

Guest editorial

Sanders: Make higher education free for U.S. students

In 1877, Rutherford B. Hayes became the first president to make a strong case for universally available public education. “Universal suffrage should rest upon universal education,” he said in his inaugural address, adding that “liberal and permanent provision should be made for the support of free schools.” Hayes, a Republican, didn’t worry that some poor kid might benefit from access to “free stuff,” nor did he believe that the children of wealthy elites should be excluded from the universal nature of the program. For him, education was the basis for full economic and political participation, and full participation was the basis for all prosperity. An education should be available to all regardless of anyone’s station.

Today, there is universal access to free, public schools across the United States for kindergarten through 12th grade. That didn’t happen by presidential decree. It took populist pressure from the progressive movement, beginning in the 1890s, to make widespread access to free public schools a reality. By 1940, half of all young people were graduating from high school. As of 2013, that number was 81 percent. But that achievement is no longer enough. A college degree is the new high school diploma.

In the 1950s and 1960s, it was possible to graduate from high school and move right into a decent-paying job with good benefits. Strong unions offered apprenticeships, and a large manufacturing sector provided opportunities for those without an advanced degree. A couple with a sole breadwinner could buy a home, raise a family and send their kids to college. That was the American dream. Unfortunately, today, for too many Americans, it’s not a possibility.

An important pathway to the middle class now runs through higher education, but rising costs are making it harder and harder for ordinary Americans to get the education they want and need. In 1978, it was possible to earn enough money to pay for a year of college tuition just by working a summer job that paid minimum wage. Today, it would take a minimum wage worker an entire year to earn enough to cover the annual in-state tuition at a public university. And that’s why so many bright young people don’t go to college, don’t finish or graduate deeply in debt. With \$1.3 trillion in student loans, Americans are carrying more student debt than credit card or auto-loan debt. That’s a tragedy for our young people and for our nation.

In my view, education is essential for personal and national well-being. We live in a highly competitive, global economy, and if our economy is to be strong, we need the best-educated workforce in the world. We won’t achieve that if, every year, hundreds of thousands of bright young people cannot afford to go to college while millions more leave school deeply in debt. We need to ensure that every young person in this country who wishes to go to college can get the education that he or she desires, without going into debt and regardless of his or her family’s income.

It may seem hard to believe, but there was a time when higher education was pretty close to free in this country, at least for many Americans. After World War II, the GI Bill gave free education to more than 2 million veterans, many of whom would otherwise never have been able to go to college. This benefited them, and it was good for the economy and the country, too. In fact, scholars say that this investment was a major reason for the high productivity and economic growth our nation enjoyed during the postwar years. And, in certain states, such as California and New York, tuition was so low that college was practically free for free of the 20th century. That is no longer the case in America, but free college is still a priority in many parts of the world.

In Finland, Denmark, Ireland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden and Mexico, public colleges and universities remain tuition-free. They’re free throughout Germany, too, and not just for Germans or Europeans, but for international citizens as well. That’s why every year, more than 4,600 students leave the United States and enroll in German universities. For a token fee of about \$200 per year, an American can earn a degree in math or engineering from one of the premier universities in Europe. Governments in these countries understand what an important investment they are making, not just in the individuals who are able to acquire knowledge and skills, but for the societies these students will serve as teachers, architects, scientists, entrepreneurs and more.

It is time to build on the progressive movement of the past and make public colleges and universities tuition-free in the United States — a development that will be the driver of a new era of American prosperity. We will have a stronger economy and a stronger democracy when all young people with the ambition and the talent can reach their full potential, regardless of their circumstances at birth.

— Sen. Bernie Sanders

Bernie Sanders, an Independent, represents Vermont in the U.S. Senate and is a candidate for the Democratic nomination for president.



Candy Ho!

A FAMILY OF sailors goes trick-or-treating on Main Street in Middlebury Sunday afternoon during the annual Spooktacular celebration. For more photos from the event, see Page 14A.

Independent photo/Trent Campbell

For my sister, Meigan, on her birthday

Two days ago, my older and only sister would have turned 60. Instead, she’ll always be 43.

