David Boldt
Alarms and Diversions

School shows job training that works

There was nothing all that emotional in the sun-splashed dedication of the Philadelphia Area Accelerated Manufacturing Education (PhAME) facility in West Oak Lane last week.

But several times, I thought I was going to lose it.

Initially, I'd been a skeptic. Rep. Dwight Evans claims I laughed at him when he drove me past the abandoned nametag factory on a cold, rainy day in 1994 and told me he had gotten some foundation money to make it into a job-training center.

The place looked like hell — a battered, graffiti-scarred building inside a rusty chain-link fence that had been penetrated many times by vandals. Trash, trees and vines were taking over the site like forest reclaiming a clearing. Beyond that, the whole idea of another government training center seemed ludicrous. Evidence was rapidly stacking up that the federal government would accomplish as much with its job-training programs if it simply shredded the billions spent, baled them and dropped them into the Potomac.

But gradually, the whole thing began to shape up. The heavy involvement of a major corporate CEO (Bill Avery of Crown Cork and Seal) limited the danger that the project would be another boondoggle, training people ineptly for jobs that didn't exist.

The $8.5 million to rehabilitate and equip the building — a seemingly impossible goal — came in via a process only Rube Goldberg could love. It was so complex and involved so many entities that Charles Moore, who runs PhAME now, says he doesn't dare list the contributors for fear of leaving some out.

(The biggest players were the Annie E. Casey and Charles C. Mott Foundations, Boeing and Crown Cork, and an assortment of state and city agencies.)

The result: a school equipped like a factory that can graduate up to 240 machinists a year. It will take in people who may have only eighth-grade reading and math skills and whose present career horizons go no further than security guard or waitress.

After a 53- or 61-week course (depending on the candidate's initial skill level), graduates can earn $30,000 or more a year by filling one of the estimated 2,000 openings for machinists now available in the region.

It's easy (as always in Philadelphia) to find critics. Some claim that PhAME is too expensive, that it's doing what the public schools should be doing, or that it should aim its graduates toward another field. And there may be some truth in such criticisms.

But the proper response is for other organizations to show they can do as well — or better. I like the way PhAME did it for many reasons:

PhAME shows that Community Development Corporations work. At the heart of the enterprise is the Ogontz Avenue Revitalization Corp., one of many CDCs emerging across this nation as the most effective institutions available for reviving inner-city neighborhoods.

PhAME demonstrates the efficacy of centrist politics. The key political partners in this effort were Evans, a Democrat, and Gov. Ridge, a Republican. Mayor Rendell and City Councilwoman Marian Tasco, both Democrats, were also saluted at the ceremony; so was State House Majority Leader John Perzel, a Republican. All profess to believe that what Philadelphia needs most is jobs. All were willing, together, to back their rhetoric with funding.

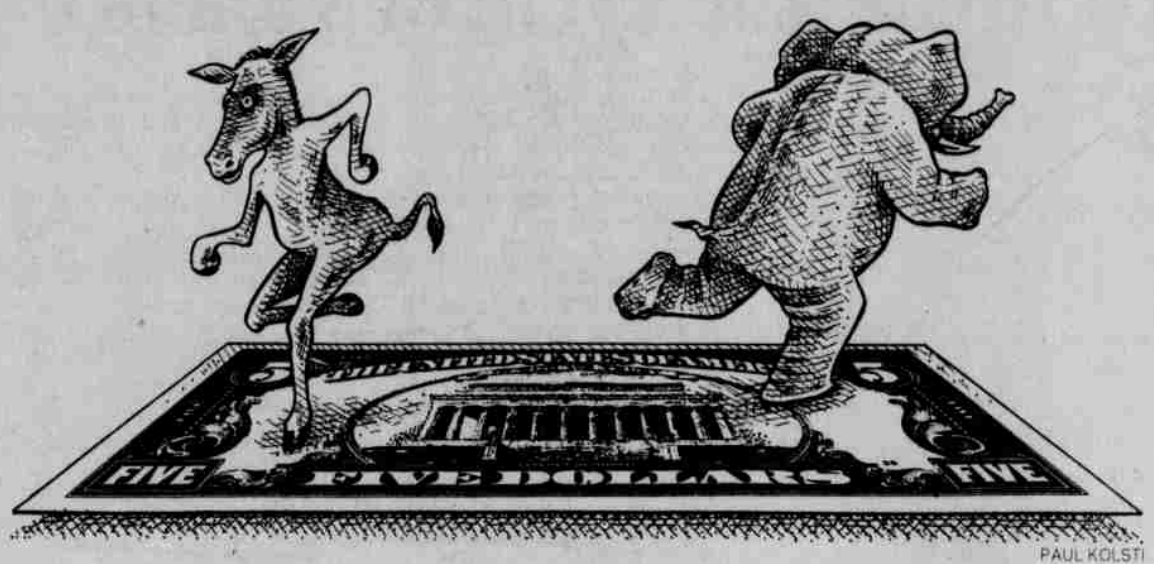
PhAME showed that faith-based organizations could be effective partners. Philadelphia Interfaith Action, an association of more than 40 churches and synagogues, got the crucial task of helping PhAME candidates meet their living expenses during the program. The group obtained $2 million from the state to provide stipends for 100 students during the first year and says it will raise $3 million more.

