

OUTLOOK

Mideast peace process gets push from Obama



Charles Krauthammer says calling out the Palestinians for their refusal to negotiate a settlement deals a blow to Abbas' ongoing obstructionism.

"I honestly believe that if any Israeli parent sat down with those (Palestinian) kids, they'd say I want these kids to succeed."

— **Barack Obama**, in Jerusalem, March 21

Very true. But how does the other side feel about Israeli kids?

Consider that the most revered parent in Palestinian society is Mariam Farhat of Gaza. Her distinction? Three of her sons died in various stages of trying to kill Israelis — one in a suicide attack, shooting up and hurling grenades in a room full of Jewish students.

She gloried in her "martyr" sons, wishing only that she had 100 boys like her schoolroom suicide attacker to "sacrifice ... for the sake of God." And for that, she was venerated as "mother of the struggle," elected to parliament and widely mourned at her recent passing.

So much for reciprocity. In the Palestinian territories, streets, public squares, summer camps, high schools — even a kindergarten — are named after suicide bombers and other mass murderers. So much for the notion that if only Israelis would care about Arab kids, peace would be possible.

Israelis have forever wanted nothing more than peace and security for all the children. That's why they accepted the 1947 U.N. partition of British Palestine into a Jewish and Arab state. Unfortunately — another asymmetry — the Arabs said no. To this day, the Palestinians have rejected every peace offer that leaves a Jewish state standing.

This is not ancient history. Yasser Arafat said no at Camp David in 2000 and at Taba in 2001. And in 2008, Prime Minister Ehud Olmert offered a Palestinian state on all of the West Bank (with territorial swaps) with its capital in a shared Jerusalem. Mahmoud Abbas walked away.

In that same speech, President Barack Obama blithely called these "missed historic opportunities" that should not prevent peace-seeking now. But these "missed historic opportunities" are not random events. They present an unbroken, unrelenting pattern over seven decades of rejecting any final peace with Israel. So what was the point of Obama's Jerusalem speech encouraging young Israelis to make peace, a speech the media drooled over? It was mere rhetoric, a sideshow meant to soften the impact on the Arab side of the really important

event of Obama's trip: the major recalibration of his position on the peace process.

Obama knows that peace talks are going nowhere. First, because there is no way that Israel can sanely make concessions while its neighborhood is rolling and unstable — the Muslim Brotherhood taking over Egypt, rockets being fired from Gaza, Hezbollah brandishing 50,000 missiles aimed at Israel, civil war raging in Syria with its chemical weapons and rising jihadists, and Iran openly threatening to raze Tel Aviv and Haifa.

Second, because Abbas over the past four years has shown that he has no interest in negotiating. Obama's message to him was blunt: Come to the table without preconditions, i.e., without the excuse of demanding a settlement freeze first.

In Ramallah, Obama didn't just address this perennial Palestinian dodge. He demolished the very claim that settlements are the obstacle to peace. Palestinian sovereignty and Israeli security are "the core issue," he told Abbas. "If we solve those two problems, the settlement problem will be solved."

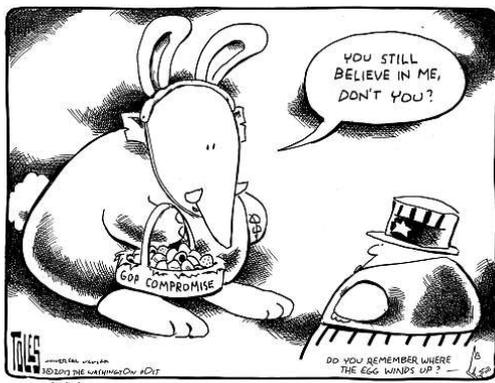
Finally, Presidential validation of the screamingly obvious truism: Any peace agreement will produce a Palestinian state with not a single Israeli settlement remaining on its territory. Any settlement on the Palestinian side of whatever border is agreed upon will be demolished. Thus, any peace that reconciles Palestinian statehood with Israeli security automatically resolves the settlement issue. It disappears.

Yes, Obama offered the ritual incantations about settlements being unhelpful. Nothing new here. He could have called them illegal or illegitimate. It wouldn't have mattered — because Obama officially declared them irrelevant.

Exposing settlements as a mere excuse for the Palestinian refusal to negotiate — that was the news, widely overlooked, coming out of Obama's trip. It was a breakthrough. Will it endure? Who knows.

But when an American president so sympathetic to the Palestinian cause tells Abbas to stop obstructing peace with that phony settlement excuse, something important has happened. Abbas, unmasked and unhappy, knows this better than anyone.

Krauthammer's email address is letters@charleskrauthammer.com



More access to private education makes sense

Scholarship bills would benefit both students, business

By **Robert Enlow, Charles T. Evans and Brooke Terry**

Private schools have been serving Texas families very well for decades. But now that state lawmakers are discussing ways to increase access to those schools for low- and middle-income families, myths about private education are being raised.

Such falsehoods mustn't get in the way of giving students the educational opportunities they deserve.

Tax-credit scholarship legislation introduced by Sens. Dan Patrick, R-Houston, and Ken Paxton, R-McKinney, and Rep. Bill Callegari, R-Houston, would allow Texas businesses to receive tax credits for donating to nonprofits that, in turn, award private school scholarships.

Such a program currently is operating in 11 states, serving more than 150,000 children.

