

# EDITORIALS

# OPEN FORUM

## Above the law?

Has U.S. society turned into a police state, one where those who enforce the law are above the law?

A comparison of two recent tragedies on our roadways in and around Harford County supports this disturbing conclusion.

On New Year's Eve, Maryland Transportation Authority Officer Courtney Brooks, who was directing holiday traffic at the interchange of I-95 and I-395 in Baltimore was struck and killed by a hit and run driver.

Within six hours a "person of interest" in the case, Kerri J. King, 35, of Elkton, was picked up and ordered held in connection with a series of prior traffic offenses, including some in Harford County. Her identity and tie to the officer's tragic death was made public almost immediately.

A few days shy of a month later, on Monday of this week, Antonio M. Martinez, 28, of Baltimore, was killed in an accident on I-95 near Aberdeen caused by a hit and run driver. Police say they were able to track that driver down and have said the suspect in the case is an Anne Arundel County police officer, who may have been driving under the influence at the time of the 6 a.m. crash.

Police from the various agencies involved refused to release the name of the Anne Arundel County officer, though it showed up on a log of people taken into custody at the JFK Barrack of Maryland State Police. The officer, Dane Patrick Hall, 28, of the 1000 block of Frenchtown Road in Perryville, appeared to have been charged with a drinking and driving offense based on the paperwork, but police officials subsequently have said he hasn't been charged. Anne Arundel County police say he'll be assigned to administrative duties pending the outcome of the investigation. He is not incarcerated and, officially speaking, his name remains unreleased by the involved police agencies.

The rule in this case would appear to be if you're a cop suspected in the accidental death of an ordinary civilian, you're released, protected from general public scrutiny and allowed to continue earning a living. But if you're an ordinary civilian accused in the accidental death of a cop, you're held on that suspicion based on outstanding traffic charges, even though you're not charged in connection with the death.

Just a coincidence? It would be nice to think so, but the reality is this sort of thing has come up before. Accident reports, as they should be, are matters of public record. Regardless of who is at fault, the names of the drivers are routinely released to the public, even if no charges are filed as a result of the crash.

Names are routinely released, but not always released. On May 23, 2004, Paul Thomas, 73, of Edgewood, was walking his dog in broad daylight in the crosswalk at Perry Avenue and Willoughby Beach Road when he was hit and killed by a Volvo SUV driven by Alice Carson-Johnson, an off-duty Baltimore City Police officer. For several weeks, the Harford County Sheriff's Office refused to release the identity of Carson-Johnson, as did the Baltimore City Police Department. It was a matter of "professional courtesy," police said.

She ended up getting probation on a traffic charge of failing to yield to a pedestrian in a crosswalk.

All these cases are tragic. Anytime a life is ended prematurely in a traffic accident, it's a terrible tragedy for everyone involved, especially the family of the deceased.

But the tragedy in these cases is even deeper and has an impact that affects us all: it promotes the notion that police are above the law. When one group of people gets preferential treatment under the law, our democracy is in trouble. This is especially true when the group getting preferential treatment is not only entrusted with the permission to carry loaded guns and arrest other citizens, but also to keep order in our chaotic society.

## For the future

Public interest in Tudor Hall is something that goes well beyond Harford County. The building has cultural value on two levels: its relationship to a preeminent family of Shakespearean stage actors, and its infamous tie to John Wilkes Booth, assassin of President Abraham Lincoln.

Until 2006, however, the property remained in private hands, though there was something of an effort by the 1990s owners to open the place to the public and especially to showcase its importance to the evolution of the art of acting.

It's fitting, therefore, that a performing arts organization — the Center for the Visual and Performing Arts — has been allowed to take up residence in the building. Leaving historic buildings unoccupied until decisions are made about how they'll be used is an invitation for them to become dilapidated.

This doesn't mean, however, the county government should put on a back burner the long-term status of what is arguably the county's most significant landmark.

Like Ford's Theater in Washington, D.C., and the sixth floor of the Texas School Book Depository, Tudor Hall is a place of profound public interest. The first step has been taken in the direction of making Tudor Hall an important public site, but the county shouldn't stop with the purchase of the building. Harford County has a substantial community of people doing research on local history, and a way to enlist these folks in how to manage Tudor Hall should be found, and relatively soon.

