



Overdue: PSU should return Amazon blood samples

By Patriot-News Editorial Board

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Penn State must give blood samples back to Yanomami.

Penn State University prides itself on academics, athletics and "improving the well-being and health of individuals and communities," according to its mission.

But in Brazil, there is a different view of Penn State.

The university is the largest holder of blood samples from an Amazon tribe known as the Yanomami.

In 2006, the Brazilian government formally asked for the blood back.

Today, the blood still sits in a freezer in State College.

The samples have created a worldwide ethical firestorm. They were collected in the 1960s by two American researchers. Accounts vary on how much the tribe understood what was happening and whether the tribe was promised medical and other assistance that it never received. That is a debate for another day.

It was an era before "informed consent" was the norm much like the case of the African-American woman Henrietta Lacks whose cells were taken from a cancerous tumor when she died in 1951 and used for medical research.

In the case of the Yanomami blood, there is a clear way to put things right: return the blood so it can be destroyed in the Yanomami custom. The tribe believes all parts of the dead must be destroyed before a person can depart this world.

Penn State was once seen as a hero in this decadeslong saga.

After the Brazilian government made its formal request, Penn State is credited with getting the other holders of the blood — the American Cancer Institute and three other universities — on board with the notion of returning the blood samples. State College is housing one of the other university's samples in an effort to streamline the return.

Everything seemed on track for a smooth transition.

But here in 2010, Penn State is gaining a negative reputation for not keeping its word and drowning the situation in red tape.

When we called Penn State this week to inquire about the status, spokeswoman Lisa Powers reaffirmed the university's commitment to returning the blood, but said, "We have never been given a specific person to send the blood to and in what manner."

That answer falls flat.

A Brazilian newspaper reported last week that a plan is in place to have the universities and American

Cancer Institute bring their samples to Washington, D.C., where the Brazilian health agency (called Anvisa) would then take over and transport the blood back to Brazil and ultimately to the Yanomami people.

There have been enough excuses. While there are many parties involved in this seemingly simple transaction, concerns about how to transport the blood or that the universities could be liable for any hiccups in the return should have been sorted out in the last five years.

Enough is enough.

As Robert Borofsky, an anthropology professor at Hawaii Pacific University and author of a book on the Yanomami ordeal says, "It's like the oil spill in the gulf.

There is enough blame to go around about everything, but now we need to keep everyone focused on returning the blood."

It's time to make good on the university's word.

Let Penn State be the hero again by being the first to get the blood on its way to Washington, D.C., this year and ultimately back to Brazil.

The matter and the blood should finally be laid to rest.

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YOUR VIEW

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Corbett, Rohrer are wrong about tax benefits for state

Heather Long noted in her thoughtful May 9 commentary that The Patriot-News has received few letters supporting any gubernatorial candidate.

I will not state a strong preference either, but I would like to say that the positions of both Republican candidates on taxes and on the role of government would mean a big step backward.

Just as the House Appropriations Committee has finally passed a bill supporting the long-overdue imposition of taxes on Marcellus Shale gas drilling, smokeless tobacco and cigars, Tom Corbett trumpets in his commercials his opposition to any new taxes. All of the other natural gas-producing states have an extraction tax, and it is not hurting business there. Why should Pennsylvania citizens be the only ones left out?

Sam Rohrer, who also opposes a drilling tax, goes even further, saying that permits for gas drilling and coal mining "would be issued promptly with little regulatory oversight." (The Patriot-News, May 9). In the wake of recent tragedies in West Virginia and Louisiana involving the deaths of coal miners and oil rig workers, as well as incalculable environmental damage, strict government regulation is more essential than ever in these industries.

And the Sarah Palin fans who seem to be the most adamant anti-tax fanatics should logically favor taxing Marcellus Shale drilling. After all, Palin was only able to keep taxes for Alaskans so low by imposing large fees on the oil industry in that state.

ROBERT SHAFER, Upper Allen Twp.