PhAME proves it can be done. The complexity of interactions and multiplicity of partners show that where there's a will, there is indeed a way. If someone will raise the flag, people will follow.

Of course, PhAME will not solve all the problems created when many urban residents are cut off from the economic mainstream. But its story can inspire, and offer hope.

David Boldt's column appears on Tuesdays and Fridays.

■ **Tuesday columnist** Acel Moore has the day off.
■ **Tomorrow:** "Worldview" with Trudy Rubin; Claude Lewis; Drugs among the Amish.



PAUL KOLSTI

In a dearth of energy and ideas, a big finale turns into a big sleep.

Death of a Congress

By John Hall

For all practical purposes, this Congress has had it. The collapse of the anti-cigarette bill ended the chance of doing something big in a body whose principal accomplishments are the highway and transit bill known as ISTEA, a porkers' feast, and the expansion of NATO, a treaty looking for a mission.

Sen. Joseph Lieberman (D., Conn.) says Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott has become the hero of Senate wives. Senators now get home for dinner at night. Some can be seen jogging down the Mall before the sun goes down. The nonpartisan Lieberman says with a twinkle in his eye that this is because Lott is so efficient and businesslike.

If the Senate is a lounge for resting between elections, the House is a temple of preelection angst.

Feeling an urgent need to do something for the folks, Republicans unveiled their proposal for a patients' bill of rights to set national standards for health maintenance organizations. To get it through in this session will require a bipartisan coalition — something that Speaker Newt Gingrich and President Clinton no longer seem capable of assembling.

Deals were once waiting to be consummated. A cigarette tax in exchange for repeal of the marriage penalty looked like a sure bipartisan thing to save the tobacco settlement. But Lott, led by the Republican majority, pulled the plug. And a relatively harmless Republican bill to create tax-preferred educational savings accounts, said Lieberman, seemed like a great vehicle for Clinton to do a little bargaining to get something he wanted — subsidies for school construction. Instead, the White House jammed a veto threat before the President hied off to China.

Out of the blue, the House drove through an amendment to block production of the French abortion pill RU-486. This came on the night before the Supreme Court's historic decision against the presidential line-item veto. There's a connection.

With 20 votes to spare, the House voted to bar the Food and Drug Administration from licensing RU-486. The drug's proponents said if this measure becomes law, it would effectively deny American women the same access to this drug that European women have had for years as a safe and early alternative to surgical abortion. But opponents said just popping a pill made abortion too accessible and easy.

The measure, as is so much legislation in Congress, was not a free-standing bill. It was submitted as an amendment to the agriculture appropriations bill. This was a standard legislative tactic to complicate President Clinton's decision of whether to sign or veto the bill should it get through the Senate.

Under the line-item veto, the President would have been able to throw out the RU-486 provision and sign the rest of the Agriculture appropriations bill. As a result of the Supreme Court's decision, that is no longer an option. He will have to veto the entire package or sign it.

The court's ruling was scarcely a surprise. Even though the White House and decisive majorities in both houses backed the item veto, the court was not about to let Congress give away, even voluntarily, such a fundamental power to the president. Though it was one of the planks of the famed "Contract With America" on which Republicans ran and took control of the House in 1994, it was doomed from the start without the long and difficult process of a constitutional amendment.

After the court's decision, the Senate's steadfast opponents of that provision materialized like tribal elders whose will had been defied by headstrong, dead-wrong insubordinates. Sen. Robert C. Byrd (D., W.Va.) called the Senate's 69-31 vote on this measure a "colossal blunder" and Sen. Daniel Patrick Moynihan (D., N.Y.) said that "liberty was put in jeopardy" by the majority.

But what drove Congress to it was its own past and present excesses. Rules against legislating on appropriations bills are violated with impunity. And Sen. John McCain (R., Ariz.) complained that items like the National Center for Peanut Competitiveness are inserted into vital spending bills.

Peanuts. An appropriate symbol for this fast-disappearing session of light accomplishment.

John Hall is Washington bureau chief for Media General News Service.

A new presidential library honors a non-U.S. president

By Alvin S. Felzenberg

Here's a quick quiz: How many presidential libraries grace the land?

Every chief executive from Hoover to Bush has one. That makes 11, right? Wrong.

On May 30, Mississippi dedicated the Jefferson Davis Presidential Library on the grounds of Beauvoir, Davis' home in Biloxi.

A presidential library for Davis, president of the Confederate States of America from 1861 to 1865? Some may think the idea absurd. He was not president of the United States but headed only a part of it that was returned to the Union by force in a Civil War that took the lives of 620,000 Americans.

Unlike its counterparts, the Davis library was financed with public funds ($4.5 million from the state) and is run by the private Mississippi Division of the United Sons of Confederate Veterans.