Much has been said about the opioid addiction problems plaguing Vermont. But it hits you differently when it’s not just a state statistic or a headline in *The New York Times* putting addicts in Rutland or Barre or next door where we all like to think there’s just cows and golden glowing leaves. My sister died of a heroin overdose at 43. This last part is ironic. She almost died of a heroin overdose as a teenager. She was no longer living at home. It’s a long story, so we’ll just say she emancipated herself early. But as my mom years later told me, one night my then-teenage sister sort of “appeared to her,” like a ghost or a message or a vision, and my mom knew she was in trouble. And indeed that very same night — one state away, somewhere in Norman, Okla., living God knows where or how — it turns out my sister had almost died of an overdose.

When the call came, so many decades later, at 5 a.m., to say that “her old bad habits had caught up with her,” I wasn’t expecting it. She was happy. She was married. She lived in a ranch house — how settled, how ordinary is that? It seemed that she’d moved away from her chemically propelled lifestyle. But she was dead just the same. I still have the police report, which I’ve pored over, again and again.

Like a lot of folks who end up battling addiction, my sister was forced to grow up way too fast. The oldest daughter out of five children, her childhood seemed to have ended soon after our dad died when she was six. By eight, she was shopping, cooking, doing the laundry, looking after the rest of us. By 12, she was hanging out with kids from the local college. By 15, she ran away from our small farming town

in Kansas for San Francisco, just a few summers after the Summer of Love.

Meigan was a blues and rock ‘n’ roll singer in always-local bands. Her voice — sort of like Janis Joplin’s or Bessie Smith’s or Lucinda Williams’s (to whom I am sure we are linked down some long-lost branch of our Southern family tree) — was often so real it cut just to listen. She was generous to a fault. And she was fearless. Case in point was when she invited to her grade school birthday party, a little girl with no friends, who’d been labeled “slow” and “different” and ostracized as only the playground can so cruelly do.

After the party, when the girl’s mother picked her up she told my mom that her daughter was so thrilled. No one had ever invited her to a birthday party before. Meigan had that kind of courage — to love and include somebody that everybody was supposed to shun.

My sister grew so wild in high school with my mom, at her wits’ end, packed her off to a girls’ home run by a religious zealot so besotted with a twisted version of Old Testament-style punishment that even the state of Texas finally shut him down. But when I visited her there, just a sixth-grader, she told me serenely how she’d learned the Hebrew word for eagle and that she’d gotten really good at plucking chickens. Then, when she was called on to testify in church, she gave a bang-up blues rendition of “Just as I Am.” She was in “prison,” but she found a freedom within herself.

Meigan made a patched together living singing in local bands and Dumpster diving and trading in vintage clothes. In fact, we had her cremated in one of her best finds ever: a green sequin tuxedo suit. One of my cousins even took

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Clippings

By Gaen Murphree



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Act 46 looming as election issue

Act 46, the school consolidation bill passed by the Legislature earlier this year, will be a major issue in 2016, both in local elections on establishing new consolidated school districts and in the statewide race for governor.

The act provides property tax reduction incentives to newly consolidated districts that receive voter approval by July 1, 2016. While some incentives will be available to districts that consolidate after that date, the prospect of a 10-cent reduction in property taxes is leading several districts to accelerate planning for consolidation votes.

These districts, including the towns in the Addison Central Supervisory Union, hope to have proposed charters for new consolidated districts on the ballot for Town Meeting Day on March 1. Australian ballot turnout that day will be much higher than usual, because the Vermont presidential primary will be held on March 1. With presidential contests in both the Democratic and Republican parties, primary turnout should be strong.

It is too early to project how voters will respond to consolidation votes, in the ACSU and in other districts across Vermont. However, the statute requires that a consolidated district must be approved by every town in the proposed district in order to go into effect.

This will pose a particular challenge to districts such as the ACSU, where one town (Middlebury) has a majority of the voters and students, and would have a majority of the members of the proposed new district board. A negative vote in any one of the six other towns in the ACSU district would defeat the proposal.

Some voters in the outlying towns may be concerned that a Middlebury-dominated board could vote to close their local elementary school over their objections, especially if the small school has a higher cost per pupil than other, larger elementary schools in the district. A requirement written into the new district’s charter for a two-thirds super-majority board vote to close a school might help alleviate this concern.