3 ways to reform our political parties

What difference will Tuesday's locally based, party committee member elections make? I sincerely encourage our region's Democratic and Republican voters to consider these three principles to reform and renew Pennsylvania's parties:

• **Return to a grassroots focus:** The parties must become more responsive to voters' interests and needs. County and state committee members should privilege the views of their districts' residents over politicians or party operatives. They should actively foster the vital, grassroots participation that spurs change from the bottom-up, instead of setting the parties' agendas from the top down.

• **Support open primaries.** To ensure that ordinary voters truly have their say, state and county committees should refrain from formally endorsing candidates until after the primary elections. This would conserve the parties' financial resources to use in November's general elections, rather than spending valuable funds on behalf of preselected, favored primary candidates.

Openly contested primaries provide a crucial gauge of voters' changing views, better inspire and engage each party's members and can generate dynamic new ideas when candidates vigorously debate important issues.

• **Stand for a party's ideals:** Committee members should raise the issues ordinary voters most care about with candidates and elected officials at their regular committee meetings.

CATHERINE LAWRENCE, Harrisburg

State's tax advertisement is a little too much

I am writing to let you know that I am displeased with state government's choice to run an ad campaign about paying state taxes that depicts us all as being watched in a Big Brother manner.

I find this ad to be offensive, and it seeks to make people live in a world of fear of their government that we should pay taxes or suffer the consequences.

I think a much more effective route to getting people to pay their taxes would be to show how a lack of tax revenue means less money for schooling, infrastructure and emergency services.

I do not believe that the idea of a UAV guided missile strike on the home of a suburban family is a good motivator.

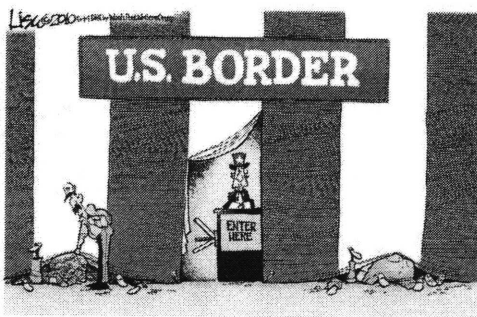
In a time when people in this country are upset with overly involved government and the latest developments of a police state in Arizona, I find this advertisement to be highly irresponsible.

I hope others can see that this ad is not the message our citizens should receive. We should not live in fear of our government or that some Jack Bauer tax agent will burst through our door.

This ad should be removed immediately and a formal apology made.

MATTHEW MAHONEY, Swatara Twp.

Lisa Benson | THE WASHINGTON POST



OUR VIEW

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Megan's Law loophole needs to be closed

Lawmakers need to make fixing an unintended loophole in Megan's Law a top priority.

It is unnerving to know that even though those sentenced to a lifetime of registration for serious crimes are required to notify authorities in Pennsylvania after moving here from another state, there is no penalty if they don't do it.

We saw this in our own community recently when charges in Cumberland County were dropped against Bryan Shaw Rouse for failing to register as a sex offender after he moved here from Ohio.

He was then rearrested on charges of sexually assaulting a 14-year-old Mechanicsburg girl back in August.

This is all happening after the state Superior Court ruled in mid-March that some out-of-state offenders who fail to comply with their registration cannot be prosecuted without specific statutory changes.

Megan's Law was created to allow authorities and the public to keep track of sex offenders.

In Pennsylvania, 10,205 people are registered as sex offenders under the law. Of that number, 1,830 people came from other states and must register for their entire lives.

This glitch means some serious offenders, including sexual predators, could go free if they get caught disregarding the law.

On the flip side, if sex offenders with

convictions on lesser charges don't comply with their 10-year period of registration, they face a tough two-year prison term.

Cumberland and Dauphin county district attorneys along with Pennsylvania State Police Commissioner Frank Pawlowski are right to urge lawmakers to close the loophole as soon as possible because there are likely offenders in our state now not complying with the law who will avoid penalties if caught.

We commend the House Judiciary Committee, which is working on legislation to fix the problem. But the Rouse case highlights why there is a need to move quickly.

