

**The Capital**  
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**Our say**  
**United Way effort**  
**helps community**

ANNE ARUNDEL COUNTY, according to a recent survey, leads the state in projected fourth-quarter growth. Some 44 percent of the local companies contacted by Manpower-Inc. are planning to add workers.

If nothing else, this means United Way of Central Maryland should be able to meet its goal this fall of raising \$1.34 million in Anne Arundel County, 9.8 percent more than was raised last year.

We've been having good times in this state and this county — such good times that the main business problem is a labor shortage. Prosperity brings with it an obligation to support agencies that help the less fortunate and see to human service needs. And we don't know of an easier or better way to do this than a payroll deduction to the United Way.

The list of local organizations supported — from the Annapolis Boys and Girls Club to the Salvation Army, the YWCA, and the Anne Arundel County Association for Retarded Citizens — is large and diverse. And year after year the United Way puts more money into local organizations than it raises in the county.

In part, that's because some county residents work and contribute in other jurisdictions. But it also tells us that more can be raised here.

In spite of our relative affluence, this community still has homeless people, unwed mothers, child abuse, drug problems and special educational needs. It still has older communities that need a helping hand. And a lot can be done for a mere \$1-a-week deduction from a paycheck — an amount that, frankly, most of us will never miss.

So when those pledge cards are distributed at your workplace, please think about it seriously.

**Weekend's MDA event**  
**deserves support**

TODAY THROUGH Sunday you may notice firefighters — members of Local 1926 — at main intersections in Annapolis with, of all things, boots. The "Fill the Boot" campaign is just one of various fund-raisers for the Muscular Dystrophy Association over the Labor Day weekend, connected with the annual Jerry Lewis MDA telethon. The firefighters raised \$6,000 last year.

The telethon — now in its 35th year — starts at 9 p.m. Sunday on WDCA (channel 20) and at 11:30 p.m. on WNUV (channel 54). It will also be simulcast on the Web at [www.mdousa.org](http://www.mdousa.org).

Last year this event raised a record \$53.1 million for research, clinical care and other services for children and adults suffering from muscular dystrophy, Lou Gehrig's disease and other neuro-muscular disorders.

We encourage you to contribute — either directly, on the phone or the Internet, or through local spinoffs like the firefighters' effort. It's a great cause.

**10-mile run**

I would like to take this opportunity to thank some of the people and organizations whose support made this past weekend's 25th anniversary Annapolis Ten Mile Run such an outstanding success and without whom the race could not happen:

- The mayor's office and the city of Annapolis, for allowing us to use the streets.
- The United States Naval Academy and Naval Academy Athletic Association, for allowing us to use their roads, not to mention the Navy-Marine Corps Memorial Stadium.
- The Annapolis Police Department, for ensuring that we had a safe race.
- Anne Arundel Medical Center, for letting us use its facilities for the expo on Saturday.
- The Capital, for helping us get the word out.
- The 600 volunteers who have made a reputation for themselves as among the finest in the country.
- Our sponsors, for their support and refreshments.
- The communities of Admiral Heights, Ferry Farms and Penderinis Mount, and all the churches along the course, for accommodating the runners this one Sunday morning each year.

You're all wonderful! On behalf of the Annapolis Ten Mile Race Committee and the Annapolis Strider organization, thank you

RON BOWMAN  
 Race Director  
 Annapolis Ten Mile Run

**Fort Smallwood Park**

What is the fate of Fort Smallwood Park?

