

## COMING MONDAY

Amid the endless parade of negative economic statistics, let's reflect on the intangible things that constitute the Houston Factor.

EDITORIALS | COMMENTARY | OPINION | LETTERS TO THE EDITOR | POLITICAL CARTOONS | VOICES

## HEALTH

## Smoking cessation treatments work

Let's convince insurance firms to offer coverage

By ELLEN R. GRITZ, PH.D.

IN Texas in 2007, 19.4 percent of adults over the age of 18 and 21 percent of teenagers smoked cigarettes. That's about one out of every five Texans who are put at risk of life-threatening diseases — including at least 15 types of cancer, heart disease, stroke and chronic lung disease, as well as many other serious health problems. We all know that no one wants to suffer from such terrible diseases.

When kids start to smoke, they fully believe that they can stop at any time. They will only be smoking for fun, they think, and for a very short time. Unfortunately, that rarely turns out to be true.

The cigarette is a powerful drug-delivery device, every bit as efficient as the illegal drugs we are constantly trying to eliminate from our youth and adult populations. Smoking is an addiction, powered by the potent drug nicotine, which triggers the brain to experience pleasure and changes the brain's structure and functioning. It doesn't take much to become addicted to tobacco; some studies find that just a few cigarettes will do it.

Once people start to smoke, it becomes increasingly hard to stop. Almost 50 percent of youth who smoke try to quit each year. Almost 80 percent of adults say they want to quit and more than 40 percent try to quit each year, but only about 5 percent who try to quit on their own succeed for even six to 12 months. People try to quit, start again, and then try once more. We call that a chronic relapsing medical condition — not just a bad habit — and it costs our society dearly in terms of lost health and economic burden, to the tune of more than \$167 billion each year.

With grim statistics like these, there is something very important we can accomplish that will save people's lives and Texas dollars. We can let our fellow Texans know that smoking cessation treatments do work and we can make it much easier for smokers to get effective treatment to help them quit.

In 2008, the U.S. Public Health Service published an updated guideline on treating nicotine dependence. The guideline is a compendium of data evaluating the entire range of smoking cessation treatments, citing evidence of the effectiveness of various individual and combined treatments. The guideline was authored by a distinguished task force of scientists, doctors and clinical researchers, and utilized scientific methodology as well as expert clinical judgment.

The findings were that the most effective treatment for smoking cessation combines behavioral counseling with pharmacotherapy (five forms of nicotine replacement and two non-nicotine medications, varenicline and bupropion). Pharmacotherapy has been shown to double or even triple rates of successful long-term quitting and is recommended for all cigarette smokers except those with specific medical conditions.

Research also demonstrates that the health care system is an important factor in smoking cessation treatment. When health insurance benefits cover treatment, people are more likely to enter treatment and the numbers of quitters rise. When insurance coverage is not available, smokers often don't have the money to get real help.

The irony is that smoking  
Please see **HEALTH**, Page B11

## INFRASTRUCTURE

## Is U.S. vulnerable to a cyber attack?

Much rhetoric, fewer facts in debate over likelihood of penetration of America's grid

By CHRIS BRONK, KEN MEDLOCK and DAN WALLACH

FOR at least a decade, rumors have swirled around major electricity outages in the United States that malicious computer hackers, possibly based overseas, are responsible for turning out the lights. Recent news reports allege, "Cyberspies have penetrated the U.S. electrical grid and left behind software programs that could be used to disrupt the system." Invariably such charges are attributed to a usual set of suspects, chiefly Russia and the People's Republic of China, and largely hinge upon the contribution of an anonymous source working somewhere inside the U.S. intelligence community. From those who coined the term "Electronic Pearl Harbor" we are informed of a falling sky in cyberspace, which will destroy the financial system, cripple air traffic control and crash out the energy grid. Disappointingly, this debate is largely informed by rumors, anonymous sources or wild conjecture without much basis in verifiable fact.

So has the power grid been hacked and can criminal elements, terrorists or agents of the People's Liberation Army bring it down? Possibly. But we are aware of but a handful of cyber attacks responsible for disabling a computerized critical infrastructure management system. On this topic we are trending through a precious few data points. One particular case is interesting. In April 2000, Vitek Boden, a computer programmer, compromised the computer software managing the wastewater control system in the Australian resort town of Maroochy Shire, releasing millions of liters of raw sewage onto parks, rivers and the grounds of the Hyatt Regency. "Marine life died, the creek water turned black and the stench was unbearable for residents," observed Australia's environmental agency. Boden knew what he was doing, but likely because he worked for the company that had designed and installed the system. And he was disgruntled. Maroochy Shire had rejected his application to work for the municipality. Boden was arrested and jailed.