Like the other libraries, this one recounts the story of its subject's career. Davis remains a much-misunderstood and maligned figure.

Unlike a certain Californian whose name also adorns a library, Davis relinquished his office with honor. Also unlike Richard M. Nixon, Davis spent two years in the slammer. And he neither requested nor received a pardon.

Davis was a major figure on the national stage even before the outbreak of what some still call the Great Unpleasantness.

A hero of the Mexican War, he was the strong man in Franklin Pierce's weak administration. As secretary of war, he redesigned the West Point curriculum (stressing modern languages and higher mathematics), provided for pensions for Army widows and orphans, built the Washington Aqueduct (still in operation) and the Patent Building (now the National Portrait Gallery and Museum of American Art), and supervised the expansion of the U.S. Capitol and the construction of its dome.

It was he who breathed life into John Quincy Adams' vision for a museum of world-class proportions on the national mall — a vision that became the Smithsonian Institution. He built much of the mall itself out of swampland and sewers. And he selected the path the transcontinental railroad eventually took.

As senator from Mississippi, Davis got a respectful welcome in abolitionist Boston as late as 1858. If not for the strife that tore the nation apart, he might have become president of all of the United States.

The library relates all this — and something more important. It presents an honest portrayal of African American life in Davis' world. That includes the paradox of his yielding to Secretary of War Judah P. Benjamin's suggestion that slaves who fought for the South be offered freedom. Edward Smith, a descendant of one of Davis' slaves who followed his master's two sons into battle, sits on the library's advisory board.

The library also reveals the ambiguity in Davis' relations with blacks. He thought slavery divinely sanctioned, yet took into his household the orphaned son of a freed slave. His plantation had a black overseer and an all-slave "court system" to administer discipline.

Staffers have kept the library free of the strife that surrounds other Confederate symbols.

One wishes they would do something else: Drop the word *Presidential.* The libraries to which they seek to compare theirs manage to get by without that designation.

Eliminating it would enable curators to tell Davis' story without the distraction of the Lost Cause.

And he would have wanted that. His last public remarks before a gathering of Southern youth displayed buoyancy and optimism:

"Before you lies the future — a future of golden promise; a future of expanding national glory, before which all the world will stand amazed. Let me beseech you to lay aside all rancor, all bitter sectional feeling, and take your places in the ranks of those who will bring about a consummation devoutly to be wished — a reunited country."

Welcome home, Mr. Davis.

Alvin S. Felzenberg writes and lectures on the American presidency.

Voices of black culture sing and speak of opportunity

By Harry Belafonte

Having been born into poverty, I expected to live a life absent of opportunity. When you are poor and black and American, it is difficult to know who you are. In our search for identity, if we have no person of wisdom and courage to guide us, it is more than likely that our search will yield a meager harvest. ...

My fortunate deliverance from such consequences ... mostly ... can be ascribed to the generosity of a few voices from the world of black culture. They were most critical to my escape. ... How fortunate for me that as a young child, struggling with the consequences of poverty, I could be touched by the courage and art of such remarkably gifted people as Duke Ellington, Katherine Dunham, Paul Robeson, Joe Louis, Jessie Owens, Langston Hughes and many more. They all came out of my circumstances and gave me cause to dream, to hope, to know there were tangible possibilities.

When I first heard [Marian] Anderson, she seemed like some distant, spiritual essence from a book of fiction. Beyond the overwhelming beauty of her voice was her magical ability to make one listen to that which was alien. Songs of our struggle and our history were captured in the gift of her voice. ... And she did not perform them just for us. The world wanted her gift, and she gave it to them. But in return, they had to accept who she was.

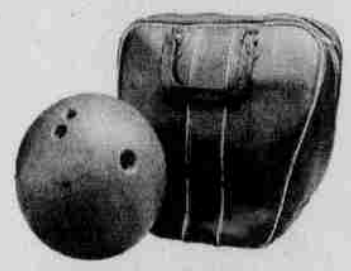
Our time was filled with great and noble warriors who waged a mighty resistance to oppression and racial tyranny. Many of them paid a great price. One such in my youth was my mentor Paul Robeson, who said: "The purpose of art is not just to show life as it is, but to show life as it should be. The artist must be the constant teller of truth." Marian Anderson was just such an artist. ...

Marian Anderson, Paul Robeson and others made me understand that artists have the power to journey into their neighbors' world, be touched by the differences they find, and be inspired by the commonality we all share because of these differences. They made me unafraid of diversity. I can rejoice in singing the songs of the Jew, the Irish, the Italian, the Russian, the Spaniard, the African. Our tongues may be different, but our songs are of each other. Our purpose is to speak truth and be a mirror for the world to see itself. ...

With the time left to me in this interesting, vibrant, feisty world; with the time left to me in this struggling, conflicted, wondrous America; in the time left to sing yet another song, I will continue to go where I must and do as I have done — and, I hope, sustain your pleasure in having bestowed on me this treasured gift.

Singer, actor and civil-rights activist Harry Belafonte made these remarks June 27 as the first recipient of Philadelphia's Marian Anderson Award.

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