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EDITORIALS

Time for partnership

WHEN THE Environmental Protection Agency pitched a so-called “Superfund” to the city of Pueblo, the sale came with assurances that testing for and cleaning up lead and arsenic contamination in the designated area *shouldn't* cost residents a dime.

Now, we're hearing that the EPA won't put that into writing.

Pam and Joe Kocman, members of the Eilers Heights Neighborhood Association, told City Council earlier this week that the EPA won't provide property owners here the same no-cost guarantee that it gave to property owners in a Denver Superfund site.

And that led Mrs. Kocman to make a reasonable request of the council.

“We want the city to partner with us and talk to EPA with one unified voice,” she told the council.

That sounds like a no-brainer to us.

Since the EPA first floated the idea of a Superfund designation around the long-demolished old Colorado Smelter, the City Council has taken a constituent-first, cautious approach to the plan.

That attitude first became apparent in

2012, when resident pushback over the possibility of stigma and damage to property values led the council to delay adopting the Superfund designation. Subsequently, an independent analysis from a Colorado State University-Pueblo professor verified the EPA's environmental health concerns, and City Council felt plenty of pressure to get on board from the Pueblo Board of County Commissioners.

The council finally adopted the inevitable designation last fall, but not before it hired legal representation to protect the city — and therefore the taxpayers who keep it running — from any Superfund costs.

In March, the city reached an agreement with the EPA that included, among other things, a provision saying that the agency must wrap testing on city-owned properties by next January.

Throughout the entire process of forming and adopting the Superfund designation, the City Council has kept its constituents at the forefront of its decision-making. It only stands to reason that the same commitment would direct the council's decisions and actions now.

Tough words on testing

WE SYMPATHIZE with Colorado school districts that have raised red flags about standardized testing interfering with teaching time.

But that doesn't mean the tests aren't valuable.

Pueblo County School District 70 got a tough reminder of that earlier this week. Federal officials rejected Colorado's request for a waiver to hold districts harmless if a large number of parents opt their children out of exams. That hit District 70 because earlier this month its board asked the state for similar permission.

“They (the U.S. Department of Education) are holding us to the letter of the law and we will follow the letter of the law,” board President Ted Ortiviz said. But he added that it was “disappointing” that the department rejected the state's request.

Here's the background: The state board of education agreed last winter that it would not force penalties on districts wherein a large number of students opted out of tests. District 70 earlier this month joined with more than 30 districts across the state seeking the waiver to be held harmless.

The federal department, however, issued a decision that said it would levy sanctions on those districts that don't have adequate student participation.

“A high-quality, annual statewide assessment system is essential to providing critical information regarding student achievement to parents and educators at all levels,” Deborah Delisle, assistant secretary of education, wrote to Colorado Education Commissioner Robert Hammond. “High-quality, annual statewide assessments provide in-

formation on all students so that educators can improve educational outcomes, close achievement gaps between subgroups of historically underserved students and their more advantaged peers, increase equity and improve instruction.”

There is some logic to that. After all, without an unbiased exam, how would we be able to get critical measurements of student, educator and institutional performance?

But on the other hand, there are also some significant shortcomings to the testing system.

First, educators have raised red flags over both the amount of time that students spend actually taking the tests and the loss of high-quality instructional time that follows the preparation and administration of those exams. And indeed, it does seem like the testing periods become more protracted each year.

Secondly, Colorado students this year are sitting for the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers exams, or PARCC. It is the third standardized test used in the past five years. So it's not hard to see how parents and educators alike must be frustrated by the system.

Hopefully, PARCC will be the final installment in this pattern of flip-flopping exams. Because when it comes to measuring scholastic achievement, the focus must be on consistent quality, not quantity.

In the meantime, now that the federal decision has come forth, we wish all students the best of luck on their exams. We are confident they will perform to the best of their abilities, and we will be watching the results with great interest.

BALTIMORE RIOTS

The roots of anguish



E. J. DIONNE
Opinion

WASHINGTON — The violence that has engulfed Baltimore is visible and heartbreaking evidence of a city that has been under siege for decades.

Since at least the 1970s, the economy's invisible hand has been diligently stripping tens of thousands of blue-collar jobs from what was once a bustling workshop where steel, cars and planes were made. Baltimore has tried to do its best in a post-industrial economy, but when work disappears, the results can be catastrophic.

