

OPINION

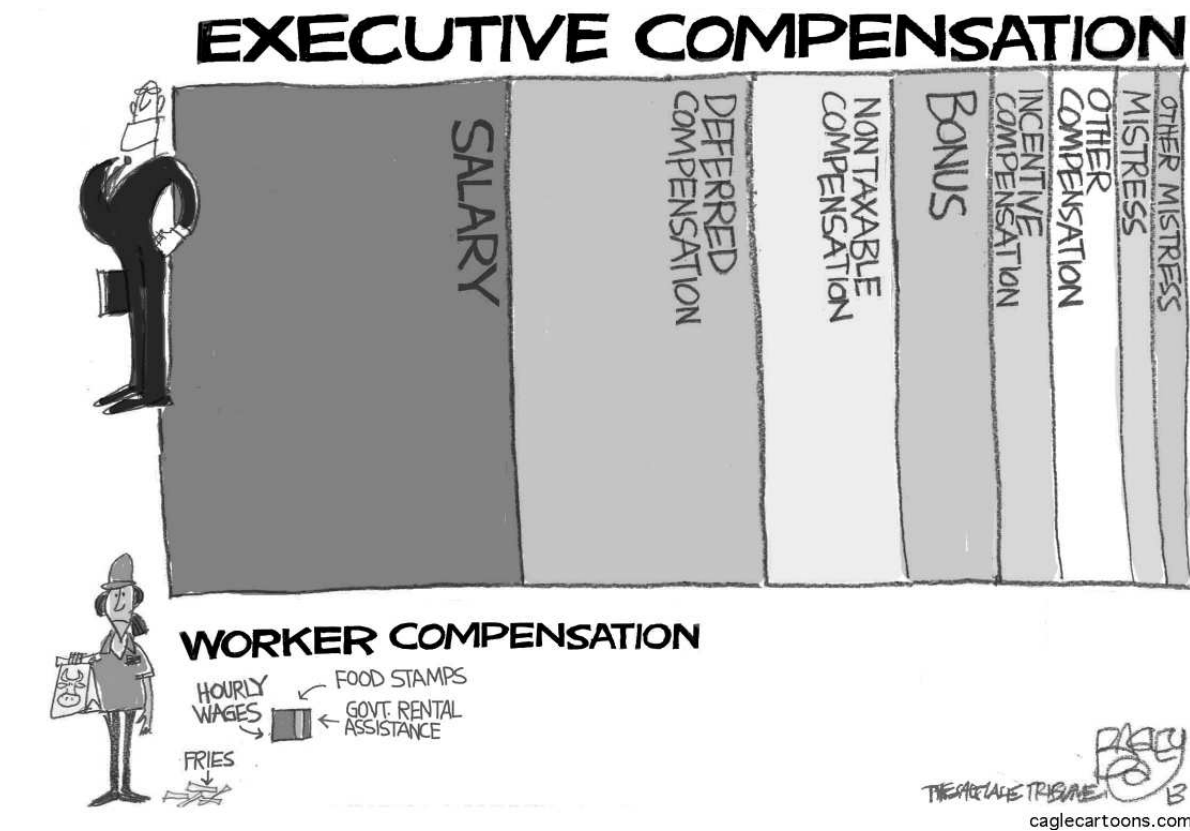
OUR VIEW

Handshake was appropriate

A fitting tribute to a great world leader shouldn't be marred by a handshake. It seems Pres. Barack Obama's handshake Tuesday with Cuba's leader Raul Castro followed through on Nelson Mandela's ideals of embracing peace, civility and the reconciliation of leaders and their people. Obama briefly shook hands with Castro at the memorial for the former South African president. The handshake was followed just minutes later by Obama's remarks that all nations had the duty to uphold "the basic human rights of their people," which Cuba has clearly not done. Obama also criticized governments that embrace Mandela's legacy of racial reconciliation but "passionately resist even modest reforms" to fight poverty and inequality, and imprison people for their political beliefs. The handshake appears to be the first between American and Cuban presidents since 2000, when Bill Clinton and Fidel Castro greeted each other at a United Nations luncheon in New York, and only the second since 1959, when Fidel Castro took power.

A White House official said the Castro handshake wasn't a pre-planned encounter. Instead, it just happened as the president walked toward the podium to give his remarks about Mandela and his legacy. Perhaps that handshake helped Castro clearly hear Obama's message about the lessons to be learned by Nelson Mandela's life, a life where he justifiably developed anger over the treatment of he and his people, but found peace and forgiveness even after spending nearly three decades in prison for his beliefs. Obama's handshake with Castro was simply a gesture of civility during a memorial for a man who embodied civility. It doesn't mean Obama agrees with Castro's philosophies or leadership, or even that he likes the man. Instead, he was polite to another world leader attending a tribute to someone who clearly influenced all corners of the world. Mandela once said, "If you want to make peace with your enemy, you have to work with your enemy. Then he becomes your partner." We hope Castro and others were paying attention to the remarks made at the tribute.

