

COMMENTARY

The **ADVOCATE**

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EDITORIALS

Citizens should be allowed to elect midterm senators

The people of Connecticut ought to have the right to elect their U.S. senator, should a vacancy occur midterm.

The premise of the right is no different than voting for a senator for a six-year term in regular election cycles. And it aligns with the right of the people to vote to fill House vacancies in special elections.

But since 1947, Connecticut's governor has held the people's right to fill a Senate vacancy and can make an appointment.

Now Gov. M. Jodi Rell has the opportunity to change the process. The governor — who has proved she is not shy about wielding a veto — should sign Bill No. 913 into law.

Passed by the House of Representatives in the waning days of this year's regular Assembly session, and endorsed the week before by the Senate, the bill mandates a special election within 150 days after a vacancy occurs.

(There are two interesting exceptions: if 50 or more Senators were to perish in a national catastrophe or if the vacancy happens in the final year of a term. In those cases, the governor could make the appointment.)

Both senators representing our state, U.S. Sen.

Chris Dodd and U.S. Sen. Joseph Lieberman, have run for higher office. Last year Dodd sought the presidency and in 2000 Lieberman came close to being the vice president.

The primary purpose of the bill, however, is preemptive.

Connecticut should have this measure in place to avoid the possibility — or even the perception — of wrongdoing such has surfaced in other states.

In Illinois, Sen. Roland Burris has been maligned for how he sought the appointment from then-Gov. Rod Blagojevich for the seat that opened when Barack Obama became president. In a recently released FBI recording of a conversation with Blagojevich's brother, Burris can be heard expressing interest in the seat and discussing raising money for the governor, who since has been impeached. Burris denies wrongdoing.

Connecticut has had enough of its own political scandals in recent memory. Let's not perpetuate the moniker "Corrupticut."

In signing the bill, Rell would be relinquishing the power to appoint a senator to a vacancy. But she would be returning the power to the people.

That's where the power belongs.

Sotomayor's critics find she can't be easily pigeonholed

I wish Sonia Sotomayor didn't have quite so much empathy. I'd like to hear her unleash a sassy tongue-lashing on the oh-so-predictable detractors who are circling as if a weaker species has wandered into their den.



MARY SANCHEZ

But taking the low road is not how she got this far — from the much-mentioned housing project childhood to the threshold of the U.S. Supreme Court.

Sotomayor suffers from curse of the first. The knee-jerk (and simply jerk) remarks that followed her selection as the first Hispanic to be nominated to the Supreme Court are probably old hat to her.

Take the comments insinuating that she couldn't possibly be qualified. Most of her critics didn't even have the tact to veil their conceit.

John Yoo, an American Enterprise Institute scholar and the towering legal intellect who OK'd the Bush torture policy, certainly didn't mince words: "empathy has won out over excellence in the White House." Rush Limbaugh predictably called her "an affirmative action case extraordinaire." But what such juvenile critics don't grasp is that the very thing she is being criticized for — empathy — is why she will slay them in their tracks. And they won't even feel it.

Sotomayor has spent a lifetime learning how to read people unlike herself. She has had to.

Being bilingual and bicultural means she understands codes of conduct for the Bronx, for the parochial high school she graduated from as valedictorian, for Princeton, where she initially felt intimidated, for Yale law school, for private law practice breaking counterfeit rings for luxury goods, and for the federal bench. That is a lot of social ground for one person to cover.

Sotomayor has been quoted saying that, in any given case, a Latina jurist might "reach a better conclusion than a white male who hasn't lived that life." This was in response to Justice Sandra Day O'Connor's contention that a wise man and a wise woman could be

expected to reach the same judicial decision.

What isn't mentioned are the rest of Sotomayor's comments: "I am reminded each day that I render decisions that affect people concretely and that I owe them constant and complete vigilance in checking my assumptions, presumptions and perspectives and ensuring that to the extent that my limited abilities and capabilities permit me, that I re-evaluate them and change as circumstances and cases before me requires."

That is the statement of a person willing to look at her own bias humbly, as well as at that of others, and ensure it does not influence the outcome of the question at hand.

