TOWER TALK

AROUND SAN FRANCISCO TOWERS

Sugar Caen

Olympic Reflections

In watching the thirtieth Olympiad one could only marvel at the superhuman capacity of competitors and applaud their discipline, physical striving, and engaging spirit. They made one humble.

The same cannot be said of TV coverage. Commercials occupied 40% of airtime. NBC covered misbehaving swimmers, Lochte and friends, for 16 minutes but paid no heed to women's basketball team winning their sixth straight gold.

NBC's ineptness and greed came at a price. Conventional viewership was many millions lower than previously; closing ceremonies were hardly viewed. No doubt TV advertisers noticed.

NBC's failures were paralleled by the hubris of organizers' proclaiming Brazil to be in the vanguard of ecological virtue and environmental sensitivity*!*

It seemed odd to have a nation that destroys rain forests, pollutes the air, endangers or eradicates species, and poisons rivers, to be preaching to the rest of us about ecological sensitivity.

An astonishing 18% of the 554-member US Olympic team was comprised of athletes enrolled either at Stanford or the University of California, Berkeley. Each university's athletes won 20 medals. No other university was close.

The United States outdid all others in medal counts. Moreover, if taken as a nation, California ranked Number 6, ahead of France and Australia.

Also, new opportunity and freedom permitted black athletes to at last display their skill in previously under represented events such as swimming, gymnastics, volleyball, and archery.

The Olympic Spirit prevailed. What is left unclear are benefits for Brazilian taxpayers who, like counterparts before them in London, Beijing, Barcelona, etc., spent enormous amounts on stadia and infrastructure for activities that come but once.

Would it not be better to have a permanent internationally subsidized Olympic venue in Greece?

1896 First Modern Olympiad: Athens

Finally, is it too late for Michael Phelps and Simone Biles to run for President? Ryan Lochte not in consideration. *Just sayin.*

Real Olympic Things Said:

Paul Hamm, Gymnast: "*I owe a lot to my parents, especially my mother and father."*

Boxing Analyst: *"There have been injuries, and even deaths, but none serious."*

Softball announcer*: "If history repeats itself, I should think we can expect the same.*

Basketball analyst: *"Opponents dislike his dribbling. You can see it on their faces."*

Soccer commentator: *"Julian Dicks is everywhere. It's like they have eleven Dicks on the field."*

ESC Versus Episcopal Bishop

Mediation has failed. The conflict now enters a new phase. A trial is scheduled for September 19, 2016. Date can change.

In a June 9, 2016 communiqué to SFT residents, ESC purported to disengage completely from the Episcopal Church. The reason given was that the Bishop's desire for continued oversight imperiled effective ESC operation and expansion.

On August 19, 2016, ESC CEO, Kevin Gerber, announced the proposed "affiliation" with Presbyterian Homes and Services no longer would occur; the proposed merger having succumbed to uncertainties surrounding disagreement with the Bishop. Anticipated affiliation had become a contentious matter.

The key trial issue is whether or not the Episcopal Diocese can continue, and possibly strengthen, its historic role in the direction and oversight of Episcopal Senior Communities (ESC). The intended oversight mechanism is Diocesan authority to approve appointment of ESC board members.

A petition submitted in May of 2016, and signed by 132 SFT residents, proclaimed a preference to remain affiliated with the Church.

An almost equal number of SFT residents did not sign or ignored the petition, presumably siding with ESC management or taking no side at all.

Though the petition covered issues pertaining to ESC, their officials did not acknowledge receipt of copies provided to them or otherwise respond.

In a deposition and under oath, ESC CEO Kevin Gerber suggested SFT residents were coerced into signing and sponsors solicited signatures from residents with diminished capacity. When questioned, Mr. Gerber could not substantiate this claim.

Continued church affiliation, as succinctly stated by an SFT resident: "presumes capacity of the Episcopal Church to provide SFT residents with a protective moral shield."

ESC management perceives the Church as an impediment to its ambitions to expand services and undertake cooperative affiliations with other senior oriented and charitable organizations.

The Bishop has requested a jury trial. If granted, jury selection and procedural matters will no doubt take several days. Both sides may call witnesses. A trial could be protracted. Stay tuned.

Trouble at Cal

Bay Area regional and, possibly national, prosperity is buttressed by the local presence of two world-class universities, Stanford and Cal. Stanford is thriving. Cal is in trouble.

UC President Janet Napolitano previously accepted Berkeley Chancellor Dlrks' resignation, effective next year. Berkeley faculty members want him replaced immediately.

Dirks has acted badly. He accrued expensive perquisites at a time of budget shortages and layoffs, and was glacial in reacting to sexual harassment charges against notable faculty and staff.

But the system's troubles are deeper. For example, administrator salaries are out of line. Full-tuition-paying out-of-state applicants are being admitted over equally qualified Californians. Few efforts are made to expand instruction through technology. New UC Merced campus is ill conceived.