Act 46 is also shaping up as a major issue in both the Democratic and Republican primaries for governor. On the Democratic side, House Speaker Shap Smith is a strong supporter of Act 46, which passed the House under his leadership. He says that Act 46 will give school boards tools to respond to unsustainable cost increases, and will spread educational opportunities more widely, to all students within a consolidated district.

Democratic gubernatorial candidate Matt Dunne opposes Act 46. He says the deadlines established by the act are unrealistic and will cause school districts to make hurried decisions. He also says Act 46 takes a “one size fits all” approach that does not reflect the quality of education currently offered in some small community schools.

The third Democratic candidate, Sue Minter, supports the general goals of Act 46, but says that the Legislature may need to tweak the law. In particular, she does not like the spending cap provisions, which she says are inflexible and may not be appropriate for every local situation around the state.

(See Davis, Page 5A)

Letters to the Editor

Foote Street work well done

Many thanks to the Middlebury Department of Public Works and Engineers Construction Inc. for the great job at the water main replacement project on Foote Street. Thanks also to Adam Piper and Jim Foster.

It was a professional job, courteously done, with excellent results.

Ron Holmes
Middlebury

Philosophical musings enjoyed

I want to thank the *Addison Independent* for printing Professor Victor Nuovo’s articles on Socrates.

I find that Socrates probably really existed and was not just the imagination of Plato, who did a lot of the writing about Socrates.

I found it hard to follow what Socrates was doing. For instance, *The Republic* started with Socrates walking down the street one day and was soon joined by several fellow citizens who talked about old age and other problems, and if it was “justice” to pay back debts.

There are several definitions for justice, but Socrates asks several people what justice is. If he had looked in a somewhat recent dictionary (which was printed probably 2,300 years too late) he would have found around four definitions, and in the OED (Oxford English Dictionary) there are 11 or 12.

Then Socrates asks the people around him what justice is. He pleads ignorance, as he tosses in a golden apple to get things started, by asking if justice is more than telling the truth and paying debts (which I don’t think was covered in the OED).

The ensuing dialog gets the local people confused as to which of many possible concepts are contained in the proposition of justice. Socrates doesn’t ask for a list of various possibilities for defining justice, he treats his audience as if there might be just one idea and we must choose, which really confuses some of his listeners. And then I am confused as to where Socrates is going with this. It seems he is really trying to take people for a head spin and confusing them so they don’t even know the way home.

So, I really appreciate the *Addison Independent* for printing the Nuovo work, which clears away the peregrinations and gets to the meat of what Plato really wanted to say. (Or was it really Socrates?)

Peter Grant
Bristol

Welch waffling on TPP question

I recently signed an online petition to Congressman Welch, urging him to vote against the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP). Here is his reply, and my response to it. Evidently, he needs to hear from lots of people encouraging him to take a more decisive stand against the TPP.

“Dear Ms. McKay, “Thank you for contacting me about the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) trade agreement. I appreciate hearing your views on this issue.

“When properly negotiated, trade agreements can create good American jobs, protect workers and our environment, and spur economic growth. Unbalanced trade agreements can send jobs offshore and benefit a narrow class of investors. Recent agreements have boosted corporate profits, but failed to boost wages and employment for American workers.

“The TPP trade agreement would lower trade barriers in the Asia-Pacific region with the participation of the United States and 11 other Pacific Rim countries. I am skeptical that it will benefit American workers and will make my decision on the basis of whether it is likely to increase wages and jobs in this country. I voted against the President’s request to ‘fast track’ its consideration by Congress with no opportunity for amendments, which passed in the House on June 12, 2015, and the President signed into law on June 29, 2015.

“I will keep your views in mind as I review the terms of the final agreement. Please keep in touch. I look forward to seeing you in Vermont soon.

“Sincerely,
“PETER WELCH Member of Congress”

Dear Congressman Welch: Your response puzzles me. It seems a carefully neutral nod to both pros and cons of trade agreements in general. Yet surely you’re aware of Sen. Sanders’ unequivocal denunciation of

(See Letter, Page 5A)

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Ready for another automotive romance

I bought my first car 41 years ago at Weybridge Garage. It was a 1970 VW Bug with 90,000 miles and four years of Vermont road rust.