Urban riots call forth an avalanche of glibness. Tragedies allow us to ride our hobbyhorses and to repackage the same arguments we were advancing before the first stone was thrown and the first fire set.

So I will stipulate that the violence in Baltimore has multiple causes, beginning with the troubling death of Freddie Gray and a nationwide backlash against police treatment of young African-American men.

Digging deeper, however, Baltimore is Exhibit A for why there is such frustration over how the costs of globalization and technological change have been borne almost entirely by the least advantaged people in our society.

Baltimore and its inner suburbs were once home to vast manufacturing facilities operated by Bethlehem Steel, General Motors and Martin Marietta, notes Thomas J. Vicino, author of “Transforming Race and Class in Suburbia: Decline in Metropolitan Baltimore.” In 1970, about a third of the labor force in Baltimore and its first-tier suburbs was employed in manufacturing. By 2000, only 7 percent of city

residents had manufacturing jobs, and the losses have continued since. An awareness of this, Vicino says, should shape our understanding of what's happening in the city now.

“We need to reframe the problem more broadly than racial profiling and police brutality,” Vicino, a professor at Northeastern University who grew up in Maryland, said in an interview. “These are major issues and have been for decades, and we need to deal with them. But the bigger context is the globalization of the economy, technological change and deindustrialization.”

“This is a double-whammy for poor black people left in the city,” he continued. “They are not in a position to share in the development downtown and, with the loss of manufacturing jobs, they are left, at best, with access to relatively low-paying service jobs. This, in turn, creates a spiral for those left behind, damaging families and devastating neighborhoods.”

This cycle hurt working-class whites as well, Vicino added, “but whites were in a better position to move elsewhere, whereas black mobility was limited by housing discrimination.”

William J. Wilson, a professor at Harvard, is the author of the book “When Work Disappears,” a phrase I borrowed earlier, in which he offered a central truth: “Regular employment provides the anchor for the spatial and temporal aspects of daily life. It determines where you are going to be and when you are going to be there. In the absence of regular employment, life, including family life, becomes less coherent.”

So should Baltimore's problems surprise us? Where will the help come from? Will we just go back to business as usual?

The people of Baltimore and all the other places the invisible hand has left stranded deserve better.

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WHAT OTHERS ARE SAYING

The Chicago Tribune on North Korea:

What's North Korea done lately besides rage against Hollywood over the “The Interview?”

Build more nuclear bombs.

According to a recent Wall Street Journal report, Chinese nuclear experts have told some American counterparts that North Korea's nuclear weapons stockpile is larger than previously estimated. Kim Jong Un could possess 20 nuclear warheads, plus the capacity to have double that number by next year, the Chinese warned in closed-door meetings earlier this year.

You can question the estimates, but that obscures the larger point: The North Korean nuclear threat is real and growing.

That's sobering news about North Korea and a stark lesson about how the world is dealing with a would-be nuclear

threat. Long before the world's powers began negotiations with Iran over its incipient nuclear program, there was Pyongyang's defiant, wily leadership using brinkmanship and lies as its primary tool of diplomacy. Paper agreements with North Korea were worthless because the world couldn't verify that the rogue nation was living up to its word.

And there's little prospect for change there unless China tries to force it.

Beijing is the North's economic lifeline to the outside. If China were to decide there's too much risk in allowing Pyongyang to continue to expand its nuclear arsenal, then China might get serious about forcing negotiations. Beijing does have some desire for global credibility, and coddling Kim Jong Un doesn't provide it.

But for now, the prospects seem dim.

TELL IT TO THE CHIEFTAIN

VETERANS' AFFAIRS

Breakfast and fellowship

Pastor Tim Reed of Lake Avenue Baptist Church is to be commended for his monthly free breakfast for veterans. Any veteran can attend this wonderful tribute to all veterans.

Each month, this event includes a wonderful breakfast and very informative speakers regarding veteran benefits, as

well as stories from veterans and their families.

Although its free, I would recommend a donation to help cover the costs if you can afford it. His breakfast is scheduled for every third Saturday of each month.

Butch Chavez
Pueblo

WE WELCOME LETTERS

• **By mail:** Send to Letters to the Editor, Pueblo Chieftain, P.O. Box 36, Pueblo, CO 81002.

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MALLARD FILLMORE

By **BRUCE TINSLEY**

