

The Style Invitational

Week 622: Our Sunday Constitutional



BY BOB STAAKE FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

For any offense whatever, members of Congress shall receive punishment on their large seats, delivered with a branch by a common criminal.

This week's contest, suggested by Peter Metrinko of Chantilly, was inspired by the new law, hustled through Congress by Founding Father Sen. Robert Byrd, that all 1.8 million federal employees, plus students at all schools receiving federal funds, must receive "educational and training materials" about the U.S. Constitution. Since so many Washingtonians will soon be perusing this foundation of our society for at least a whole minute, there ought to be at least a magnet in it for them: **Write a new article or amendment to the Constitution, using only the words contained in the existing document (including amendments).** Remember, this is a humor contest, so don't get all passionate and screedy on us. Winner receives the Inker, the official Style Invitational trophy. First runner-up gets, direct from Vietnam and donated by Loser Stephen Dudzik of Olney, a bottle of genuine Snake Wine (One Unit). This is an actual bottle of clear wine that contains not only an entire dead cobra placed inside in the striking pose but also a dead scorpion thrown in for extra medicinal value. "Usage: Rheumatism, Lumbago, Sweat of Limbs."

Other runners-up win a coveted Style Invitational Loser T-shirt. Honorable mentions get one of the lusted-after Style Invitational Magnets. One prize per entrant per week. Send your entries by e-mail to losers@washpost.com or, if you really have to, by fax to 202-334-4312. Deadline is Monday, Aug. 15. Put "Week 622" in the subject line of your e-mail, or it risks being ignored as spam. Include your name, postal address and phone number with

your entry. Entries are judged on the basis of humor and originality. All entries become the property of The Washington Post. Entries may be edited for taste or content. Results will be published Sept. 4. No purchase required for entry. Employees of The Washington Post, and their immediate relatives, are not eligible for prizes. Pseudonymous entries will be disqualified. The revised title for next week's contest is by Chris Doyle of Forsyth, Mo.

Report from Week 618, in which we asked you to remedy — in words set to a recognizable tune — the lack of a memorable song the District can call its own. So, so many funny parodies. To stick somewhat to the subject of the city, as well as to winnow the number of worthies, the Empress tossed all submissions relating to a single *national* political news development (so sorry, Mr. Rove and Ms. Plame), though she used a number of songs about federal and congressional Washington in general. The best rhyme of the week came from Mike Murphy of Munhall, Pa., who rhymed "filibusterin'" with "Van Susteren." We'll spare you the rest of the song, however. In return, do take the opportunity to see the many more parodies on the Style Invitational page on washingtonpost.com.

◆ **Third runner-up: To the middle of "Bohemian Rhapsody":** I see a vendor with a cutout of a man: "Pres'den' Boosh! Pres'den' Boosh! Would you like a nice photo?" Tourists find delighting — very, very frightening me. "Take a photo, take a photo, take a photo, take a photo" — Can't you all please just go ho-o-o-ome? (Eric Murphy, Chicago)

◆ **Second runner-up: To "Begin the Beguine":** When they descend on D.C. The lobbyists swarm like flies on manure. The city becomes an ethical sewer When they descend on D.C. They're with us once more, handing out treats With junkets galore, and influence-peddling, So much to abhor! Congressional meddling! When they descend on D.C. (Jeff Brechlin, Eagan, Minn.)

◆ **And the winner of the Inker: To "Anything Goes":** They come from Texas and Nebraska, They're coming here from Alaska with résumés. Everyone stays! They say their stay is temporary, That life here is just a very short passing phase — Everyone stays!

They all love to schmooze today 'bout the news today, Pass a bill today on the Hill today, Get a spouse today and buy a house today. And then they don't ever leave!

◆ **Honorable Mentions To "Whole Lotta Shakin' Goin' On":** Come on out to D.C., whole lotta takin' goin' on; Palms getting greasy, those lobbyists know how to fawn. I ain't fakin', whole lotta takin' goin' on. When the slop starts a-flowin', ya gotta belly on up to the trough. If Ethics wants to grill ya, just hold your head high and scoff. And, if you're really, really cookin', you might find your own Abramoff. (Nick Curtis, Gaithersburg)

To "A Wonderful Guy" from "South Pacific": Nothing's deader than D.C. in August Once you see Congress adjourn and shut down. That's just as well, 'cause it's hotter than hell And we all want to clear out of town. Atmosphere like an open-air sauna: So stinking muggy you fear you could drown. Patience runs out and all stand up and shout, "I must leave, I must leave, I must leave, I must leave, I must leave from this horrible town!" (Brendan Beary)

To "It Don't Come Easy": No vote in D.C., You got no vote in D.C. You know that you will lose: There's no senator to choose 'Cause you got no vote in D.C. Don't bother to shout, you are just left out 'Cause you got no vote in D.C. Taxation without representation: Washington is second class To the whole rest of the nation . . . (Jeff Wadler, Ocean Pines, Md.)

To "New York, New York": Start spinning the news, they're leaking today, Right where they make an art of it: D.C., D.C. They win or they lose, but still they all stay And play their pompous parts in it. D.C., D.C.