I had acquired just enough money from college graduation presents to buy a car. So I bought the first Bug I saw.

Owning a VW was virtually a generational requirement at the time. Plus my girlfriend and I needed wheels as we embarked on the trial-by-fire of living together.

Four decades and several cars later, it's time to think about getting yet another new vehicle. Time to open yet another tiny chapter in the Great American Love Affair with the Car.

And as much as I'm trying to avoid the unflattering comparison between cars and romantic partners, not all the romance has gone out of the automobile.

Perhaps old cars, like old flames, have something to teach us.

Lesson No. 1: Never buy a four-year-old VW Bug with 90,000 miles on it. Especially if it's been driven in Vermont before the word "rustproofing" has entered the English language.

I was making \$100 a week at the time, so there was no money for repairs done by a mechanic. Facing one emergency fix after another, I fell under the spell of "How to Keep Your Volkswagen Alive: A Manual of Step-by-Step Procedures for the Compleat Idiot."

I certainly qualified as a compleat idiot. Somehow I kept the car alive long enough to hit the highway two years later.

On that Great American Road Trip, I encountered flooded roads in Georgia that splashed water up through the rotted floor boards of the VW. Minnesota winds damn near blew me and the car off the interstate. I finally plowed the thing into a South Dakota cornfield.

There a friendly old mechanic was able to straighten the bent front axle, at least enough to make the car some-

what drivable. It finally gave up the ghost shortly after I hit the Arizona desert.

Lesson No. 2: Avoid buying a Datsun. Especially when the guy selling it admits the car "has a few small issues."

Having thumbed my way to the California coast, I had scraped together enough cash to buy a Datsun 500 wagon. It was the perfect surfmobile for a San Diego summer — if only it had remained capable of forward motion.

Short story: I cracked the block and traded it in for \$300 toward a new Honda Civic hatchback.

Lesson No. 3: Never leave a trusty Honda behind. Two years after I bought the Civic, I embarked for a year in Australia. I sold the Honda to a former girlfriend before I left. And when I returned, carless, I watched her drive that lovable, unstoppable little Civic around the neighborhood for years to come.

Lesson No. 4: "Rabbit" is a cute name for a car — way better than the Golf name it later acquired — but a cute name doesn't mean the sunroof won't leak.

Contrary to the song and current drought, it does sometimes rain in Southern California. In the Rabbit, there were mornings when I would drive to work with a towel in my lap, to soak up the rainwater leaking through the top.

When it came time to sell the Rabbit, a young woman and her mother answered the classified ad. They seemed like the perfect owners. Until, that is, they took the car for a test drive and returned three minutes later. On foot.

The Rabbit's battery had died down the block. Wisely, mother and daughter chose not to make a purchase that day.

Nonetheless, I was determined to continue my inexplicable love affair with VWs. Some men will pick the same type of woman, no matter how

many times it doesn't work out.

The Rabbit ended up as part of a trade-in for a new Jetta. That red sedan had the virtues of a payment I could afford and a sunroof that didn't leak. Over several years of Jetta ownership, however, I came to learn...

Lesson No. 5: *Consumer Reports* can be wrong.

The Jetta came with stellar recommendations from the car-buying bible. But several years and costly repairs later, it was obvious to me that the experts had blown it in their evaluation.

Even a beautiful woman can be an undesirable companion. And European cars, it turns out, are no more reliable overall than American vehicles. Which led me to...

Lesson No. 6: Buy a Japanese car.

For several years there, my then-wife and I were happy Honda drivers. Like millions of others, we struck up a lasting accord with an Accord. Two of them, in fact.

They were comfortable, they sipped gas, they had enough power to pass on the freeway, and — blessing of blessings — they needed no repair work until the timing chain needed to be replaced.

By that point we were 80,000 miles down the road. And those pesky little monthly payment coupons were a distant memory.

Lesson No. 7: Buy more Japanese cars.

By the time I finally came to my senses and moved back to Vermont some years ago, I had migrated to a Toyota Camry. We shipped it to Vermont, and all these years later that car is still rolling along.

