

# Opinion

## The absence of fathers matters

Maybe you heard about the tribute Kevin Durant paid his mother last week. You probably missed the one he paid his dad.



LEONARD PITTS

Both came during Durant's acceptance speech after being named the NBA's Most Valuable Player. Maybe you don't follow sports, maybe you've never heard of Durant, maybe you think a pick and roll is a roadside produce stand. You still should see the video.

In a voice choked with tears Durant, a ferociously talented forward for the Oklahoma City Thunder, thanks God. He thanks each teammate by name, thanks his coach, support staff, brothers, friends, grandmother, fans, the sportswriters who voted for him. And in the part that will have you clearing your throat and discovering a foreign particle in your eye, he speaks directly to his mother.

"The odds were stacked against us," he says. "Single parent with two boys by the time you were 21 years old. . . . We moved from apartment to apartment by ourselves. One of the best memories I have is when we moved into our first apartment. No bed, no furniture, and we just all sat in the living room and just hugged each other. We thought we'd made it."

He recalls her waking him up before dawn to work on his game, exhorting him to run, practice, play to the pinnacle of his ability. "You made us believe; you kept us off the streets, put clothes on our backs, food on the table. When you didn't eat, you made sure we ate. You went to sleep hungry. You sacrificed for us. You're the real MVP." Wanda Pratt catches her tears in her hand as the crowd gives her a standing ovation.

By contrast, Durant's acknowledgment of his father is short and almost perfunctory. He notes the "up and down road" they have traveled, the support his father has given "from afar." He tells him he loves him, but he lavishes less emotion on Wayne Pratt than he does Russell Westbrook who's only a teammate, or Scott Brooks, who's only his coach.

It is a telling moment. It turns out Pratt deserted his wife and two boys when Kevin was 1, because, as he told the Washington Post in 2012, "I was immature, selfish; I was young." It took him almost 10 years to apologize to his sons and make peace with his ex-wife. He says he was a constant presence during Kevin's teenage years.

The intention here is not to indict father or son. No, the intention is simply to say this: The absence of fathers matters.

We have evolved a society wherein we pretend the opposite is true. The disappearance of fathers is now nearly the norm. Almost one in four American children lives in a household without their biological dads. For brown kids, that number stands at about 28 percent. For black kids, it's a little better than half.

So, in a different sense, does Durant's speech — a glowing encomium to the woman who brought him through his earliest years alone, a scattering of obligatory words for the man who was not there.

As such, the speech was a testimony to the power of a mother's love. But it was also a reminder:

A father's absence has power, too.

## WHAT WE THINK

# Actions speak louder than words

People tend to focus on the negative. Read a few rants or Facebook posts, hear some grumbles at a local lunch spot, listen to some news reports, you could easily believe that most people no longer care about their fellow human beings.

You could easily think that no one wishes to help the less fortunate. Listen to too much cynicism, you could easily be led to think that a large number of people believe that being poor is some sort of scam.

Then you run across a day like this past Saturday. If you drove through town this past weekend, Saturday should have offered a refreshing perspective to any who worry that the world's Scrooges are winning.

On Saturday, if you visited almost any street in Valdosta and Lowndes County, whether it was a street in the richest neighborhood, or the poorest, or any neighborhood anywhere in between, you would