Some conservatives are concerned tax-credit scholarships would open Texas private schools up to state meddling and increased government regulations. Opponents from the left contend private schools are not accountable and should not receive any state incentive to serve Texas families.

The fear of government over-regulating a private school is legitimate but, ultimately, unjustified. State by state, where school choice programs exist, private schools have maintained their integrity and freely educated students who otherwise could not afford to leave the public schools that failed to meet their needs.

A Cato Institute examination of 20 school choice programs found there is no statistical difference in the level of regulation between a private school accepting scholarship students and a private school that declines to participate in a choice program.

Moreover, "curriculum mandates, admission policies, price controls ... or barriers to using scholarships to attend religious schools are rare for tax-credit scholarship programs," according to research from the Friedman Foundation for Educational Choice. But that reality doesn't stop the demagoguery. Also, participation in a tax-credit scholarship program is 100 percent voluntary for private schools. If a school is concerned that accepting scholarship students will

detract from its mission, it can decline to participate.

To the concern about private schools being "too unregulated" or "not accountable," all three tax-credit scholarship bills being considered in Texas require that participating schools be accredited, a rigorous process by which a private school is audited and must adhere to certain requirements on governance best practices, financial transparency, curriculum quality and staffing. Moreover, all accredited schools in Texas must annually administer a national norm-referenced test approved by the school's accrediting agency.

Schools also are accountable to parents who can leave if they become dissatisfied with a school's performance. Schools that can't meet parents' expectations go out of business. That's real accountability.

Notably, Sen. Wendy Davis, D-Fort Worth, has introduced a bill requiring private schools that accept scholarship students to administer TEAS STAAR tests.

But the goal of school choice is not to make private schools look just like public schools through state-imposed curriculum and testing requirements. It's the opposite. School choice is meant to provide an array of opportunities — public and private — to students who have diverse needs and interests while improving the quality of all schools.

Indeed, 22 empirical studies have shown that when private school choice is introduced into a community, neighborhood public schools actually experience academic gains.

Decades ago, before private school choice programs existed, there was uncertainty about how school choice would impact students. Today, thanks to the experiences of 21 states, we know school choice benefits students and schools. It also saves taxpayers money.

Those on the left or right shouldn't be worried about tax-credit scholarships. Rather, Texans should be troubled that it's taken this long to make such freedom available to more families.

Enlow is president and CEO, Friedman Foundation for Educational Choice. Evans is executive director, Texas Association of Private Schools. Terry is a mother and advocate for educational options in Texas.



Texas should not mandate drug tests for unemployment benefits

Proposed legislation would cause a litany of problems for state

By **Nathan Jones**

Gov. Rick Perry has expressed support for a bill now before the Legislature that would require drug testing for the receipt of unemployment benefits.

Those who favor the proposal argue that it will reduce drug use, save money and prevent state benefits from going to those who would waste them. These are laudable goals.

Unfortunately, this proposal is unlikely to achieve them. The reasons to oppose are numerous. Let me explain.

The bill will likely cost more than it will save. Florida adopted a similar law in 2011 and has spent more on reimbursing people for testing than it has saved from denied benefits.

Defenders argue that this does not take into account people who do not apply because they know they will fail.

We should be skeptical of numbers that cannot be measured.

Contrary to the opinion of some, most people want to work. They make more money and have greater dignity as jobholders.

Eighty percent of the jobs they will apply for will require drug tests anyway, making the state-required tests redundant.

Texas' political culture prides itself on respect for individual rights. This bill is an example of Big Brother government at its most invasive.

For those who do fail, the tests will disproportionately catch marijuana users who can test positive up to a month after use. Harder drugs such as heroin or cocaine leave the system within a few days.

The tests also ignore alcohol, which is far more dangerous than marijuana in terms of its impact on driving safety or violent behavior.

Denying unemployment benefits to drug users also will harm their innocent children.

Few drug users spend every dime on

drugs. Some money goes to food and other necessities for themselves and their families. Punishing the innocent in an attempt to punish the guilty is unfairly punitive.

Application of the law could have a racially disparate impact. The bill calls upon the Texas Workforce Commission to create a questionnaire. "Suspicious" answers will lead to a drug test.

One can only hope the form does not include a race self-identification question. The room for abuse and potential profiling would be great.

Drug test false positives happen. I know because it happened to me.

I attended University of California, Berkeley and planned to return home to work at the Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk for the summer in 2001.

A drug test was required for the job I sought. According to the company, the drug test drew an "inconclusive result," which was tantamount to failure.

Few things are more frightening than being falsely accused of something. You wrack your brain: Could I have been in contact with second-hand marijuana

smoke? I called the medical review officer, who asked me if I ate bagels or muffins with poppy seeds. When I said I had, he gave me a negative on the test, which meant I passed and had documentation to prove it.

This is not just an anecdote. A review of the literature on drug testing, presented by Dr. Dwight Smith at the 2010 American Psychiatric Association convention, revealed that "one in 20 are going to have inaccurate results, and those are more likely to be false positive than false negative." Take those odds across millions of annual drug tests and you get a sense of the problem.

In an era when so many have lost jobs through no fault of their own, we should have some compassion.

We should not add insult to injury by making jobless Texans urinate in a cup to get the unemployment benefits needed to serve as a bridge to their next job.

It is not only costly; it's just mean.

Jones is the Baker Institute's Alfred C. Glassell Postdoctoral Fellow in Drug Policy.