◆ **First runner-up, winner of the CD "The Symphonic Whistler": To "Midnight Train to Georgia":** Ooh, the Beltway proved too much for my van, It's the hottest day of summer and I'm about to overheat. 'Cause I've got the AC cranking as I inch along in traffic; I've been out here for an hour And I ain't gone a hundred feet. Nothing's movin' from Wisconsin out to Georgia. Yeah the Inner Loop is gridlock, as it is most every day. But I'm determined to make the best of my inertia; I just suck in those exhaust fumes and pretend I'm in L.A. (Brendan Beary, Great Mills)

Some folks insist they miss home places So full of familiar faces, where cattle graze And everyone prays!

Though Bob Dole said he'd be returning, I never see Bob Dole yearning for Kansas days. Everyone stays! (Barbara Sarshik, McLean)

I want to shake up those loudmouth media creeps, Then climb up Capitol Hill, and tell off those [bleeps]! The Democrat Blues are whining, Reds say. They both should put a sock in it — In old D.C. If they can fake it there, they'll take it everywhere. You know it's true! D.C., D.C.! (Phil Berardelli and Jessie Thorpe, McLean)

To "Another Brick in the Wall": We don't get no representation. We don't get pothole patrols. No learning goes on in our classrooms. We ain't got no hope at all. Hey! Congress! Leave us all alone! (Gary Patishnock, Laurel)

To "Roxanne": Glenmont, you're now at the end of the Red Line. My commute got shorter, I don't have to drive that Pontiac of mine. Glenmont, I don't have to get no parking fine, Ride the Metro to D.C., I don't care what it says on the street sign. . . . (Russell Beland, Springfield)

To "Walk Like an Egyptian": Hear your con-gress-man, he cam-paigns A-bout how god-aw-ful this place is. If you don't send him back (oh-way-oh) He'll just move here as a lobbyist. All the tourist groups on the Mall Wanna see the pandas, don't you know. They don't move too quick (oh-way-oh) on the escalator to the Red Metro. College kids with their internships say Ay oh way-oh, ay oh way oh, Let's go to Washington. (Pam Sweeney, Germantown)

See lots more Honorable Mentions on the Style Invitational page on washingtonpost.com.

Next Week: WordCount Us In, or Four-Word March

MISS MANNERS

Judith Martin

Perfect Guests, Perfectly Irritating

Nobody likes a houseguest who critiques the arrangements, announces his likes and dislikes, refuses to participate in planned activities, uses the place only to sleep or remains constantly underfoot, never offers return treats and expects to be waited upon without having to lift a finger to help.

But there are more ways than these for a houseguest to become a household pest. That can also be accomplished by praising everything in sight, refraining from admitting to any dislikes or special likes, being ready to do everything proposed, dropping everything to follow the host's schedule, helping out around the house and reciprocating generously.

Miss Manners hates acknowledging this. If only the etiquette business consisted of setting out rigid rules requiring obedience but not judgment — which most people think etiquette is, anyway — her life would be simpler. She could bark out orders and retire to her porch swing without the nuisance of dealing with nuances.

But then you might be stuck with exasperating people who follow the rules scrupulously, such as the Perfect Houseguest.

This type can be identified first thing in the morning, when he refuses to choose among the options offered. That may be a relief after the houseguest who announces that his breakfast needs include kiwi juice, eggs Florentine, bread with no preservatives, boysenberry jam and a specific brand of coffee with fresh cream. But not after the following dialogue:

Host: "What do you normally have for breakfast?" Guest: "Oh, anything." Host: "I have eggs, bagels and cereal. What would you like?" Guest: "It doesn't matter." Host: "But what would you like?" Guest: "Oh, I like everything."

And so on. Inquiries as to whether he slept well bring a reassuringly positive answer, and it is only later than the host discovers that rather than ask for an extra pillow or blanket, the guest went out and bought one.

Praise for the household is gratifying until it has accumulated to the point where hardly a stick in the house has not been favorably appraised, and the host is beginning to feel as if he is running a shop.

If the host seems momentarily occupied, the Perfect Guest puts himself under house arrest in his

room. When the host proposes an activity, he unfailingly acquiesces, and may be overheard canceling any independent plans he was encouraged to make, such as sightseeing or visiting other friends in town.

But he can also take the initiative. He jumps up to clear the table while people are still eating, washes up while no one is looking and puts things away where no one can find them. Instead of bringing a small luxury in the way of a present, he brings groceries and other staples. In the most extreme cases, he leaves money behind to cover the host's costs.

Such a guest may sound good to those who suffer from the inconsiderate guests, but Miss Manners assures them that guests who are trying too hard to be perfect can be perfect nuisances. It is nerve-racking to try to please someone without receiving any reliable feedback. Having one's every gesture of hospitality anticipated and thwarted eventually seems insulting. And then there is the irritant of not being able to find where the guest put the washed spoons.

It can almost — but not quite — seem to be a high price to pay for not finding hair in the guest bathroom sink.

Dear Miss Manners:

My best friend is getting married and we want to know if there is a proper way to ask for donations to the newlyweds in lieu of presents. They have everything they need, but the cost of the wedding is going to put her in debt for a long time.