I've had a couple other flings since then — with a used Audi wagon and a leased Ford hybrid that gets a glorious 40 miles per gallon. But I haven't found anything with the rock-solid reliability of a Honda or Toyota.

So will my next car be a Japanese one?

Don't bet on it. Some men never learn.

Gregory Dennis's column appears here every other Thursday and is archived on his blog at www.gregdennis.wordpress.com. Email: gregdennis-vt@yahoo.com. Twitter: [@greengregdennis](https://twitter.com/greengregdennis).



Between The Lines

by Gregory Dennis

The Culture of the City

Editor's note: This is the seventh in a series of essays or reflections about "The Republic," a book written two and a half millennia ago by the great philosopher Plato.

By culture, I mean the knowledge and skills that a person must acquire to be a good citizen and more particularly a leader, all of which make up the course of education that a civil society provides in its schools, but in other ways as well. In the *Republic*, Socrates sums it up under two headings, music and gymnastics. The goal for everyone is a sound mind in a sound body.



Justice and Plato's Republic

An essay by Victor Nuovo
Middlebury College professor emeritus of philosophy

Music includes much more than compositions of instrumental or vocal sounds that have certain melodic, rhythmic and expressive qualities; it includes also poetry, story and general discourse, for all languages have rhythmic turns and melodic qualities that serve to edify, uplift and, most importantly, express truth through a wide range of emotions and moods. Today, perhaps more than ever, the beats and rhythms of music seem to be sounding in everyone's ears and perhaps shaping their souls as they go about their daily business.

The concern here is with education, and most especially the education of children. The truth is to be told to them in a form that is able to take root in their souls, in a manner that both charms and edifies. What sort of truth? Moral truth, not about what is, but of what ought to be, for the stories we tell children from earliest childhood are fables, not historical or factual narratives. Moral truth, even when we are certain of it, is not easily located in reality.

So will my next car be a Japanese one? Don't bet on it. Some men never learn. *Gregory Dennis's column appears here every other Thursday and is archived on his blog at www.gregdennis.wordpress.com. Email: gregdennis-vt@yahoo.com. Twitter: [@greengregdennis](https://twitter.com/greengregdennis).*

lightened, rational theology. God is wholly good and can cause no harm. Hence God is not the cause of everything, not the creator of the world out of nothing. Plato supposed that not only the Gods, but the physical universe and the stuff out of which it was made, were eternal and required only an intelligent fashioner.

He believed that evil has no real cause. Secondly, the Gods are unchanging, because they are perfect, so that any change that they might undergo would make them less than perfect, which is impossible. Finally, the Gods are neither deceived nor can they deceive, for the Gods, having existed from eternity, know all things, and therefore, unlike us, when considering the past, have no need to resort to telling noble lies. We humans, being limited in so many ways, and ignorant of so many things must resort to fables. Unfortunately, Plato provides no examples of the sort of purified fables that we might tell our children. But the point is made.

One may ask, "Did Plato believe in God, or did he suppose merely that belief in God is a useful fiction for civil society?" There is no sure answer to this

question, because Plato kept his personal beliefs to himself. Of this at least we can be sure: Plato was no dogmatist. His manner of writing is sufficient proof of that. His purpose was to provoke thoughtful consideration of important issues, to free the mind from the superstitious fear that the Gods might do us harm here or hereafter, and to promote rationality and not faith.

Gymnastics, the other part of primary education, is about training the body so that it is fit, healthy and strong. Diet, as well as exercise, must be carefully planned to achieve these aims. Overall, like his model city, the course of training he prescribes is Spartan. Yet, like all the Greeks, Plato admired the human body, and just as he prescribed the cultivation of the musical attributes of language, with melodic turns and a variation of cadences, so the body must be trained to move with all the gracefulness and spontaneity of a dancer. He suggests in all this that physical strength and graceful movement are physical conditions of courage.

The program of music and gymnastics that is proposed in the *Republic* is meant primarily for the guardians and auxiliaries. It is meant to make them fit to rule and protect the city. Moreover, because all their needs would be provided by the city, they were not to be allowed to acquire any private wealth. Nor were they to marry and have a family. Nor were they to have any other interest that might distract them from their vocation in life, to protect and defend the city.

