

Opinion



Another Viewpoint

We need to help vets fight cynicism

We know that cynicism runs deep in Washington, but some politicians these days are getting so deeply cynical that they ought to wear hipwaders every time they speak.

Veterans Day is one time in particular that produces a torrent of cynical, self-serving rhetoric from politicians of both parties. They offer teary-eyed, red-white-and-blue, gushing tribute to America's beloved vets on this day - yet they spend the other 364 days of the year either ignoring or actively opposing the actual needs of veterans.

George W gets especially deep into this despicable political posturing. On this Veterans Day, he had a photo-op at the Vietnam memorial and made several speeches elsewhere, declaring solemnly: "We remember those who served America," adding that today's young people should talk to yesterday's soldiers about the honor of military service.

Touching. However, Bush didn't mention that his own administration has been quite busy taking actions that dishonor yesterday's soldiers. For example, even as he spoke on Veterans Day, his Pentagon lawyers were pushing a federal court case to deny health care coverage to World War II and Korean War veterans who had been recruited into service with a solemn promise that they'd get lifetime health care if they stayed in the military for 20 years. The vets upheld their end of this deal, but now the Pentagon wants to renege on its pledge, claiming that such health care is too costly and that there really was no valid contract because the promises didn't have the force of law.

Also, federal law now discriminates against disabled veterans by deducting their disability payments from their retirement pay - a hardship that is not imposed on other federal employees, such as George and his White House staff. Congress is moving to eliminate this rank discrimination...but Bush has indicated that he'll veto the bill.

To help our vets fight the cynicism, contact the Military Retirees Grass Roots Group at www.mrgrg-ms.org <<http://www.mrgrg-ms.org>>.

Jim Hightower is a former agricultural commissioner of Texas and a radio talk-show host.

Comments to any opinions expressed on this page are encouraged. Mail them to the Colby Free Press, 155 W. 5th St., Colby, Kan., 67701. Or e-mail td@nwkansan.com or pdecker@nwkansan.com.

Addresses of elected officials:

U.S. Sen. Pat Roberts, 302 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510. 202/224-4774

U.S. Sen. Sam Brownback, 303 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510. 202/224-6521

U.S. Rep. Jerry Moran, 1519 Longworth House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515. 202/225-2715

State Rep. Jim Morrison, State Capitol Building Rm. 174-W, Topeka 66612. 785/296-7676 e mail: jmorriso@ink.org web:<http://www.idir.net/~jmorriso/>

State Sen. Stan Clark, State Capitol Building Rm. 449-N, Topeka 66612. 785/296-7399 e mail:

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155 W. Fifth (USPS 120-920) (785) 462-3963 Colby, Kan. 67701

freepress@nwkansan.com

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Tom Dreiling - Publisher
td@nwkansan.com

NEWS

Patty Decker - Editor

pdecker@nwkansan.com

Darrel Pattillo, Sports Editor

colbysports@nwkansan.com

Michelle L. Hawkins, family and religion

mhawkins@nwkansan.com

ADVERTISING

Crystal Rucker - Advertising Representative

crystalr@nwkansan.com

Flo Rodriguez - Ad Composition, Legals

BUSINESS OFFICE

Lea Bandy - Circulation Manager

Pattie Stevens - Office Manager, Want Ads

Evan Barnum - Systems Administrator

support@nwkansan.com

NOR'WEST PRESS

Jim Bowker - General Manager

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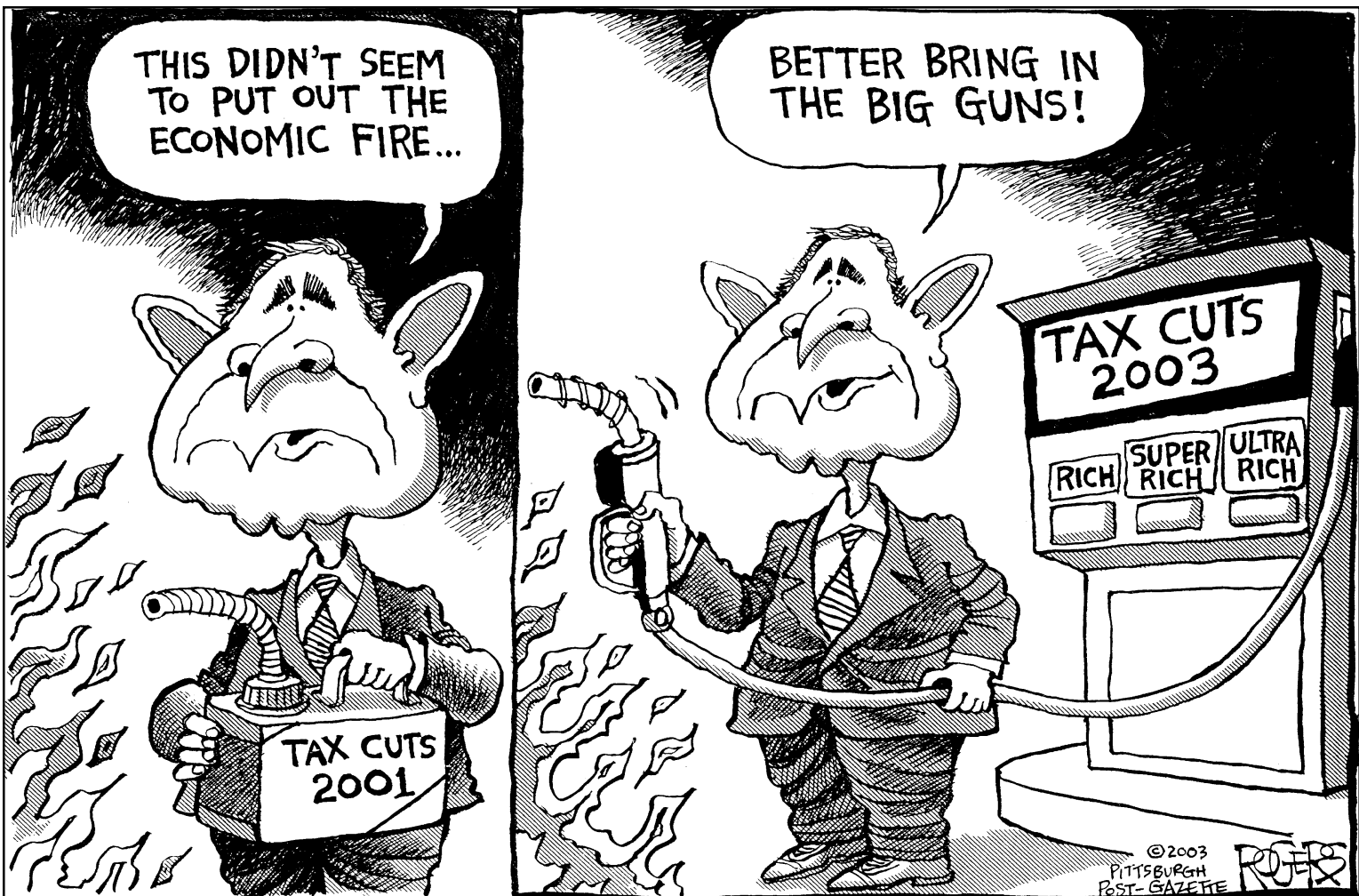
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Teaching an old cat new tricks