Sewage spills aside, and with the Internet virus of the moment, conficker, still an issue, it is worth thinking about the computers that manage our critical infrastructure, including the energy grid. Electrical power systems (and, for that matter, oil refineries) are often controlled with SCADA (Supervisory Control And Data Acquisition) gear, and SCADA was never designed with security in mind. Despite this, some SCADA systems are apparently reachable from the Internet. Others are simply reachable if you're within radio range. After 9/11, this issue became a topic of conversation. There are plenty of people working on the problem. Meanwhile, the problem persists in fielded equipment.

The reality of our electric  
Please see **THE GRID**, Page B11



ROBERT WUENSCH PHOTO  
ILLUSTRATION: CHRONICLE / FOTOLIA

## FIREARMS

## For sake of safety, approve bill allowing campus guns

Evidence shows concealed-carry laws lower chance of mass shootings

By EDGAR BROWNING, THEODORE DAY, STAN LIEBOWITZ and CRAIG PIRRONG

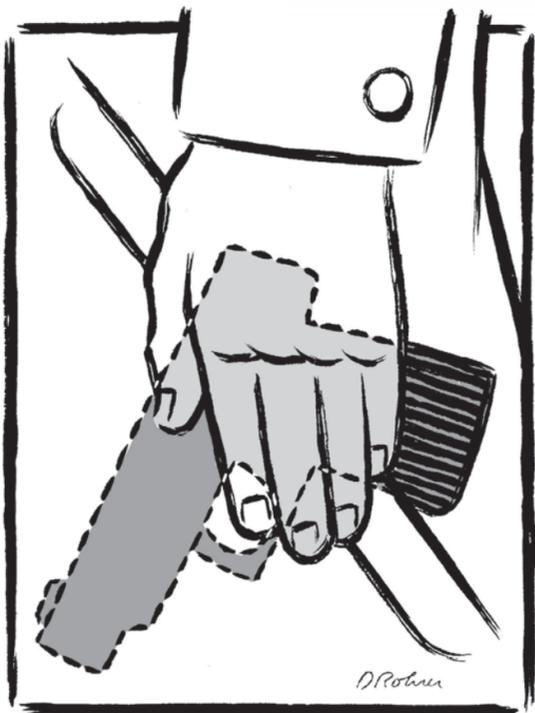
MASS public shootings are a particularly horrific feature of modern life. Many of the bloodiest examples of this scourge have occurred on college campuses, so as professors we are particularly sensitive to this danger.

Despite this — no, because of this — we support a bill currently pending in the Texas Legislature that would permit the concealed carrying of firearms on college and university campuses in the state by holders of concealed-handgun

licenses. We therefore call on the Legislature to follow the example of the Missouri House of Representatives, which recently passed a similar bill by an overwhelming margin.

Any public policy involving matters of life and death should be decided after weighing carefully the competing risks. In our opinion, based on a thorough study of the relevant facts and data, permitting Texas CHL holders to carry weapons on the campuses of the state's col-

leges and universities would improve safety because: years of experience demonstrate that CHL permit holders are overwhelmingly law-abiding individuals who pose minimal threat to the safety of their fellow citizens; the best available empirical evidence shows that concealed-carry laws result in a dramatic reduction in the incidence of mass public shootings; even in jurisdictions that issue concealed-carry permits, mass public shootings occur almost exclusively in places — like universities — where concealed carry is prohibited; there are numerous examples of gun owners acting to disarm would-be mass murderers, thereby saving lives; and extending the right  
Please see **FIREARMS**, Page B11



DEAN ROHRER

## EDITORIAL

### Pay to stay

Approve a bill requiring those who stay behind during a mandatory evacuation to pay if a rescue is needed. **PAGE B13**

## LATE PROTEST

### Democrats change tune on torture

Charles Krauthammer says Nancy Pelosi and allies did not object when they first heard of interrogations. **PAGE B12**

## SHE'S GOT TALENT

### Just give her a break

Ellen Goodman says stop projecting society's beauty standards problem onto singer Susan Boyle. **PAGE B12**

MODERN ROMANCE

# Puppy love for adults can lead to doghouse



JON KRAUSE

## ■ Visiting your ex to see the dog may be barking up the wrong tree

By MARY MICHAEL TOWNSEND

**I**N the world of dating, I'm an anomaly: I'm 42 and unmarried. It's not ideal, but there is a positive side to it: After 20-plus years of dating, I've developed a keen ability to recognize bizarre dating games when I see them — and I see one.

This newest dating game involves single males who, having moved on to a new relationship, still feel the need to be with animals ... that belong to their ex.

I call it puppy love version 35 plus.

Forget the puppy love of junior high. This is a modern-day version that provides an excuse for otherwise sensible, single males (generally over 35) to act like hormonal adolescents and get suckled by their ex, instead of having to cut bait and go fish in the sea of relationships unknown.