It would be a shame if, through lack of action, Tudor Hall became just another old building owned by the county.



## Tax revolt on property is called for

Editor:

Let me see. My house is being reassessed for a hefty amount because other houses in my area which, are comparable to mine, sold for even heftier amounts during a period when people were buying and selling houses like they were changing their underwear. This while, under the spell of creative mortgages, everyone and anyone was able to purchase a home even if they really couldn't afford it. No money down, interest only loans! What were they thinking?

Now that the housing market bubble has popped, home sales, prices and values have declined. So how did our "friends" at the state Department of Assessments and Taxation come up with these outrageous reassessment figures? My guess is that it probably had something to do with a Ouija board.

I love my home and my neighborhood. I've lived here for over 20 years, but if Maryland can't control its insatiable need to wring money out of its residents, I guess a move out of state might be in the future. I am appealing my assessment, and I hope others do too. Also, I think its time for a tax revolt. Anyone up for a demonstration in Annapolis?

**Janet Brock**  
Fallston

## Strong opinions on race for judge

### 50-year lawyer for Judge Eaves

Editor:

I have practiced law in Harford County for more than 50 years, mostly in litigation matters, and served 12 years as a People's Court judge and 35 years as counsel to the Harford County Liquor Board. Needless to say, I am most familiar with the judicial system in Harford County which has remained one of the finest, most competent and effective systems in the state of Maryland.

I know, both as a long standing attorney and lifetime resident of Harford County, what a good judge should be. To this end, I am honored and delighted to support the election of sitting Judge Angela Eaves to the Circuit Court for Harford County. Judge Eaves has previously served with distinction as judge of the District Court of Maryland for Harford County since April 2000 and was recently appointed and elevated to the Circuit Court for Harford County.

Judge Eaves was a former prosecutor and assistant attorney general for the state of Maryland and brings to the Circuit Court of Harford County those attributes that make her the most suited person to serve as judge of the Circuit Court for Harford County. As a judge of the District Court, she has repeatedly demonstrated qualities of patience, fairness, understanding of the law, dedication, tolerance, civility and an eagerness to learn and to serve.

We, in Harford County, have a long and distinguished history of supporting our sitting judges. On Feb. 12 it is time to elect our next sitting judge. The election of a sitting judge should not be based on gender, race, religion, popularity or politics, but on ability and qualifications. I implore the citizens of Harford County, irrespective of political affiliation, to vote for Judge Angela Eaves.

**Stanley Getz**  
Bel Air

### Against gov.'s judge selection

Editor:

When I graduated from law school, I knew some of the theory but little of the reality of practicing law. I had never drawn and recorded a deed, never opened an estate, never handled a divorce, and never picked a civil or criminal jury in Harford County. I was, however, aware I was not qualified to become a Harford County Circuit Court judge.

The Honorable Judge Angela Eaves, the current governor's appointed Circuit Court judge, apparently does not feel that these matters are impediments. To my knowledge, and after a review of her resume, Judge Eaves has not drawn and recorded a deed in Harford County, opened an estate in Harford County, handled a divorce in Harford County or picked a civil or criminal jury in Harford County.

This lack of trial experience does not make her an appropriate candidate for a Circuit Court judgeship, regardless of the governor's agenda. The Jan. 23 *Aegis* quoted Judge Eaves as looking forward to hearing more serious cases. She should be reminded that all cases are serious,

especially to the citizens involved.

I would ask the voters not to make the Harford County definition of a judge to be a lawyer who knew the governor.

**Timothy R. Streett**  
Bel Air

### Ed Andrews best for bench

Editor:

Now that signs for judges are up for the primary on Feb. 12, it is time to tell Harford County that they would do themselves a great service to elect Ed Andrews to the Circuit Court judicial position. He evidently has the most experience of all the candidates. He has successfully established himself in a thriving sole legal practice and has a loyal and supportive client base who each knows he gives his all and does the best job possible.

As a public servant he would be bringing his principles and expertise to a system in which he has been a participant for 25 years. Based on his tenure alone, his learning curve would be significantly shorter than someone who has a considerably lesser Circuit Court experience, which would include all the other candidates, especially the governor's appointee.

