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Fact checks: Chicago has among the nation's most restrictive gun laws and is in the midst of a horrific surge in homicides. It would be foolish to argue that A leads to B, but it's worth nothing that A did not cancel out B. We should check back with a few years of data to see how New York's restrictions did or didn't affect crime rates and mass shootings.

Mike Hashimoto, editorial board member, dallasnews.com/opinionblog



Awaiting a decision: Update on Edward Graf arson-murder case: The tragedy that Jason and Joby's lives were extinguished at such an early age is incomprehensible. But more incomprehensible is how this one horrific tragedy — which may well have been no more than an awful accident — has devastated so many more fine and good people. And why? For no good reason.

Sharon Grigsby, editorial board member, dallasnews.com/opinionblog

Hey, Lance: Leave fellow cancer survivors alone

Armstrong blew his chance to really help others, says **Melinda Henneberger**

Oprah Winfrey says she found Lance Armstrong's doping confession just mesmerizing: "I think the entire interview was difficult" for the seven-time Tour de France winner, Winfrey told CBS News. After years of denying he ever touched a performance-enhancing drug, the cyclist was "pretty forthcoming" in their 2½-hour chat at the Four Seasons in Austin, she said. "We were mesmerized and riveted by some of his answers."

Liar can have that effect, of course, and Winfrey has a show to promote. But some of us who've lost years, friends and body parts to cancer are not quite so fascinated.

Because even after he started cheating in the mid-'90s, Mr. Liv-

estrong had a chance to strike an important blow against cancer, which has been linked to both steroids and human growth hormone. Don't do what I did, he could have said after his diagnosis, and millions would have listened.

Instead, the message he and his tacky plastic bracelets sent around the world was just the opposite: Whatever he was doing, it was clearly worth emulating. Sure, because he was the guy who'd stared down death and ridden off laughing.

Turns out, jilting that nice Sheryl Crow was the least of his crimes; Armstrong, who put cycling on America's map, got rich and famous on a lie and dynamited his sport in the process.

The titles have been taken back now, and the required apology tour has finally begun. But here's the answer to the question Oprah wouldn't answer, about how contrite the for-

mer champion is: Even now, the waist-deep hoey on his website, LanceArmstrong.com, features the cliché that he saw cancer as "the best thing that ever happened to me," since his "new perspective allowed him to think beyond cycling and focus on his debt to the cancer community."

Au contraire, as they say in his favorite country, he played those of us in the cancer community for suckers and not only milked his diagnosis but used it for ill. No matter how much good the foundation he founded 15 years ago has done, the truth would have done far more. (The next time those donors are tapped for cash, isn't his dishonesty what they'll remember?)

Armstrong rewrote what could have been a cautionary tale as a heroic one, all the while threatening his various enablers to keep his secret and defaming any who dared tell the truth.

Even when he retired in August and stopped fighting the accusations that he'd spent his career running a big, complicated cheat, he was still blaming everyone but himself, calling the well-documented U.S. Anti-Doping Agency's case against him "an unconstitutional witch hunt" that was "one-sided and unfair" and based on "outlandish and heinous claims."

On his website there is still a link to a pre-Oprah story in *Forbes* magazine that asks, "Was it all a lie? Who cares. Cheater or not, has any athlete done more with their fame than Lance Armstrong to benefit people?"

He can keep telling himself that, but I don't think he will find much sympathy among others who've fought cancer. Any late-breaking crocodile tears that will be televised tonight and tomorrow have been shed in the hope that he can get a reduction in his lifetime ban from the Olympics, reportedly so he can compete in tri-

athlon and running events.

Whatever his punishment, I hope he'll leave his fellow survivors alone from now on; you've done quite enough to help us, thanks, and made the world a more cynical place.

Maybe now we will discuss the links between cancer and not just steroids but hormones, even if the answers aren't what we want to hear.

As far as we've come in demystifying the many diseases rolled into that one scary word, *cancer*, one of the most persistent myths is that it makes you a better person.

It is not necessarily ennobling, though, and if we learn that harsh truth, it will be the only good that has come of this long, sad saga.



Follow Washington Post political writer Melinda Henneberger at @MelindaDC.

BRIDGING DALLAS' NORTH-SOUTH GAP

Milking the misery of the poor

Southern Dallas landlords find profits in their run-down rent houses in a pocket of poverty, says **Tod Robberson**



Staff Photo

A four-plex at Collins Avenue and Carter Street has peeling paint, rotted siding, plumbing malfunctions and other problems that owner Thame's Real Estate has not tended to adequately.



READ previous commentary on Dallas' north-south gap. dallasnews.com/gap

You would have any interest in southern Dallas slum property?

The manager, a woman who would identify herself only as Evelyn, told me by phone that she couldn't talk about conditions at the four-plex and referred me to the company's president. I asked for his name, and she responded, "I'm not even supposed to admit he exists."