First we thought of opening an account for family and friends to make a deposit into, but we wouldn't know who gave what. Then we thought of having a nice decorative box for the envelopes to go in. We feel this is tacky asking for money, but it's really what they need. Can you help us?

Yes, because Miss Manners knows what your best friend really does need. She needs to know that there is no polite way to say, "We plan to spend beyond our means and want to stick you with the bill."

Feeling incorrect? E-mail your etiquette questions to Miss Manners (who is distraught that she cannot reply personally) at MissManners@unitedmedia.com or mail to United Media, 200 Madison Ave., New York, N.Y. 10016.

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ASK AMY

Dear Amy:

A friend recently discovered the phone numbers of other women in her boyfriend's truck. After being a sounding board for her during this period, I started questioning my own relationship. I started looking in my boyfriend's wallet. I found the phone numbers of many women; one woman I thought he had a crush on a while back, and he had denied it. The numbers were all current too. I don't know what to do about this. We've been together a long time, but there has been no further commitment.

I know I was wrong to snoop, and I feel sick about it. I've done it three times in 3½ years. Do I just come out, admit I was snooping and ask him about these numbers? What's worse — a man who secretly has the phone numbers of other women in his wallet or the snooper?

Making Myself Ill

I don't think we need to determine what is worse — snooping or collecting phone numbers. I'm sure your guy will say that snooping is worse, and then your conversation will be all about your snooping problem instead of your trust issues.

You should come right out and tell your guy that you have gone through his wallet. Tell him that you know it was wrong to do that and that you apologize.

Then ask him about his phone number collection.

Snooping isn't simply an invasion of privacy — it's the manifestation of your suspicions and insecurity. If your guy offers you a rational and reasonable explanation for his collection ("Honey — I wanted it to be a surprise! I'm putting together a tribute band of the Spice Girls!"), then you have to take his explanation at face value — and will you? If he tells you that women just give him their numbers and that these numbers don't mean anything to him, then you have to believe him — and will you?

I suspect that your snooping admission will lead you to deeper questions, as it should. If you and your guy use this little crisis as a way to work on some of your relationship issues, then it will be a good thing. But you have to be brave enough either to leave your guy's wallet alone, or to have this conversation. I hope you choose to leave his wallet alone and talk.

Dear Amy:

I am one of four young women who have been close friends since elementary school. We've drifted apart at times, but I think now that we are all out of college, we are in a way closer than ever, even if we don't hear from each other for weeks at a time.

In the last year or so, one of our ranks moved to another coast. She leads a busy life, and it's hard to keep in touch with her, but she makes contact with two of us every once in a while.

However, she has repeatedly ignored attempts by our other friend to contact her.

Ignored Friend doesn't understand what is causing this rift with Far Friend, and neither do we.

I suspect F.F. has some unresolved beef with I.F., but I.F. is clearly clueless about what this beef is, and she's hurting very much.

I don't want to get involved and risk alienating either of them, but I feel as if F.F. is putting us all in a tough position by remaining mute on the issue.

Furthermore, I want to visit F.F. in her new home but feel that would hurt I.F. or seem like a betrayal.

Should I continue to stay out of it or confront F.F. about her poor treatment of I.F.?

Confused Friend

It would be rare if you four maintained four balanced friendships all through your lives. You said that you have drifted apart at times, and this could be one of those times.

You can mention this rift to your Far Friend without getting too involved by saying, "Ignored Friend asked me why she hasn't heard from you. Are you two getting along okay?" Far Friend's spam blocker might be ignoring I.F.'s e-mails, or perhaps F.F. just placed I.F. at No. 4 on her Friends List. You don't need to know the reason, and you don't need to be a go-between, because once you've mentioned this to F.F., your involvement in this should stop.

Write to Amy Dickinson at askamy@tribune.com or Ask Amy, Chicago Tribune, TT500, 435 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago, Ill. 60611.

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BRIDGE | Frank Stewart

Both sides vulnerable

NORTH
♠ 8 3
♥ K 10 8 5 2
♦ A K Q 10
♣ 5 3

EAST
♠ Q J 6 2
♥ J 7 4 3
♦ 9 2
♣ A K 6

SOUTH (D)
♠ A K 10 9 7 4
♥ A
♦ 8 5 4
♣ Q J 2

The bidding:

South	West	North	East
1 ♠	Pass	2 ♥	Pass
2 ♠	Pass	3 ♦	Pass
3 ♠	Pass	4 ♠	All Pass

Opening lead: ♣ 10

ruffed and took the ace of clubs and a trump. Down one.

Cy mopped sweat from his brow, accepted his 100 points and mumbled that God must look after fools and his partners.

I didn't tell Cy, but Wendy's diamond shift was far from foolish. Say she cashes two clubs and leads a heart. South wins and sees that the only danger is losing two trump tricks. So South adopts a safety play: He takes the ace of trumps, leads a diamond to dummy and returns a trump, playing the ten if East plays low.

Wendy's diamond shift looked to everybody like a singleton, so South couldn't afford the safety play.

If Wendy had a singleton diamond and, say, J-6-2 in trumps, South would lose a cold game if he played safe.

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