Are you experiencing puppy love version 35 plus? If your love interest is occasionally spending time with his ex's pets, you probably are.

Whether your guy's occasional stop-ins at his ex's are really about the pet or have more to do with the fact that his ex walks around braless and in yoga pants, I can't be sure; but I do know that pets seem to be the justification du jour for keeping a foot in the ex's door while testing the waters elsewhere.

And while it's prevalent among males, it's not limited to them.

I first learned of this phenomenon in late 2007 when I heard of a lesbian couple that had chosen to remain leashed to each other through joint custody of a Rottweiler, in spite of the fact that both could have moved on — baggage free — to a new relationship.

I wondered whether this was an ill-fated situation affecting only lesbians and Rottweiler lovers, but shortly thereafter a friend of mine confessed to feeding his ex's cats when she went out of town. He later admitted that he was holding on to the hope that — by feeding MacArthur and Willis — his ex might come back around.

That's when it dawned on me that this pet pattern might have less to do with the ex's animal than the ex acting like one.

In fact, no sooner did I spot this trend than a guy who suffered from the same malady began calling me. He casually mentioned one day that he regularly saw his former fiancé when she picked up his dog for weekend custody swaps. Why would he do this, I wondered — knowing that

he had practically left her at the altar two years earlier. "Because she loved Badger, too," he explained.

Riiiiiiiiight ...

I'll concede the remote possibility that the continued contact between exes is motivated by a genuine love for the pet, but let's be frank:

Seeing as how even the most dejected dog can delight in a new owner nearly overnight, when Mr. Wonderful's ex comes to pick up Lucky for the weekend, Mr. Wonderful may be getting lucky, too.

I understand the love and devotion people feel toward their pets — God knows I've come full circle, from being somewhat tolerant of dogs to darn near wanting to French-kiss mine — but on the rare occasion that I meet a nice guy who is sans femme, do I now have to worry about the

animal kingdom? Apparently I do.

Puppy love, in its original form, is cute; but I want nothing to do with the literal, modern-day variety. For those who do, however, I'll offer some words of caution: If you play with the ex's dog, you'll probably be treated like one ... and getting neutered is not much fun.

*Townsend is a single female who has lived throughout Texas and in Boston. She currently resides in Houston.*



DEAN ROHRER

## HEALTH: Let's cover smoke cessation

**CONTINUED FROM PAGE B10** cessation is one of the most cost-effective health care benefits available. It is really inexpensive — estimated to cost only 45 cents per person per month when averaged across all insurance enrollees. And treatment is estimated to save Texas more than \$3,800 a year in direct health care and productivity costs for every smoker who quits.

In an era when preserving human and financial capital

is essential, let's move in Texas to help defeat tobacco addiction. Let's improve the quantity and quality of the lives of our citizens by making effective smoking cessation treatments more available to all through health insurance coverage.

*Gritz is a psychologist and chair of the Department of Behavioral Science at The University of Texas M.D. Anderson Cancer Center.*

## FIREARMS: Approve law allowing guns on campus

**CONTINUED FROM PAGE B10** to carry to educational institutions would help to reduce the rates of other crimes on campuses.

With respect to the risks that CHL holders pose to their fellow citizens, the record is abundantly clear. Based on recent data, Texas CHL holders commit misdemeanors and felonies at a rate of about one-seventh as high as the state's adult population. The rates at which they commit crimes of violence are even lower relative to the population at large. When CHL permits are revoked, it tends to be for technical violations, such as failure to take their license with them. Ever left your driver's license at home?

Opponents of permitting concealed carry on campus have raised particular concerns about young people possessing arms in dormitories. These concerns are seriously misplaced not only because one must be 21 to obtain a CHL in Texas, but because the bill currently under consideration explicitly permits universities to prohibit the storage of weapons in dormitories.

Turning to the effect of bans on crime, if gun bans truly reduced the risk of mass public shootings, then gun-free zones would be refuges from such havoc. Sadly, the exact opposite is true. Particularly striking is the simple fact that all multiple victim public shootings in the United States with more than three people killed have occurred where concealed handguns are prohibited. The campus of Virginia Tech University is one par-

ticularly tragic example of this. Moreover mass public shootings have occurred in Europe — including a recent incident at a college campus in Greece — despite its draconian gun laws.

Furthermore, a peer-reviewed academic study demonstrates that the passage of concealed-carry law reduces incidents of mass public shooting by 60 percent. Tellingly, those episodes that have occurred in states that allow concealed carry took place in locations like schools and malls where firearms possession was prohibited.