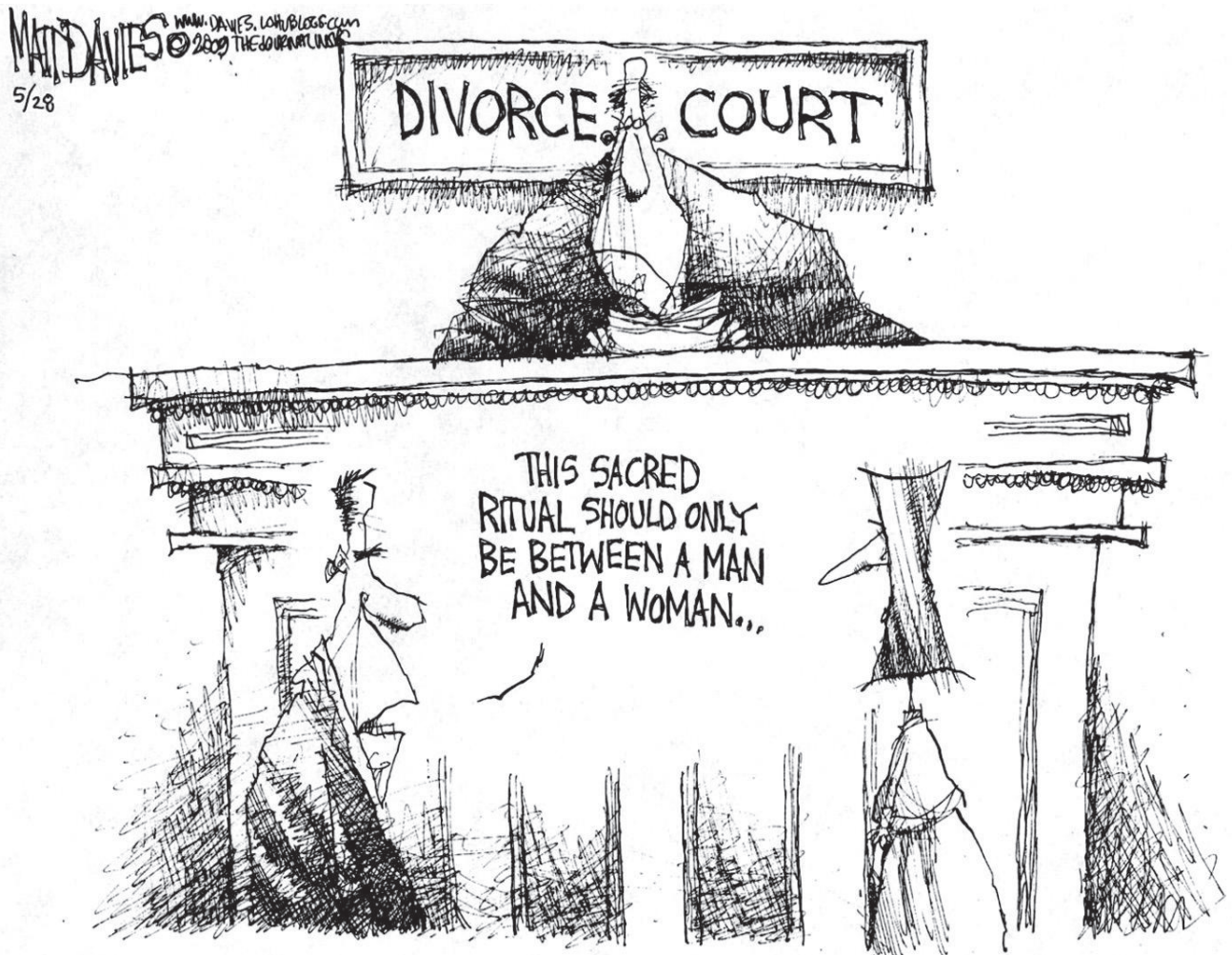
This doesn't mean she will seek to tweak the Constitution to always favor the little guy. In fact, judging her by previous rulings, Sotomayor is not so easily labeled. She has sided with big business, and against investors. She has turned aside allegations of racial and age discrimination. Those rulings are as much a part of her legal background as when she ruled in favor of a city that threw out the results of a firefighters' test because it didn't produce the diversity of candidates desired.

Sotomayor is difficult to predict because she has the ability to read the world through many people's eyes, not simply her own.

"I am an ordinary person," she has said, "blessed with extraordinary opportunities and experiences." That is not a statement of entitlement.