She told me to call back and leave my name and phone number on her voicemail so she could forward it to the president. I complied, but got no response. I called back Wednesday and left another message.

Documents show that the president's name is Curtis Timmins. He and his companies own more than 25 properties around southern Dallas, largely in the South Dallas/Fair Park area. Registry details indicate a pattern of purchasing troubled property at extremely low prices, including some sold off by the defunct mortgage company Countrywide Financial.

Timmins has headed numerous companies, including at least one placed under a state tax lien in 2011, according to legal documents. In 2002, he and an associate were defendants in a lawsuit by Microsoft

Corp., which won more than a \$1 million federal court judgment against them for copyright and trademark infringement and unfair competition. Timmins appears to have dabbled in lots of technology-related companies such as Allied Semiconductor Corp., Trek Technologies and Compu Jack. There are many others, according to the documents.

This might not seem like the typical southern Dallas real estate magnate's profile, but the business plan is from the same cookie cutter. The way that many outsiders make money on dilapidated southern Dallas housing is to do exactly what Timmins did: buy low, make cursory repairs and move the renters in quickly. In other words, get rich off the poor.

Southern Dallas is full of absentee landlords who live in nice suburban homes or, in some cases, other states, perhaps blissfully unaware of how bad conditions are for their tenants.

I would like to hear Mr. Timmins' side of the story, but he hasn't returned my phone calls. I guess, as Evelyn suggests, we're not even supposed to know he exists.

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Electoral tinkering idea gets GOP leaders to salivating

Changing vote allocation would have put Romney in office, says **Carl Leubsdorf**

Barack Obama is beginning his second presidential term this weekend because he captured 332 electoral votes last November, well above the required majority.

But if some Republicans had their way in changing how electoral votes are allocated, Obama might have been headed back to Chicago while Mitt Romney began his first term, despite receiving just 47 percent of the votes, nearly 5 million fewer than Obama.

The GOP idea is to allocate most electoral votes by congressional districts, rather than giving all to the statewide winner. That sounds logical, and it might be, if those congressional district lines were fairly drawn.

But coming after Republicans used substantial 2010 victories in several normally Democratic states to enact pro-GOP redistricting plans and strict voter ID laws, it looks suspiciously like another effort to rig the electoral system.

The GOP's redistricting successes enabled Republicans to maintain their House majority, even though the Democrats got more votes. If every state awarded its electoral votes by these gerrymandered congressional districts, Romney would have won by a 276-262 margin, despite Obama's popular vote margin, David Wasserman, the nonpartisan *Cook Political Report*'s House expert, calculated.

Until now, only Nebraska, with five electoral votes, and Maine, with four, have allocated some electoral votes by congressional districts. But Reid Wilson, the editor in chief of *National Journal*'s Hotline, reported recently that concern over recent Democratic presidential successes is prompting "senior Republicans" to consider changing the electoral vote system in several large states that voted for Obama but have GOP governors and legislatures.

Just this week, Republican National Chairman Reince Priebus gave the effort what appeared to be a high-level blessing. "I think it's something that a lot of states that have been consistently blue that are fully controlled red ought to be looking at," Priebus told the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, adding such a system "gives more local control" to the states.

Republican legislators in several GOP-controlled states have

introduced legislation, though it's too early in the year to know if those efforts will succeed.

Pennsylvania Republicans, who made an abortive effort to change that state's system last year in what they acknowledged was an effort to help Romney, are trying again. State Rep. Bob Godshall has introduced legislation to award 18 of the state's 20 electoral votes by congressional district, which would have given the GOP 13 more electoral votes in 2012.

State Sen. Dominic Pileggi has proposed dividing the electoral votes by the percentages of the popular vote, which in Pennsylvania would have given the GOP eight more votes.

In Michigan, state Rep. Peter Lund, chairman of the House Redistricting and Elections Commission, said he will reintroduce a bill to divide electoral votes by congressional district.

In Wisconsin, Gov. Scott Walker said he was intrigued by the idea.

In these three states, the GOP won both the governorship and legislature in 2010. All backed Obama but, thanks to redistricting, elected a majority of Republican House members. As a result of these and similar efforts, the Democrats won just 201 of the 435 seats, even though they polled 1.3 million more votes.

Republican strategists have not been shy about celebrating their efforts.

In a Jan. 4 memo, the Republican State Leadership Committee, which seeks to elect state-level Republicans, said it was "no accident" that Republicans held the House despite getting fewer votes.

By focusing substantial resources on the 2010 REDistricting Majority Project, "Republicans held majorities in two-thirds of the states where the state legislature played a role in the redistricting process, and the impact of that control can be seen clearly in the 113th Congress," the group said.

Partisan redistricting is hardly new. Texas and California Democrats did it for years. But trying to affect presidential elections that way is both new and reprehensible since it could deny a substantial majority its choice for president.



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