For people who genuinely care about Harford County and what goes on in our Circuit Court, character and experience, rather than political appearances, should be the determining factor for electing a judge. As all court cases are open for public record, Ed Andrews is a man with a proven track record of integrity and professionalism. We will all be well served to have him as a Harford County Circuit Court judge.

**Clarissa Neumer**  
Fallston

### Councilman advocates Eaves

Editor:

It is with great pleasure that I support the appointment of Judge Angela Eaves as the new Circuit Court judge for Harford County. This appointment displays the commitment to diversity in government as Judge Eaves is not only the first woman but the first minority member ever to achieve this position. I also support the election of Judge Eaves to this position as she will be running for this office in the upcoming primary on Feb. 12. Please get out and vote.

I have had the opportunity to work on the Harford County Community Mediation Commission where Judge Eaves has been the chair from 2005 until present. In recent years she has taken us through some trying times. She is a great leader in that position and does an outstanding job. She has been a leader in various other avenues including aerobics instructor as well as guest lecturer, moderator and organizer at many conferences involving the judicial system, just to name a few.

Judge Eaves was appointed to the bar for Court of Appeals in the jurisdiction of the Supreme Court of Texas 1987, Court of Appeals of Maryland 1990, U.S. Court for the District of Maryland 1996, U.S.

District Court for the Northern District of Texas 1998, U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit 1999, District Court of Maryland 2000, and Circuit Court of Maryland 2007.

As a judge for nearly seven and a half years, Judge Eaves has accepted the responsibility to represent the justice system by exhibiting patience, tolerance and civility, because this system applies to all of us, not just the best or the worst. The experiences on the bench and as a practitioner have taught her that each case is important, regardless of the character of the individuals involved, the amount of money at stake, or whether incarceration is imposed. She continues to welcome serving the citizens of Maryland as a positive force in their lives and will always invoke the virtues of wisdom, understanding and compassion to do so.

Judge Eaves' impeccable credentials display her sense of fairness, responsibility and civility while dealing with the public. I feel that, through Judge Eaves' many years of experience as an attorney, as well as her position as associate judge, have proven that she will perform at the highest caliber necessary in the position of Circuit Court judge and I recommend her reelection.

**Dion F. Guthrie**  
Harford County Council  
District A  
Edgewood/Joppatowne

### 'Outstanding candidate' Eaves

Editor:

I first met Judge Angela Eaves about 15 years ago, when I was working as a counselor at a middle school here in Harford County, and she was serving as advocate to parents of children with special needs. Although we were on opposite sides of the issue, I was immediately impressed with her ability to understand both sides of the issue. She demonstrated wisdom, understanding and compassion as well as knowledge of special education law. Her quiet, confident demeanor won me over, and needless to say we easily came to agreement in the case at hand.

Over the intervening years I have come to know her well, serving on boards with her, including the Boys & Girls Clubs. She has been supportive of numerous nonprofit organizations during those years. My respect for her abilities has only grown over that time. I was very pleased when she was appointed judge of the District Court more than seven years ago, and I believe she has served with distinction in that role. Thus, I was elated that she was appointed to the Circuit Court. She will be an excellent judge in that court also.

Judge Eaves has the judicial experience, the legal expertise, the wisdom and above all the human qualities which one on that bench must possess. She is certainly well respected in the legal community in Harford County. Thus, I believe she is not simply the "politically correct" candidate for this position as one of her competitors implied; she is the outstanding candidate. I highly recommend that voters of Harford County keep Judge Angela Eaves.

**Thomas E. Owen**  
Aberdeen

### Letters to the editor

are welcomed by *The Aegis*, and correspondents are reminded that brief ones are invariably better read. In any case, the limit for letters submitted for publication is 300 words. The deadline for letters intended for Wednesday's edition is noon Monday and Friday's edition noon Wednesday.

All letters must be signed. They must also include a full address and telephone number, although these will not be published. While the free expression of diverse views and ideas on the part of our correspondents is encouraged, light editing for grammar and spelling may be expected. Letters also may be submitted by e-mail to news@theaegis.com, but should include home address and daytime phone number. *The Aegis*, of course, reserves the right to reject any letter deemed unsuitable for publication.

**John D. Worthington IV**, Publisher

**Ted Hendricks**, Executive Editor      **Jim Kennedy**, Editorial Page Editor

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