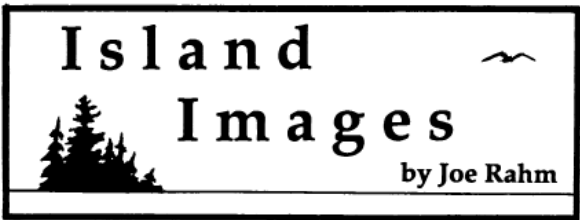
FIRST AMENDMENT "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press or the right of people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances."



GUEST COLUMNS

Life's better moments

Life has many challenges, but thankfully, it also has moments of triumph and inspiration. This column is about two of those moments. They still brighten my day, and perhaps now they will brighten yours too. Oddly enough, they both center on little boxes. The first one involves the generation gap: Three small, forlorn figures stood in a boat that was drifting toward Canada. As my boat approached them, one held up a gas can. They were a boy and two girls about 12 years old. After I towed them to our dock, the girls joined my wife in the flower garden, and the boy and I climbed into our truck to go for gas. Separated by half a century, we rode in awkward silence. Finally I asked, "What do you do in your spare time?" "I like to ride my jet-ski," he replied. Then he asked if I had one. "No, I don't like them, especially when they make noisy power circles near our house." "Oh, they shouldn't be making 360's. The most I do are 180's, way out in the bay."



we all get repaid, but we don't have to bother with money." He shook my hand, hesitated as if to say something, and then he was gone. That was 16 years ago, and I still remember my young friend.

The other memorable moment shows the caring side of humanity. It occurred at a funeral: A lovely lady had died, and as we waited for her funeral to begin, my attention was focused on a little wooden box resting near the altar. Elegant in its simplicity, the box had been made by a local carpenter. He had built it carefully from fine red oak, then sanded and stained it to a soft luster, and now it held the earthly remains of his friend. His remarkable compassion was that of the pioneers who built pine boxes in which their friends were laid to rest. During the service, as we raised our voices in Amazing Grace, my spirits rose too. And while leaving the church, I felt all the better for having been there.

How to contact your lawmakers

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Earning our trust today in America

Trust ain't what it used to be in America. Back in 1972, when the folks conducting the General Social Survey first asked a sampling of Americans if they trusted their countrymen, about half said they did. Last year, when the same research outfit asked the same set of questions, only a third of our fellow Americans said they trusted one another. The GSS found that Americans — black and white, rich or poor — are more leery, suspicious and mistrustful of others than ever before. As long as the General Social Survey itself can be trusted, it both confirms and contradicts what my eyes and ears have been telling me for years. On one hand, the survey found that about two-thirds of Americans believe "you can't be too careful" dealing with others. The Associated Press followed up this year with a poll on some specifics. Americans say they don't trust other drivers not to crash into them. They say they don't trust the retail clerks who swipe their credit cards. They say they don't trust the people they meet when they are traveling. The GSS didn't bother to ask if we trusted the government or Wall Street or the mainstream news media. The AP found that 81 percent of Americans seldom trust the government in Washington.



Michael REAGAN
MAKING SENSE

No one needs a survey to discover that most of us believe those big American institutions can't be trusted. It's also understandable why so many Americans, especially the young, don't trust our leaders and social institutions like marriage, the church and the family. A lot of young people have fallen out of trust with President Obama lately, for good reason. Ditto for churches. And after seeing so many marriages break up, why would a young person trust her own marriage to last? Better to not get married in the first place. Despite the survey results, however, the real problem might be that too many Americans — especially young ones — are actually too trusting in some ways. Too many people of all ages still blindly trust that what they see on TV and the Internet is true. But when it comes to social media, kids — and too many of their parents — are incredibly

trusting and naive. By the millions, they post their personal data and deepest thoughts on Facebook. They email each other. They sext love notes to each other. They send out compromising selfies on their smart phones. These over-trusting souls tell the whole world where they live, what they own and when they're going away on vacation — and then they're shocked to come home to a robbed and ransacked house. In the Smart Phone Age, when everyone with an iPhone thinks he's a news reporter, trusting everyone in the room or on the street with your secret or your politically incorrect opinion is a dumb idea. Ask Mitt Romney. Ask Prince Harry. Ask Alec Baldwin. It's pretty clear that technology and social media have outrun our ability to handle them. Until we get a grip on them, until we learn to use them maturely, we shouldn't trust them so much. So who do we trust? We trust the people and institutions who earn our trust. And if no one is earning it, we have to learn to trust ourselves. I hope we still know how to do that. Reagan is the son of President Ronald Reagan, a political consultant, and the author of "The New Reagan Revolution" (St. Martin's Press). His column is distributed exclusively by Cagle Cartoons newspaper syndicate.