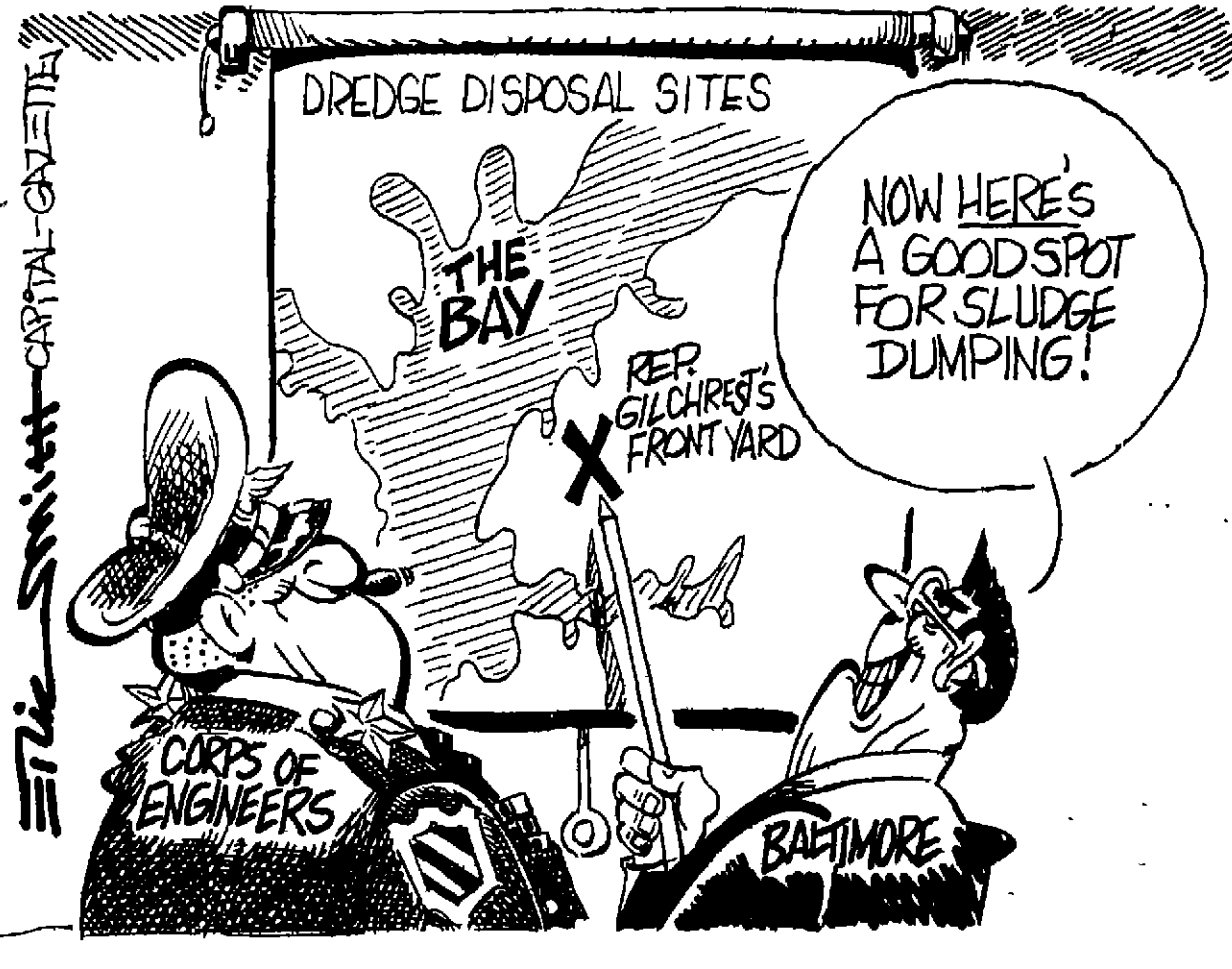
I have lived in Anne Arundel County for 35 years, and I just recently purchased a waterfront home just three miles away from Fort Smallwood Park. My husband and I decided to take a bike ride through the park one morning. I couldn't believe the condition of the park — signs stating "No camping due to sewage problems" and other problems dealing with trash, and poorly maintained grounds.

Through conversation with locals, I found out that, although the park is in Anne Arundel County, the city of Baltimore owns the park.

At one time Fort Smallwood Park was a popular vacation spot for Baltimoreans and Anne Arundel residents. So, why hasn't Baltimore city maintained Fort Smallwood Park to the standards of such parks as Downs Memorial and Quiet Waters? The city of Baltimore didn't seem to have a problem accommodating the park with lights and sewage for the 15,000 square dancers who arrived in our city for a convention.

If the city of Baltimore has no intention of maintaining Fort Smallwood Park, then it should hand it over to Anne Arundel County residents, so we can ensure the preservation of this historic park.

CATHY SHADRICK  
 Pasadena



**Readers' views**

**Deregulation**

I've been following with interest the news about upcoming electric supply deregulation in Maryland and the promised benefits of lower rates through competition. My recent trips to California have offered a different perspective on the subject, which I haven't seen reported here.

The local news in Los Angeles is filled with hardship stories resulting from deregulation in California (implemented a couple years ago), which resulted in rate increases for residential consumers of two or three times or even more.

Additionally, Californians are currently experiencing local rolling brownouts and blackouts in the San Diego and Orange County area, due to power shortages. The governor has become personally involved and is trying to negotiate more favorable rates and delayed paybacks for the residents. The situation is repeatedly described as a disaster and few seemed pleased with the results of deregulation.

