

COMING MONDAY

■ The Legislature has an opportunity to seize the national momentum for solar power and develop the industry in Texas.

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

WAR ON TERROR

HOW TO WRAP UP

Here are four steps Obama should take to shut down prison this year

By MURRAY FOGLER

EVERYONE knows that President Obama issued an executive order his first week in office to close the prison at Guantanamo within a year. While many have opined on the difficulties of handling the approximately 245 remaining detainees, here is a four-step recommendation for what needs to be done.

STEP 1: Free the Uighurs.

There are 17 Uighurs (Chinese Muslims) in Guantanamo and 5 others who we shipped to a refugee camp in Albania (yes, Albania). The U.S. government has long ago acknowledged these men were picked up in error, and a U.S. court has recently ordered their release. Yet, they remain in maximum security detention.

Granting asylum to all of the Uighurs in the United States would be a simple and quick start to the process of closing Guantanamo. It's a no-brainer. Taking this step has several benefits.

First, it is the right thing to do. These men are innocent, yet they have been held for seven years in captivity. Second, it can be accomplished in short order — there is a community of Uighur-Americans who are ready to accept and assimilate the

Fogler, an attorney at Beck, Redden and Secrest in Houston, has represented two Guantanamo detainees, both of whom have been released.

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PAUL LACHINE

GUANTANAMO

SCHOOLS

New growth model assessment is a win for education

■ Measuring academic progress of students will aid accountability

By CHRIS BARBIC

AT YES Prep Public Schools, a Houston-based charter school system preparing students

in low-income communities for college graduation, newly enrolled students often arrive behind grade-level and below the state test-passing standards. Despite these chal-

lenges, YES Prep students have consistently achieved outstanding passing rates on state-mandated TAKS tests. These TAKS passing rates, however, paint an incomplete picture and fail to take into account exactly where students begin each academic year, where they end it, and the amount of growth achieved over the course of that year. As a result, the success of student academic progress at

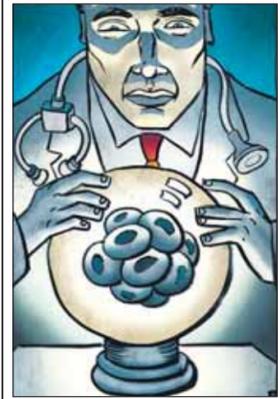
YES Prep and other high-performing public charter and traditional schools has never been granted proper credit. This is especially true of high-performing dropout recovery programs working with our toughest student population and ensuring these same students not only stay in school, but earn a high school diploma and meet college and work-ready standards.

Shortly before leaving

office, Education Secretary

Barbic is the founder and head of schools for YES Prep Public Schools, a public charter school serving low-income students across five campuses in Houston. YES Prep has been named as the best public school in Houston by U.S. News & World Report, Newsweek and Children at Risk.

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PAUL LACHINE

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DEAN ROHRER

ENERGY

Latin America warms up to nuclear expansion

■ Interest driven by need for stable source of power

By SHARON SQUASSONI

NUCLEAR power, long on the outs, is fashionable again—this time as an antidote to energy insecurity and global climate change. In Latin America, the current plans for nuclear expansion are ambitious. Argentina and Brazil may seek to double or triple existing nuclear capacity. Mexico may build as many as eight more reactors by 2025. Chile, Venezuela and Uruguay are similarly caught up in the enthusiasm for nuclear energy.

With the exception of Mexico, interest in nuclear power around the hemisphere is driven by a desire to find alternatives to sometimes erratic hydroelectric power. Rising electricity demand and prices have also tightened natural gas supplies. Add to this the gas cutoff between Argentina and Chile and the nationalization of Bolivia's natural gas production in 2006 and the interest in nuclear power as a supplement to risky, tight gas sup-

plies is suddenly growing.

Yet the road to nuclear power is long and expensive, and it is unclear whether it can live up to expectations.

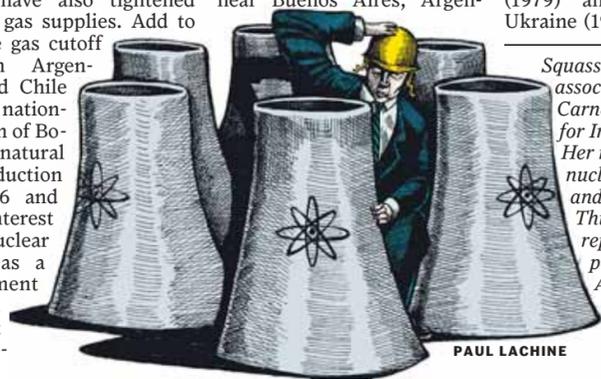
Latin America's first nuclear power plant (Atucha I near Buenos Aires, Argen-

tina) opened in 1974, 20 years after the world's first electricity-generating nuclear power plant. Since then, a lack of funds and public opposition after accidents at Three Mile Island in the United States (1979) and Chernobyl in Ukraine (1986) led to signifi-