Sotomayor changed her class and social status. You can bet she learned a few lessons along the way.

Mary Sanchez is an opinion-page columnist for The Kansas City Star. Her column is distributed by Tribune Media Services.



LETTERS FROM OUR READERS

A real hero

To the editor:

Today I met a hero. No, he was not Superman or Spider-Man. He is not famous. He came into the office with a limp and needed a little help getting on the exam table. He is 90 years old.

Mr. S (I am keeping his name confidential) came to have his carotid arteries checked. He told me he had various skin cancers and needed radiation treatment for them. I asked him about his sun exposure in his youth and soon we were talking about his days in World War II.

He was only 24 years old and had two young children when he went off to war, as did hundreds of thousands like him. His mother, a devout Irish Catholic, told him to pray every day. Mr. S told me he prayed every day.

He saw many of his friends killed. He had many near misses himself. A mortar narrowly missed a supply truck he was driving. One day, he was called by his lieutenant to drive him to the next town in Germany. He was upset to leave his three soldier friends that day. However, when he returned he found out that all three were killed by a bomb not too long after he left.

He told me stories of how he would retrieve personal belongings from dead soldiers so that they could be returned to their families. One time he was sent out to get water from town. He wandered into a building, which he thought might have a well. He found a large truck and a large trailer. The truck was filled with dead American sol-

diers, the trailer filled with dead Germans. Whether they were American or German, he still remembers to this day how young they looked. Many just teenagers.

It did not take long for me to realize that I was talking to an American hero. He is not alone. He is like hundreds of thousands, or even millions of heroes who have served this country. He told me that he often wondered if his daily prayers are what kept him alive. When he came back he said he would continue to pray. He still prays every day as he has done for the last 65 years.

We should not have to wait until Memorial Day to thank our veterans. We should be thanking them every day. A little prayer every day might not be a bad idea.

Mr. S, thank you for your service.

James Sarnelle
Stamford

Don't abandon families in need

To the editor:

I am writing to express my sincere regret that the governor has decided to suspend funding for the Connecticut Family Resource Centers. Sixty-two Family Resource Centers are located across the state. As the coordinator of an FRC in East Hartford, I have had the opportunity to see how much good the centers can do.

Here at Silver Lane School, 65 fami-

lies attend our play-to-learn groups. We are in the process of letting them know that due to the governor's proposed budget we may not be here in the fall. They are devastated and are very willing to advocate for us. This is because, in addition to developing a relationship with our staff, they have benefited from home visits and parenting workshops which help them to parent more effectively.

We are lucky to serve diverse families of all racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic groups. We serve over 300 individuals and their families. It is sad to think about where these families will go if the FRC's are not funded. I urge everyone reading this to contact their state representatives and especially the governor herself to ask them to reinstate funding for the Family Resource Centers.

Mary Beth Kuzoian
East Hartford

Progress on sidewalks

To the editor:

I am pleased to report that the General Assembly has just passed legislation to ensure that funds will be made available for bikeways and sidewalks.

I am a co-sponsor of Senate Bill 735, "An Act Improving Bicycle And Pedestrian Access" which, as of Oct. 1, 2010, will require that at least 1 percent of the funds received by the state Department of Transportation and municipalities for construction, res-

toration, rehabilitation, or relocation of highways or streets be spent to make sure that everyone benefits, including walkers and bikers. The bill also requires the DOT and every municipality to take "future transit expansion plans" into account where appropriate.

There are a number of exceptions regarding the mandatory expenditures. For example, the bill does not require them in the event of a state or municipal transportation emergency, or if the DOT commissioner or a municipality's legislative body determines that non-motorized use of a highway, road, or street is prohibited. Nor does it require them if there is no need, if the accommodation of all users would represent an excessively large portion of the total project cost, or if the accommodation of all users is inconsistent with the state's or municipality's construction, maintenance, and repair program. The bill has been sent to Gov. M. Jodi Rell for her signature.

Anyone who has any questions about this legislation should contact me at my legislative office at (800) 842-1421 or by e-mail at Toni.Boucher@cga.ct.

Toni Boucher
Wilton

The writer is a Republican state senator representing the 26th District, which includes Bethel, New Canaan, Redding, Ridgefield, Weston, Westport and Wilton.