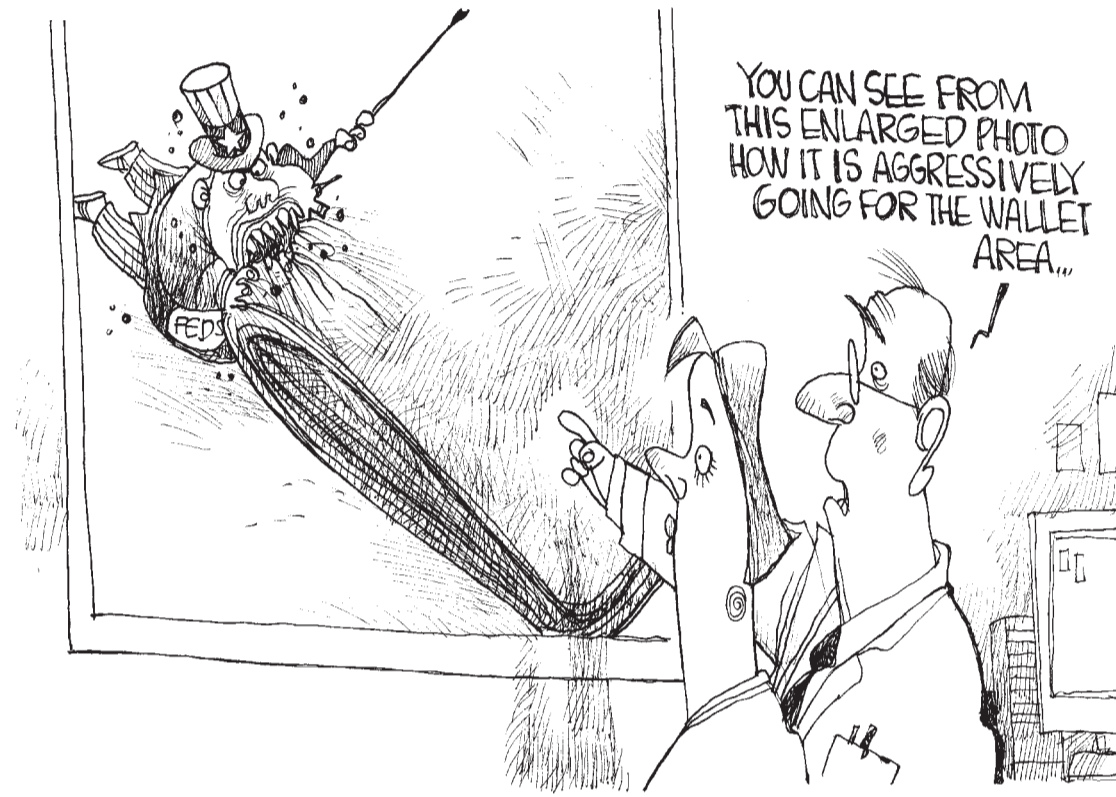
have been greeted by the sight of blue plastic sacks hanging from mailboxes, perched atop mailboxes, crammed into mailboxes, lumped below mailboxes.

Each bag filled with food for the less fortunate.

As of approximately midnight Saturday, Second Harvest of South Georgia and the National Association of Letter Carriers had collected 172,000 pounds of food in the region.

That's 86 tons of evidence that people still care for one another here in South Georgia. That's 86 tons which should lighten the load of anyone whose spirit has been weighted by feelings that the world no longer cares.

People do care. People do help. They may not speak as loudly as the cynics, but as the old phrase so truthfully proved this weekend, actions do speak louder than words.



CDC WARNS OF PARASITES PLAGUING MILLIONS OF AMERICANS

## All Benghazi, all the time

Forget the Alamo, Remember Benghazi ... at least as far as the Republicans are concerned.

That appears to be the new battle cry for the House majority and GOP candidates everywhere as they prepare to challenge the White House's explanations for the 2012 event that took the life of four Americans, including the U.S. ambassador to Libya, with a special investigative committee that the party's leaders hope will have a semblance of bipartisanship even if a two vote edge for them might just make it seem otherwise.

One can almost smell the scent of one of those classic political confrontations that both parties are historically fond of generating as a major autumn election looms to determine control of Congress and set the stage for the next stampede for the presidential prize. Whether the new investigation can rise above just another propaganda extravaganza full of "so what" revelations or answer some really serious questions about security needs is anybody's bet. But the odds have to favor the former.

A reason for that is the seeming determination of conservative Republicans to focus this inquiry on early White House determination to paint the tragedy that took the life of Ambassador Christopher Stevens and three of his bodyguards as a spontaneous protest over a video that has caused other demonstrations in the Middle East and not a plotted act of terrorism, which it was later found to be. That's where the "who cares" factor comes in.

But that is less of a problem for the State Department and the White House than the lingering rumor and suspicion that there was an attempt to cover up what amounted to a lack of response by the administration that might have changed the outcome. If GOP sharpshooters remain true to their oft stated doubts since the tragedy took place this will be where they center their sights despite a lack of real evidence to support this view.

So how could this committee of seven Republicans and five Democrats, if they chose to participate, accomplish something useful in what promises to be a knockdown drag out under the television klieg lights?

A place to start might be to determine why an American ambassador in a violent land no matter how popular he was with elements of the Libyan population was in such a dangerous place at that

time of night. What was he doing there? Was he on a special mission? With whom was he meeting?