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PAUL LACHINE

EDITORIAL

Bonus brawl in Austin

UTIMCO needs to rethink its process for paying out bonuses. **PAGE E2**

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A successful election

Charles Krauthammer says Obama minimized the good news. **PAGE E3**

EDUCATION

The evolution debate

Two Houstonians square off on the best way to teach Darwin. **PAGE E5**

ON ETHICS

Of mites and men

Is company responsible when workers bring home pests from office? **PAGE E6**

Going just gets tougher for Obama agenda



DAVID S. BRODER says if the president thinks getting the stimulus bill passed was difficult, just wait until he turns to reforming the health care system.

NOW comes the hard part. Difficult as it has been to push the almost \$800 billion stimulus plan to the point of passage in Congress, making it work in local communities across America will be much more challenging. And here in Washington, the political tests that lie ahead as the agenda shifts to energy, the environment, health care, Iraq, Afghanistan and other trouble spots will also pose higher hurdles.

Predictably, President Obama has had a shaky introduction to his new duties. Talented as he is, he had never previously been asked to assemble an administration, to identify prospective appointees, decide where they might fit, recruit them and qualify them for the confirmation process.

Some of the biggest names on his list — Tom Daschle, Bill Richardson and Judd Gregg

— backed out before they ever took office. They withdrew for different reasons, but had Obama, with only four Senate years behind him, known the environment and personalities in public life better, he might have anticipated some of these problems.

His Treasury choice, Timothy Geithner, turned out to have unpaid taxes. More important, in his first big test — explaining the new effort to bolster the shaky banking and credit system — Geithner managed to trigger a big sell-off on Wall Street. That was hardly a vote of confidence.

Despite these difficulties and distractions, Obama was able to conduct an inside-outside offensive for his first big bill, the stimulus plan designed to stop the scary slide in the economy. He carried his campaign from Capitol Hill to Indiana, Florida and Illinois, reaching out to Republicans as well as Democrats.

The resistance proved to be much stiffer than he anticipated. Some of it was partisan, with the GOP leadership sending a message that they would not be rolled. But much of it was the reaction to the staggering sums involved. Republicans asked themselves how we would ever pay for this. Democrats, whose doubts kept breaking out in public despite pleas for unity, questioned whether the mix of spending and tax cuts was what it should be.

The daunting thing for Obama is that the next issues will be even tougher in Congress. This was, relatively speaking, easy pickings. It is always simpler to assemble a majority for spending money than for saving it. When Obama turns to health care, he will have to ask someone to pay for the millions of people he wants to add to the insurance rolls. Meantime, Obama and his aides have to prove that their expensive fix for the economy can work. Eighteen months or two years from now, statisticians are certain to be arguing whether the stimulus package created or saved the promised 4 million jobs. But by then, voters will have made their own judgment whether the prescription worked — based on the condition of the overall economy, the employment and profits picture, the movement of the markets and the degree of consumer confidence.

Obama has promised — and invested — a lot, even while acknowledging in advance that he knows not everything will work. Any spending program this big is bound to produce its quota of scandals; there aren't nearly enough contracting officers in Washington and the 50 states to prevent the chicanery. Republicans have seen to it that Obama has complete ownership of the economic rescue. By withholding nearly all their votes, they are betting that it will fail, just as they did in 1993 when the newly elected Bill Clinton pushed his first budget and tax package through Congress without a single Republican vote.

Back then, Newt Gingrich predicted the Democratic plan would lead to "a job-killing recession" and Dick Arme, his lieutenant, called it "a recipe for disaster."

Even if they had been right, they took the risk of seeming to be betting against something most voters hoped would succeed. But they were wrong — the economy soared under Clinton. Sixteen years later, today's Republicans seem to have forgotten that experience.