I would encourage *The Capital* to report on two topics. First, what went wrong in California, as its residents were also promised lower rates due to competition? And second, why should we believe that Maryland's experience will be any different?

Is deregulation going to solve a problem or open Pandora's box?

JOHN R. ALBERTINE  
 Annapolis

**Lobbyist loophole**

I am responding to Louise Woody's letter (Readers' views,

**Time for Bush**

I was greatly amused by J.A. Hooge's letter (Readers' views, Aug. 20). I am sure he had no problem with the last "dynasty," known as Kennedy — with all of its marvelous programs and wars.

As for the voting record of George W. Bush and Dick Cheney, most of their nays were to deny government waste and the greasing of the palms of lawyers and friendly corporations.

Democrats: You clowns have had your turn at bat, but naturally do not want to give in to the new kids on the block. Move over and let the patriots have a turn.

JANET LEVINE  
 President  
 Common Cause / Maryland  
 Annapolis

**Letters continue on Page A11.**

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**Lobbyist loophole (continued)**

Wooddy's letter (Readers' views,

**Clarence Page**

school sweethearts. They have numerous witnesses dating back to their days in college, Al's days in Vietnam, and both of their days on *The (Nashville) Tennessean*, where he was a reporter and she was a photographer.

But most of the nation has not been watching the Gores or the Bushes for very long. Most of the nation has spent this summer trying to find cheap gasoline for sport utility vehicles or wondering who was going to get voted off the island on CBS-TV's summer hit "Survivor."

Informing the public about the candidates and their issues is what conventions are for, which is what made the Kiss so important. People want to hear about issues, but they also remember what they are shown.

The Kiss sent several important messages. It showed Al Gore has a pulse. It showed Al Gore can be spontaneous. It showed Al and Tipper Gore will do at least one thing we have not seen Bill and Hillary Clinton do, which is to get all smoochy in public and really seem to mean it. The message: No more bimbo eruptions with this team, folks.

Al Gore knows that little emotional impressions mean a lot in winning over voters. Think back to October, when Gore was slipping badly behind former New Jersey senator Bill Bradley in the polls and in fund raising. Gore surprised us then by announcing that he considered himself to be "the underdog."

He challenged Bradley to debates, which challengers usually do to incumbents. He moved his headquarters from Washington to Nashville and shook up his staff. His usual blue suits and white dress shirts were replaced with casual earth-toned clothes. He started dashing into audiences — like Oprah Winfrey — with a wireless microphone at town hall meetings.

It looked goofy to some. His critics criticized him for re-inventing himself too often. But it worked.

Gore had a second act, Bradley did not. Bradley fell behind and failed to win a single state's primary. Gore repeated his hare vs. tortoise tactic against Bush. After languishing in the polls all summer, Gore surprised many at his party's convention by coming out swinging. "I will fight for you," he said, casting his campaign in populist terms as "the people against the powerful."

Viewers learned Gore favors a patients' bill of rights to curb health maintenance organization abuses. He wants to expand Medicare to pay for prescription drugs. He wants to stop the big polluters. He wants to target tax cuts to help "working families" with specific problems, like paying for college tuition.

Bush criticized Gore for reviving the "class warfare" that the most liberal Democrats push. If so, it is class-warfare-light. He wants to put curbs on corporate elites, not overthrow them. Like it or not, it is a message that much of his audience, hungry for information, welcomed.

Before the conventions Gore had fallen to a 17-point deficit with Bush in the Gallup poll and was 10 points behind Bush in a Princeton Survey Research Associates poll. After the conventions, Gore was dead even in Gallup and ahead by 6 points in the Princeton poll. Whether Gore can hold on to that lead depends on what kind of second act Bush presents.

For now, Gore's turnaround appears to have started with the Kiss. With one lingering smackeroo, he sent that message that, yes, just as I am passionate toward my wife, I will be passionate in fighting for you.

The critics who said Gore's speech lacked poetry were right. But you don't need a poem when a pucker will do.

**Smooch helps Gore get his second wind**

Ah, yes, the Kiss. That's the way the media have been referring to the big lip-lock Vice President Al Gore laid on his wife Tipper onstage during the Democratic National Convention.

I didn't want to pay much attention to it. But the more I think about the Kiss, the more it helps to explain why Gore bounced back from a double-digit pre-convention polling deficit to Republican presidential nominee George W. Bush — and how Bush might yet win the contest.

Many of my colleagues missed the significance of the Kiss. They tried, you might say, to kiss it off. They called it yucky and contrived and even, in the overblown words of one prominent conservative columnist, "disgusting."