These facts should not be surprising. Gun-free zones are magnets for killers bent on maximizing their body count. They know that they face far less risk of an armed response there than in places where individuals may be armed — and the killer doesn't know who. Killers may be disturbed, but they aren't stupid. They go where they have the highest odds of achieving their sick purpose. Gun-free zones are made to order.

Not only does the evidence strongly suggest that permitting concealed carry deters mass public shooting, there are numerous cases in which private firearms owners have disarmed or disabled those attempting to murder indiscriminately in public places.

In such circumstances, "first responders" like policemen are anything but; the true first responders are often armed citizens in the line of fire. Since stopping a mass shooting even seconds earlier can save lives, the possibility that a CHL holder could disable or even distract an assailant could be the difference between life and death.

Nor are the benefits of permitting concealed carry on campus limited to its effect on the likelihood of mass carnage. Sixteen peer-reviewed academic studies document that concealed-carry laws reduce rates of violent crime; none finds the opposite. Since gun-free zones in jurisdictions that permit concealed carry tend to attract criminals because of the lower risks they face in such zones, extending the right to carry will also help to reduce the rates of crimes against individuals that occur all too frequently on college campuses.

When concealed carry laws were first considered, there were widespread predictions that the passage of such laws would result in a plague of indiscriminate gunplay on the streets: "Every traffic accident is a gunfight in the making" was a common mantra. Experience in virtually every state demonstrates that

these emotional reactions were vastly overblown. Yet similar apocalyptic fears are often raised when the issue of concealed carry on college campuses is discussed. Focusing on the facts rather than the fears, one gets a much different picture: By far the most likely outcome is that concealed carry, though not a panacea for campus violence, will reduce such violence, especially the kinds of horrific mass shootings that haunt students, staff and faculty around the country.

Do you want to reduce the odds of another Virginia Tech? So do we. And that's why we hope the Legislature passes, and Gov. Rick Perry signs, the bill that would allow holders of concealed handgun licenses to carry on our campuses.

*Pirrong is a finance professor at the University of Houston, Day and Liebowitz are economics professors at the University of Texas at Dallas and Browning is an economics professor at Texas A&M University in College Station.*

## THE GRID: Few facts available in talk of cyber attacks

**CONTINUED FROM PAGE B10** power system is that, in point of fact, it is vulnerable to outages in a multitude of ways. Some of these are not even the result of malevolent acts, such as improperly maintained trees near power lines. In fact, some of these vulnerabilities could likely be much more debilitating than the threat presented by cyber terrorism or cyber espionage. In a matter of hours an individual could easily disable power flows to large numbers of consumers by causing physical damage to vital transmission links, power relay stations or generation facilities. Moreover, such damage could take extended periods to repair. A cyber attack, on the other hand, would likely be repairable in a relatively short period of time, unless the attack damaged physical hardware. The point being that there are personnel at power stations that monitor critical systems and there are personnel at independent system operators that monitor load flow patterns. Thus, any problem would in practice be identified very quickly and a remedy would be forthcoming. As nice as it might be to imagine we live in a world where vital systems are completely automated, they are not.

In addition, most of our nation's critical services, such as hospitals, are served with their own sources of back-up generation. As we in Houston observed in the wake of Hurricane Ike, hospitals, police and even large data centers remain powered and in operation during blackouts or times of large scale power outages. Most of us need not worry about losing hospital and emergency services as long as those back-up systems remain fueled and operable. Even our industrial facilities would be able to continue to operate in many cases as cogeneration capabilities

allow them to generate, and even dispatch, their own power. The key point in this is that our power grid is incredibly flexible precisely because it is designed to overcome many problems in the interest of reliability. A more pressing worry we should have is the age of our transmission network, and the serious investments that are needed for upgrades.

Finally, statements indicating a wave of cyber attacks on the nation's power systems would be forthcoming if we were to "go to war" are simply fearful rhetoric. If we were to go to war with the likes of Russia or China, there would be much greater things to worry about than unreliable power to our homes and offices. Additionally, for all al-Qaida has done in its terror campaign against the West, there is little proof that the organization has erected a viable cyber-attack capability. With no new sensational event at hand, to some extent, the recent coverage of cyber vulnerabilities in the energy grid is old news. What really would be news is if somebody is actively exploiting SCADA security holes, in a manner visible to the public. That might be what it takes to get people to take SCADA security seriously. Historical example: In 1988, the Internet was a much friendlier place. People knew about all sorts of vulnerabilities, but nobody worried about it. There wasn't much of a threat. Then the Morris Worm, the first Internet crashing cyber event, happened and that changed everything. It may take something similar for SCADA as it pertains to the energy grid.

*Wallach is an associate professor of computer science at Rice University. Medlock and Bronk are fellows at Rice's James A. Baker III Institute for Public Policy.*