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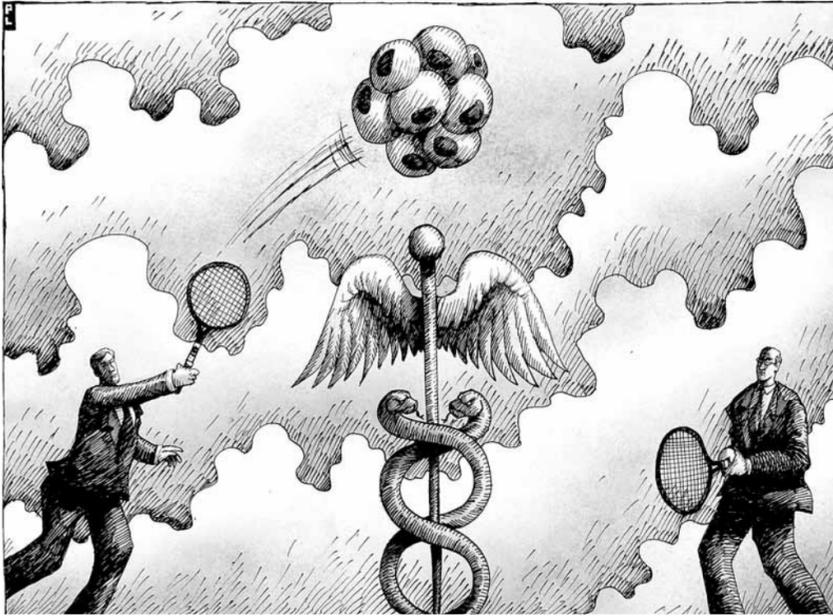
WANTED: Federal stem cell oversight

CONTINUED FROM PAGE E1 stem cells have the potential to specialize into any cell in the body and therefore have the capability to be utilized in tissues and organs where stem cells are missing or damaged. Advocates predict that embryonic stem cells could be used to produce tissues or organs to replace damaged ones, to understand and combat diseases such as diabetes and Parkinson's, and to test and develop new drugs.

The field is relatively new, dating back just over a decade, and the need for strong ethical guidelines and coordination is increasingly apparent. Unfortunately, current regulation of stem cell research in the United States is, at best, haphazard, with scientists who accept state and private funding on cells playing by a different set of rules than researchers using government cells.

In 2001, President George W. Bush restricted federal funding for stem cell research, severely limiting the amount and scope of research. But the restriction applied only to federal funding. So some universities, including Harvard University and the University of Wisconsin-Madison, obtained private funding for their research. Other researchers convinced legislators and governors in states such as California, Illinois and Connecticut to fund projects.

In the absence of federal oversight and coordination, the National Academies



stepped in with voluntary guidelines in 2005 — but there was no mechanism to ensure these practices are followed. Additionally, as the federal government has pulled back from stem cell research, the United States' leadership role in this area has diminished, with research here stagnating compared to the rest of the world.

To rectify this, the Obama administration should create a comprehensive federal stem cell policy with the National Institutes of Health (NIH) taking the lead.

This could be done by creating an Embryonic Stem Cell Research Oversight (ESCRO) board within the NIH to review controversial research and recommend policy for the agency, similar to the committee recommended by the National Academies, the most distinguished society of scientists and engineers in the country.

The ESCRO board would contain representatives with expertise in ethical and legal issues and biology, as well as policy scholars and patient advocates. The role of the

board should be to review grant applications and to develop policy options for all aspects of research involving human embryos. Moreover, NIH should work with states that have already implemented human stem cell programs to provide guidance on ethics and research, as well as to help with peer review.

The government must also outlaw any effort to clone a human being, regardless of the source of funding. Human reproductive cloning has been denounced by scientists and policymakers around the world. Fourteen states and more than 40 countries have already banned the practice. This increased federal involvement reflects public sentiment. Public support for stem cell research has increased over the past seven years, with 56 percent of Americans supporting federal funding according to Research!America. And approximately two-thirds of Americans agree that there should be a uniform federal stem cell policy.

There is also a historical precedent for an empowered

NIH. In the past, NIH has played a strong leadership role in creating research policy for controversial areas of biomedical research. For example, the Recombinant DNA Advisory Committee (RAC) was created to review proposals involving the use of DNA in research and clinical therapies.

Additionally, President Obama should continue the President's Council on Bioethics (PCB) and provide it with a mandate, along with the necessary financial support, to guide the president on bioethical questions as well as serve as a means for public outreach on these topics.

These steps are critical if the United States is to resume its leadership role in scientific research and help establish global standards that reflect scientists' interests while respecting human dignity.

Let's hope our new president takes this opportunity to promote a federal stem cell policy that expands research in a responsible, thoughtful and ethical manner.

SCHOOLS: Assessment of growth a benefit

CONTINUED FROM PAGE E1 Margaret Spellings and the U.S. Department of Education approved a Texas Education Agency pilot program to measure individual student growth in every charter public and traditional public school in Texas. Measuring both individual student growth AND passing rates on state standardized tests is a giant step in the right direction towards creating a more sophisticated state accountability system. Access to this individual student growth data will provide a number of advantages:

Teachers will be armed with the critical information necessary to better determine the appropriate interventions for students who arrive to their classroom behind grade-level.

Campus leaders can better determine which teachers are most effective in closing the achievement gap and preparing students for college, and they can consequently create a fairer system of rewards and consequences for those same teachers, and;

Parents can better evaluate their child's academic progress, and be more effective advocates for ensuring their public school (charter and/or traditional) is delivering a quality education to their child.