Many SFT residents, Sugar included, are loyal to Cal, having attended or taught there. It is time to get informed, get engaged, and let your views be known.

We all benefit from a strong Cal.

It is Time for a New U.S. K-12 Education Strategy

Over the past 50 years, the U.S. has annually averaged approximately a $1 trillion in support of K-12 schooling.

This is 6 percent of Gross Domestic Product. It is an amount exceeded only by payments on national debt, Social Security, and health care.

In contrast to widespread public perceptions, education's resource share is greater than defense spending. No nation in the world, save Switzerland, spends more per pupil on schooling than the U.S.

Despite spending largesse, today's reading and mathematics scores for 17-year-olds are not significantly different from fifty years ago. Performance is stagnant. The black/white achievement gap persists. Millions of low-income K-12 students are still left behind.

Moreover, comparative testing reveals U.S. students' achievement to be lower than European and Asian competitors.

High school graduation rates have increased. However, this may be a result more of low standards and a weak job market than greater student learning.

We have halved pupil teacher ratios, massively invested in computers for instruction, expanded charter schools and home schooling, tried classrooms without walls, invested in student self esteem boosting snake oil, added useless training for teachers, and on and on for long lists of presumed silver bullets.

In all of the above, we made two major errors. We have (1) failed to invest in teachers and (2) we have pursued an inappropriate accountability model.

Mid 20th Century education excellence resulted from having talented teachers. Schools previously benefitted from a huge workforce subsidy supplied by able women with restricted job choices.

Today, schools are unable to attract similar teacher talent. We are getting what we are paying for, not enough.

It is time to get back to basics. Nothing takes the place of an effective teacher. If monies invested over the past fifty years to achieve class size reduction had been allocated to educator salaries, today's average teacher would make $100,000.

If this kind of money was reconfigured so that truly effective teachers had the potential to earn $150-200,000 each year, America's public schools could compete for talent with law, engineering, medical professions, and Wall Street.

We have inappropriately structured accountability around districts. This is wrong. Individual schools and their staff, not district offices, educate students. We should appraise schools, not simply gauge school systems.

Principals should be premier managers and fully empowered to operate schools, including selecting their teachers. Then, they and their staff should be held responsible for results.

Massive investment in human capital, accompanied by reconfigured accountability, offer the best prospect of overcoming a half-century of stagnation.

By the way, on national exams, only Alabama and Hawaii score lower than California. TX and MA are at the top.

Giraffiti: Vandalism spray-painted very, very high.

Sarchasm: Gulf between author of sarcastic wit and people who don't get it.

Inoculatte: Intravenous coffee consumption.

Caterpallor: Your color upon finding half a worm in fruit you are currently chewing.

Ever More Upscale, Where We Live

When Sugar was growing up in San Francisco, 1661 Pine Street was considered a part of the "Western Addition." Upon moving to SFT in 2015, Sugar was informed that the surrounding neighborhood was "Lower Nob Hill." Rockwell, the new condo complex across Pine Street from SFT, boldly proclaims that it is located in upscale "Pacific Heights." SFT resident, sensible Selma Burkom, suggests SFT might be in the "Upper Tenderloin." Sugar sides with Sensible Selma

Coming Events

Tower Talk is going paperless. This September issue comes via both Internet and hard copy. In the future, if you wish a hard copy, put a note with your name and apartment number in Sugar's box (#413).

Past issues of Tower Talk and related materials will soon be posted on the Internet at Sugacaen.net.

Large type is available

9/ 9/16 "Getting to Know You"

Sugar will make a presentation at the Friday, September 9 Getting to Know You. The topic: "*Oval Office Secrets: Presidents: LBJ, RR, GWB.*"

Arguing with Sugar!!!

Uh Oh! Skunk Visits Garden Party

Proclamations that a glass of red wine is as good for you as an hour at the gym were based on a 2012 study of just one red wine compound, resveratrol. Subjects were rats not humans. A 2013 study of men age 60 and up found resveratrol reversed many of exercise's positive affects. Participants working out and taking resveratrol supplements saw fewer improvement in blood pressure and oxygen uptake than those just working out.
Just sayin.

Eagles and Indians Competition

If you attended, graduated from, were employed at, or sympathetic to either Washington or Lowell High School, let Sugar know. Competition in the offing.

Sugar Caen is the nom de plume of James Guthrie who produces Tower Talk. This is a collection of vignettes, anecdotes, humor, opinion, and information regarding residents, employees, events, and conditions in and around San Francisco Towers. This publication is produced privately and does NOT carry approval of NOR rely upon resources from Towers' management. It has no commercial content and is not intended to replace regular Towers' publications. Those wishing to comment or stop receipt may contact Sugarcaen00@gmail.