In this way, it was supposed they would be incorruptible. But Socrates' friends have doubts. The city belongs to them, yet they cannot enjoy it. They are like hired mercenaries, there to guard the city but not free to do anything else.

Socrates responds that his concern is not with the happiness of any particular group in the city, but with the happiness of the city, by which he means, the absence of corruption, dysfunction and destabilizing change. And that is achieved when every member of society knows their station in life and pursues their proper function. Such a city is well situated for resources and safety, modest in size, and without any motive but to live together in peace.

Beside, he thinks his friends are mistaken. Guardians find happiness in being lovers of wisdom, which is part of being just. We shall see how this works out in the next act.

There is no sure answer to this

Clippings

(Continued from Page 4A)

a picture of us all together, around her lifeless corpse clothed in that sparkling green tuxedo. Grief will make you capture strange images. If I rifle through my cedar chest, I can pull out more of her finds: a red crepe 1940s cocktail dress, a stunning silvery gray 1950s swing coat that grazes my calves, and a delicate lace jacket circa 1911 by the look of it.

The summer she overdosed, heroin was in the news nationally. There was a kind of heroin coming up from Mexico that was far more powerful than any previously available. Different versions of our family tragedy played out weekly for a while there on national television. It is a grim reminder that drug addiction links us in an international unholy web of lives devastated — not just by illegal drugs but the violence that fuels the underground industry they feed and the poverty, fear and despair that suck so many into its vortex.

I cannot change my sister's story, I cannot rewrite her life so that every-

thing that was brilliant and loving in her could still be shining and all the grime would just have washed away.

When I taught high school for a time, I did my best to be there for "troubled" students because maybe if somebody had been there in some different way for my sister when she was a teen things might have gone differently. The newspaperly part of this essay, the public service announcement, if you will, is the importance of looking after all the kids in our care, in our schools, in our communities — because we know if we have opioid problems, we have stressed families and kids who need our attention so that their best selves get to shine.

I named my older daughter after my sister, Meigan, because of her fierceness, because of her generosity, because of all the ways that she, the older sister, took care of me, though only four years older. My sister — the smartest of our bunch of five, who included a brother who went to Cal Tech, a brother who became a doctor, three Phi Beta Kappas — was a high school

dropout, who finally got a GED. Thanks to her, I got to be the "normal" (boring is how it seemed to me at the time), over-achieving "good kid."

My own daughter Meigan has had a blessedly ordinary childhood. We've worked like the dickens to make it so.

As a sort of talisman for my sister, we also gave our daughter Meigan the middle name "Quetzal." My husband, a travel writer, became enamored with this brilliantly plumaged, almost legendary bird of Central America, where they are a symbol for freedom. Quetzals, reputedly, die when put in captivity.

Above all else, my sister, Meigan, was a poet. She was always writing, calling me up at 2 a.m. to read me her latest in a drug-slurred haze, going up to total strangers, reciting her poetry in bars while she played pool, holding people mesmerized.

So I will leave you with her words, always so much more eloquent than mine:

"Que milagro, beloved, we are still here."

Letter

(Continued from Page 4A)

the TPP. The "liberal" read on this bill is uniformly negative. I hope you will have NO hesitation in voting against such a blatantly pro-corporate, anti-environment and anti-labor bill.

You must know that under the TPP, corporations gain the right to sue governments (in "secret" courts outside existing legal systems) for

regulations that encroach on profits. This would render government itself meaningless, along with local and national self-determination. Surely there are no "pros" to this for anyone but the 1 percent. This is not an issue to waffle on.

I will keep a close eye on congressional votes on this bill, and do my own voting — and public speaking —

accordingly.

Barbara McKay
North Ferrisburgh

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in school spending required by the Vermont Supreme Court. The ACLU hopes the Legislature repeals the caps before Town Meeting Day to avoid having to face such a lawsuit.

Eric L. Davis is professor emeritus of political science at Middlebury College.

Enjoy life!



"My course on medieval Scotland was truly engaging!" Tana Scott attending ESI College

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