have to end.

The man governor-elect figures he can get away with it. With the arrogance, recklessness, self-delusion and lack of foresight common to my gender, he figures he can handle it, somehow. Granted, he does this figuring with the part of the body that does not contain the brain, but still, he does it.

And then, when it all falls apart, he stands there and insults the intelligence of every human being within earshot.

"I made a mistake?" Beg pardon, but what he made was a decision.

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## Tilting at windmills in the 29th District

It's finally official. Don Quixote has formally launched his drive to wipe out windmills.

It's too bad Corning Mayor Tom Reed didn't start his quest earlier – and focused it on the towers that now blot the Cohocton skyline.

### THE INSIDER



Bob Rolfe

Instead, he's decided to bet his political future in an attempt to unseat Congressman Eric Massa.

Bad wager, Tom old boy, and one you may well come to severely regret.

You claim support in Cattaraugus County, close to the home of the last Democrat to represent this district before Massa. And you assert you've got backing in Monroe County – where Republicans can easily be enumerated on the fingers of one hand, no matter in which block you start your count.

OK, you've got Steuben County. That's a given. And maybe Allegany and Schuyler. But from there on, it gets extremely iffy.

You know you will lose Chemung County, because of the Democratic edge in Elmira. Ontario County tipped in Massa's favor in 2008 when he unseated incumbent Republican U.S. Rep. Randy Kuhl. Cattaraugus is possible, but don't count on massive numbers from the city of Olean.

Then there's the Rochester area, where you stand less chance than the proverbial snowball in the Nether Regions.

Platform? All you did last week was spout the party line – the line of what's come to be known as the Party of No.

When you calculate how much it'll cost you in time, travel and expenses, despite party support – and add in the time you can't devote to your paying job of lawyering because of the need to hustle votes – well, it really doesn't seem like such a good deal, does it Tom?

... This kid is an admitted racing freak, but never have I found a book on the topic as entertaining as "Go Like Hell: Ford, Ferrari and Their Battle For Speed And Glory at LeMans." It's quite simply one of the best racing histories ever written.

And you don't have to be a speed freak to enjoy it.

The author is A.J. Baime, executive editor of *Playboy*, and it's crafted like a novel. With characters like Ferrari driver John Surtees and Ford's aging genius, Ken Miles, the story never lets up. And above all are the towering figures of Enzo Ferrari and Henry Ford II, the last real American car tycoon.

Also marvelous is "Driving Like Crazy," a collection of auto-based memories by conservative satirist P.J. O'Rourke.

O'Rourke started his career on car magazines and he knows whereof he speaks. But his writing style is hilarious.

I just hope he's wrong, though I know he isn't, when he laments that the current drive for "green" cars will produce an utterly lifeless box that "uses alternative energy and renewable resources to operate in a sustainable way. When I was a kid, we called it a Schwinn."

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## COMMENTARY | TRUDY RUBIN

## Talks with Iran must be delayed after flawed election, crackdown

Now that Iran has officially confirmed its tainted election outcome, President Obama must reconsider how to deal with the regime.

The big question is whether Obama should junk his plans for direct engagement with Iran's leaders after their brutal crackdown on civil protest. "There's no doubt that any direct dialogue or diplomacy with Iran is going to be affected by the events of the last several weeks," the president said last week.

That's an understatement.

In fact, the engagement policy must of necessity be put in the deep freeze for the foreseeable future. The events in Iran have left the administration with no other choice.

Before Iran's "Green" revolt, Obama's efforts to engage made good sense. Engagement is a euphemism for direct talks without preconditions – something the Bush White House avoided. Direct talks would permit Washington and Tehran, at minimum, to put their demands and red lines on the table without intermediaries, reducing misunderstandings. If talks failed, and Washington had to take tougher measures and rally the support of other nations, Obama could point out that he had tried diplomacy. But for now, that policy must be

put on hold.

Some argue that, despite the regime's brutality, the importance of the nuclear issue requires us to hold our noses and talk. Iran's nuclear program is rapidly moving toward the point when it can produce enough enriched fuel and has the technical capacity to make a bomb.

But any U.S. engagement with Iranian leaders at present would legitimize election results that are still disputed, despite official claims. It would imply endorsement of leaders whose legitimacy is now at issue among their own people.

"At this stage, to talk with any side can give the impression that the United States has accepted that side's victory, even though the dust has not settled," said Trita Parsi, president of the National Iranian American Council.

Despite the killings, beatings, and arrests, the Green revolt has widened divisions within Iran's power elite, including the clergy, that have yet to play out in internal battles, whose outcome is unpredictable.

What can be said is that the Iranian opposition movement is far from over. "Just as we didn't want to cause harm by inserting ourselves into a domestic upheaval, we would really demoralize the opposition by

pursuing engagement at this point," said Karim Sadjadpour, a respected Iran expert at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

And, of course, there's another basic reason for freezing engagement for the time being: There's no sign that the Iran regime, with its domestic standing in question, is eager for dialogue with us.

Indeed, on the subject of engagement, President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and the supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, now sound just like their onetime arch-enemy, George W. Bush: No direct talks without preconditions, they say.

Ahmadinejad has called for Obama to apologize "for interfering in Iran's affairs" – even though the American president rightly refused to meddle in the election process. Khamenei earlier rebuffed Obama's overtures by saying he must change America's policies – such as economic sanctions and support for Israel – before engagement.

Yet the whole point of such engagement is to put both sides' concerns on the table and discuss them, without prior conditions. Instead, the list of Iranian preconditions is growing. On such a basis, it is impossible to engage.

"They are imitating Condoleezza

Rice when she said 'Iran knows what it needs to do' for a dialogue," said Sadjadpour. "Now the Iranians say 'the United States knows what it needs to do.'" He added, "There is no signal whatsoever that they are interested in engagement."

Some argue that the Iranians' tough talk is their opening bargaining position. But after the Green revolt, it more likely reflects that the regime can't negotiate with the "Great Satan" because of unrest at home and a mistaken belief that Mideast history is on their side.

Backed by the military might of the Revolutionary Guards, Khamenei and Ahmadinejad appear to need the bogeyman of a Western enemy on whom to blame Iran's troubles. They also appear overconfident that Obama needs them more than they need him.

This means the gains from any dialogue would be minimal, while the costs would be enormous. Obama is correct to leave open the possibility of engagement should the situation change or the regime show different colors. But for now, it's a no-go.

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