When talking to a reporter, Dauphin County Assistant District Attorney Sean McCormack said he knew of dropped failure-to-register charges against at least five other out-of-state offenders. That is just one county.

Some are arguing that Pennsylvania should become a haven for serious sex offenders because of the loophole. We are skeptical of that notion, but the state shouldn't wait to find out.

When sex offenders register with the police in a community where they live, it does more than just allow authorities to know their whereabouts. The information is just as importantly available to the public.

Legislators need to make changes to the law so when someone from out of state disregards that system there are serious penalties.

Does God listen only to sanctioned prayers?

This prayer thing has me confused. While it seems clear, indeed startlingly obvious, that the First Amendment prevents the government from enacting legislation favoring one religion over another or even religion over nonreligion, millions of Americans find the injunction against the National Day of Prayer statute to be somehow objectionable.

The court ruling did not ban all prayer throughout the nation, though I get the sense that many believe that is just what it did. What is there about prayer that requires its apparent effectiveness to be so dependent on legislation and presidential proclamations?

What stops believers from having their own day of prayer and praying to their hearts' content? Isn't every day a national day of prayer?

And while I'm questioning the effectiveness of prayer, because God has been "kicked out of our schools," why do believers insist that students be led in prayer by their teachers? Doesn't God hear the silently whispered and mentally constructed prayers just as well as those led by a teacher?

Does God listen only to officially sanctioned prayers and ignore the rest? To listen to the hue and cry over the recent federal court decision, one would get that impression.

JOHN PURCELL, Lower Paxton Twp.

Term limit is best way

"If you always do what you've always done, you'll always get what you always got." Let's remember that when we go to the polls.

Hate the Democrats? ... the Republicans? Fed up with the state? ... the federal government? Sick of partisan rhetoric and political theater? There is a solution that we can control — a term limit of one.

That's right. Why? It's easy to keep track. It allows officials little time to become seduced by the power, perks and prestige of the positions. Entrenchment and careerism would not be possible. More good folks would be willing to serve if they didn't have to sully themselves in the current duplicitous atmosphere. After one term, we could gratefully welcome them back among us under the conditions they helped create. And after a few complete turnovers, we would have a group of representatives ready to consider many of the constructive reforms that I see contrived in these pages almost every week.

Tell me, seriously, who among our current crop of politicians is irreplaceable? If we truly want to end the concept of political career, then the final question becomes: Can you steel yourself to vote for your party's opponent if your party's incumbent runs for re-election?

RICH WHITE, Southampton Twp.

Holocaust education

I'm a Holocaust survivor and educator. I need to thank Rep. Matt Bradford, D-Montgomery County, for introducing House Bill 2985. Also sincere gratitude to Reps. Sue Helm, John Payne and Ronald Buxton for supporting this bill.

These representatives, as busy as they are, took time to talk to me kindly and with great understanding of the importance of this bill. This bill is for Holocaust educational studies.

Those teachers instructing about the Holocaust are dedicated to the belief that teaching about the Holocaust makes a difference in the way our future generation will ultimately mature and take responsibility for their actions.

The students who have heard my Holocaust presentation write and explain to me that after listening to my presentation, they thank me for making them appreciate how lucky they are to be living in the best country in the world.

HILDA MANTELMACHER, Lower Paxton Twp.

Rethink foreign policy

Recent news is full of environmental trouble about the gulf oil spill, which threatens U.S. wetlands, costs fishing and tourism billions of dollars, and affects our pocketbook. While we hear about environmental problems, we rarely hear about the deep trouble of U.S. bombing in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Media around the world, with the exception of most American mainstream papers, recently were filled with stories of deformed children in places such as Falujah, places that were subjected to bombs made of depleted uranium and other highly toxic substances. When will the environment be cleaned of these toxins?

And what is the carbon footprint of the bombing? The B-2 bomber burns five gallons of jet fuel each minute. An F-15 fighter takeoff burns 44 gallons of fuel per minute. How is climate being affected? We need to ask our leaders to re-think their foreign policy strategies through an environmental lens.

MARY BONACCORSI HERZEL, Lower Paxton Twp.