Even more important perhaps is the question as to why he was so lightly protected. Benghazi isn't Paris for Pete's sake. Those familiar with the protocol contend that for an ambassador in such a troubled land to sally forth without a full security detail is not only unusual but to do so to a lightly guarded, quite vulnerable place is the height of folly. Some experts speculate that his actions were deliberately aimed at avoiding the attention a full security detail might draw. Be that as it may, his assailants must have had advance knowledge of his travel.

At the heart of this line of inquiry is the uncovering of an obvious weakness in how the State Department protects its diplomats; whether its Diplomatic Security Bureau is given the resources, including weapons, manpower, and expertise, that it needs in a world increasingly vulnerable to well organized terrorists. The answer on the face of what occurred is clearly it doesn't. Should the committee pay attention to that aspect it might accomplish some good.

Former State Secretary Hillary Clinton, on whose watch this took place and who is considered a front runner for presidential succession, will obviously be a target of the House panel's investigation.

She already has testified that she takes responsibility while at the same time decrying those who contend she and her boss, Barack Obama, deliberately tried to divert public outrage by lying about the true nature of the assault in the immediate aftermath.

In a perfect world this would be an orderly process that would produce much needed reforms. That's what these things are supposed to do. But they never have and it probably is too much to believe this time will be different. If one needs more evidence of the political nature of this, it is that dozens of House Republicans frantically applied for a spot on the panel as an election year boost to their fortunes.



DAN K. THOMASSON

## RANT & RAVE

This column is your chance to complain or praise, but you need to do it in 30 seconds or less. Call 244-3400, ext. 418, or visit valdostadailytimes.com. Submissions are subject to editing and publication is not guaranteed.

**To harm or kill an animal** means you are a cold-hearted animal. I hope it eats at you the rest of your life. Cruel and inhumane.

**I'm glad to see that someone** is fixing up the old building beside the Clayville school on Madison Highway. Can't wait to see what goes in there. Looks 100 percent better already.

**You call it Obamacare.** I call it Obamadon'tcare.

**Advanced waste trucks** need to slow down or be prepared for consequences. Driving 45 miles per hour in a residential neighborhood within 10 feet of small children just exiting a school bus is reckless and irresponsible.

**We need to practice our** Second Amendment right to carry weapons around with us at all times. ... We should prepare for the zombie apocalypse, alien abductions, North Korea parachutists, drug runners, and the government census takers to worry about. They'll not take me or mine!

**For anyone complaining** about my lawn. I work 40 hours a week, go to school full-time, and I cannot afford a yard service. I will get to it when I can. I am not going to quit my job, or forsake my education just because of your opinion. It's just grass.

**To the woman at the** counter who rolled her eyes at me as she zipped and moved her purse to the other side when the black gentleman walked up. Trust me, I was more likely to pick your pocket than he was.

**Big rave to Amber at Cass** Burch's service department! She did a great job taking care of me and other customers.

**With all the issues facing** our city, state, and country, I find it amazing people have time to worry about the meaningless issue of the Confederate flag!

**There is no excuse for** doctors offices not answering their phones when the office is open. I can let it slide once, but when on three different days, I've tried to call the office when you open at 8:30 and the answering machine comes on saying the office is closed and call back during regular business hours, which are 8:30, it's unprofessional. Especially when I continue to call (on all three occasions) until 9:10 a.m., when someone finally answers.

**I went to the free skin cancer** screening at SGMC this past Thursday night and it was such a well organized screening from when I entered the door to when I was done. Thank you, SGMC, for offering such a great thing for the community.

## The Valdosta Daily Times

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**Jeff Masters**  
Publisher

**Dean Poling**  
Assistant Managing Editor

Masters and Poling are joined by Chief Financial Officer Dan Friedman and National Account Manager Laura Rogers of The Valdosta Daily Times on the newspaper's editorial board. "Our Opinion" is formed by that board.

## INSPIRATION

'Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.'

John 15:13

'Hide not your talents, they for use were made. What's a sun-dial in the shade?'

Benjamin Franklin

## QUESTION OF THE WEEK

Would you attend a church that allows members to carry guns?

Yes.  
No.  
Won't know until it happens.

To vote and view results, visit:  
[www.valdostadailytimes.com](http://www.valdostadailytimes.com)