Now, now.

Just as conservatives used to beg President Reagan's advisers to "Let Reagan be Reagan," media types need to sit back and let Al Gore be Al Gore.

Sure, his political instincts are not as sharp or as sure-footed as President Clinton's. Gore is less spontaneous, more wooden in appearance. And his speechmaking seems to lurch clumsily from a dull monotone into a loud preacher-like growl when he feels it is time to show some emotion.

That's why some of us audibly moaned when Al grabbed his little Tipper, pulled her to him, pressed his lips to hers and wouldn't let her go as the crowd cheered exuberantly.

Those of us who have been watching the Gores for a long time know that Al and Tipper have loved each other since they were high-

**School choice initiative puts Mich. voters to the test**

DETROIT — A Catholic priest, asked how one might come to understand the Church's teaching on heaven and hell, answered: "Die." How can schools come to understand what reformers think reforms will achieve? Reform.

Opponents of school choice and other reforms, pummeled by evidence of reformers' successes, must feel that the trouble with facts is indeed that they are so numerous. Consider recent news:

Two years ago Californians ignored self-interested fear mongering from the bilingual education sector of the public education industry and severely limited bilingual education. Now standardized tests reveal dramatic cognitive improvements among English-deficient children, especially in school districts most scrupulously complying with the new policy.

A two-year study, by the Harvard Program on Education Policy and Governance, of privately funded school choice programs in Washington, D.C., New York City and Dayton, Ohio, documents "moderately large" improvement in test scores by African-American children who used vouchers to switch from public to private schools. The improvement was better than that achieved in a Tennessee experiment reducing class sizes by seven students.

Last week the Education Department reported stagnation in the 1990s in students' scores in reading and science nationally. Also last week, a Gallup Poll showed that almost 70 percent of nonwhite

number of charter schools, which was reached two years ago. But if this year's "Kids First" Yes! initiative passes, in districts that fail to graduate two-thirds of their students — currently about 30 of 57 districts — parents will receive scholarships worth half (about \$3,300) the public schools per pupil expenditure (about \$6,600) that will be redeemable at private schools.

The vouchers are not means-tested, but failing schools generally serve poor communities. Ninety percent of private schools have tuitions that cost less than the vouchers are worth. In all other districts, voters and school boards could choose to join the voucher program.

To immunize the program against criticism from the complacent, it would guarantee that per-pupil public school funding will never fall below the current level. Furthermore, it would guarantee an 18 percent increase in the minimum level of public school funding — a guarantee worth \$2.1 billion annually to Michigan's school districts. Plainly put, middle-class support for helping about 30 poor districts is being purchased with a guarantee of increased per-pupil spending in about 525 more affluent districts.

Finally, there would be teacher testing in the appropriate academic subject areas for all public school teachers, and for all teachers in private schools that accept the new scholarships.

Facts — those, again — demolish the

argument that vouchers would increase de facto school segregation. Detroit has the nation's most segregated urban public school system, which is much less integrated than its private schools.

"Kids First! Yes!" is spearheaded by Dick and Betsy DeVos of the remarkable Grand Rapids family that created the Amway Corp. In the mid-1990s they organized 4,000 private scholarships for low-income families — and were astonished to receive 64,000 applications from parents desperate to escape nonperforming public schools. Why, aside from the power of the teachers' unions and the weakness of the poor, does the political system not respond to such pent-up discontent?

G.K. Chesterton said he probably owed his fully positive opinion of Eskimos to never having met any. Perhaps many politicians and others opposed to school choice — including Al Gore, and many Michigan politicians and public school teachers — owe their immoderate enthusiasm for public education to the fact that their children have scant experience with it. Gore, the situational ethicist, recently said, "If I was the parent of a child who went to an inner-city school that was failing, I might be for vouchers, too."

Admirably motivated and shrewdly designed, "Kids First! Yes!" is this year's clearest test of this contented country's capacity to address glaring inequities.

Parents favor voucher plans.

The best, and often the only, way to win support for programs that help the poor is to make the programs also serve the middle class, or even primarily the middle class. The political problem confronting advocates of school choice is that their programs primarily benefit the poor, whereas middle-class parents are satisfied — often mistakenly — with their schools. And these parents believe that school choice must mean resources siphoned away from public schools.

But some astute Michigan reformers hope that in November their state will pass an initiative to institute measures targeted to fix the portion of public education that is undeniably broken. The program prudently contains considerable comforts for the comfortable.

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**George Will**

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