Those who oppose the growth model argue that it is just an easier way to meet federal standards—more schools would have met these standards if the growth model would have been enacted last year. While we must stay focused on our mission to have students graduate from high school ready to compete in college and the workforce, in order to accomplish this we need data indicating the growth of each individual student toward these standards so that a student's academic program can be differentiated according to their progress toward these standards. Teach-

ers and schools making great progress should be rewarded and those who fail to make progress should be held accountable.

Many of the educators and legislators who have opposed the growth model argue that it would be a heavy lift to track students' growth from one year to the next. They are right. The growth model is difficult and will require hard work and may force us to take another look at the quality of our current data systems. The benefits of having this information, however, are too important not to commit the will and resources necessary to make it work.

Accountability is a crucial piece of a framework for quality education. Our accountability system must provide educators and parents with both passing rates on TAKS and an individual student growth measure. Texas' accountability systems have led the nation for the past 20 years. Our drive to constantly improve has benefited millions of Texas children. Implementing an individual student growth measure is the next logical step in this improvement process and will lead us to a more sophisticated and fairer system to judge student, teacher, and school performance.

On behalf of students, educators, and parents across our state, I want to thank Robert Scott, Texas commissioner of education, and his staff at the Texas Education Agency for applying for this pilot program and former Secretary Spellings and the Department of Education staff for approving the Texas pilot, called the Texas Projection Measure. Let's encourage our legislators during this current session to follow their lead and continue to refine our accountability system with a dual lens of achievement—passing rates on TAKS—and growth.

WRAP UP: How to close down prison

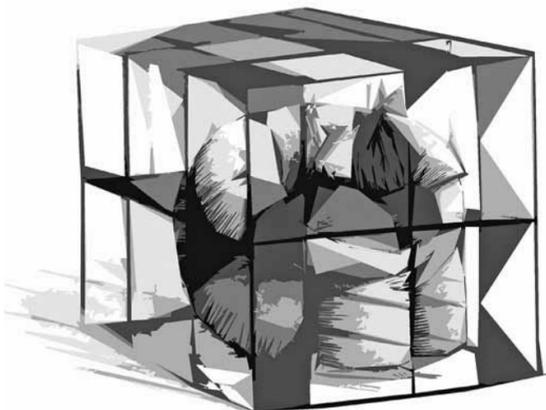
CONTINUED FROM PAGE E1 men to our country. Third, our European friends, whom we are trying to convince to take other Guantanamo prisoners, have wondered why we have refused to accept any ourselves. Bringing these men to American soil will be roundly approved and will help break the logjam of dealing with other detainees.

STEP 2: Release the detainees who have been designated for release.

It's time to stop calling all of these men terrorists. About 50 of the prisoners have already been declared by our government to be ready for transfer or release to their home countries. Send them back now.

What about those stories we hear of Guantanamo detainees "returning" to the battlefield? Those stories are greatly exaggerated, but there is no guarantee some released prisoners won't take up arms against us. We cannot, however, let that suspicion serve as a reason to hold these men.

In America, we do not imprison people merely because we suspect they might commit a crime in the future.



We detain people only when evidence shows they have already done so. We have no evidence to hold many of the current Guantanamo prisoners. The principles on which our country was founded demand that these men be released.

STEP 3: Let the habeas process work.

It has taken years for these prisoners to win the right to challenge their detention in our courts. Most of the prisoners have exercised that right and their cases are now being heard. Courts in

Washington, D.C., have ruled already on the habeas petitions of about two dozen of these men. The prisoners have won most of the cases so far, but not all of them.

The system is not perfect, but it works. There is no reason why the remaining cases cannot be heard and decided in the next few months. When the courts rule, we should honor the decision. If the decision favors the prisoner, release him immediately. If not, we must go to step 4.

STEP 4: Make the tough

decisions.

We've put these off long enough, but we must make some hard choices now.

For prisoners who lose their habeas challenges, how long can we hold them as enemy combatants? Surely not forever. When we withdraw our troops from Iraq and Afghanistan, we should let the prisoners go, unless we convict them as criminals.

Which prisoners do we have enough evidence to try as criminals? We have tried terrorists before and put them away in U.S. prisons for life. We can do this again, evidence permitting.

And, which prison — civilian or military — in the U.S. should house the prisoners we do not release? In spite of the protestations of congressmen all over this country, this is not that hard. We know how to hold dangerous men, humanely and securely.

These questions have already been subject to endless debate. Likely, there is no one right answer. Putting off the tough decisions, though, won't make them go away.

No one said this would be easy. But we made this mess, and we have to clean it up. Let's start now.