They say you can't teach an old dog new tricks, but I have succeeded in teaching Baby, our old cat, a trick. Baby must be about 17 years old, because our son had her before he was married, and his oldest child is 15.

Punkin does lots of tricks, earning treats like Pounce, or Catty Shack, since he was a kitten. For a long time, Baby showed no interest, and acted as if she didn't even like the treats. I thought she was just too dumb to learn a trick. But we got some new tarter control Whisker Lickins and she decided she likes them. (They have little red centers, so I suppose they are to cats what chocolate covered cherries are to me.)

So I taught her to retrieve her treat from off the Feist phone book which standing is on the bottom shelf of the bookcase. She has to slant her head to retrieve it. She even comes up and tells me she wants a treat, and indicates the book. What a cat! I would estimate she has a low average IQ for a cat.

Punkin, on the other hand, probably has a close-to-genius IQ. He knows lots of tricks. He likes to be around people, but doesn't like to sit on laps, so I have been teaching him to walk from a chair up my outstretched legs to retrieve a treat from my thigh, and then to my waistline.

Then I decided I would see if he would retrieve it from my shoulder.

He will, but it works better, for both of us, if he just reaches from a desk or stool rather than try-



Maxine Nelson

• Random Thoughts

ing to walk up my body. The other day, he jumped up on my desk while I was working, and stuck his claw into my shoulder, demanding a treat. Now I am thinking I outsmarted myself by teaching him that trick!

Both cats can count, because I only give them three treats. They know when those are gone, that is it — from me anyway. My husband is more softhearted (or maybe he just can't count!)

Three of our kids, two spouses and seven grandchildren, were here for the weekend after Christmas, arriving and leaving in shifts but all being here on Saturday.

Sunday morning, my daughter Paula Boyd and her daughters Becky and Hannah from Derby went to church with me. Becky, who has been attending Wichita State University, will be attending a semester of college at Nauvoo, Ill., starting in January.

Classes at the college, an extension of Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah, will be held at

Joseph Smith Academy in what was a former Catholic school building near the Mormon temple in Nauvoo. Classes will include church history and a field trip through local places of church history. The church has recently rebuilt the Nauvoo temple which was destroyed after the Mormons left the area due to persecution, and is restoring homes and businesses as a tourist attraction as well as a center of worship.

The Boyd family got to meet the new lady Mormon missionaries who are serving in this area. Becky plans to serve a mission, and it occurred to me that when she does, I will have to address my granddaughter as sister.

I hope it doesn't disturb anyone in the community to address the lady missionaries as 'sister.' It certainly doesn't bother me to address a Catholic nun as "sister." I wouldn't think of addressing her any other way.

So if a group of lady Mormon missionaries and a group of nuns happened to be at the same place, would that be a "sisterhood?" I asked my daughter and she said if a group of lady Mormon missionaries and a group of nuns were doing a community service project in a less desirable area of town, they would be "sisters in the hood." Sounds like ecumenical cooperation to me.

Maxine Nelson is the former lifestyle and religion editor at the Colby Free Press and writes as her retirement allows.

In defense of school administrators

Kansas public education faces unprecedented challenges in the current school year and in the fiscal year ahead of us.

Imprudent legislative action and a failing economy have placed a financial burden on Kansas public schools that defies description. It is little consolation to know that many of our colleagues in other states around the nation face similar burdens. We must continue to meet the needs of our children in spite of inadequate resources.

This fiscal burden comes at a time of increasing expectations on the part of public education. The reauthorization of ESEA, the so-called No Child Left Behind Act, places significant new mandates on states and local school districts across the nation. Further federal mandates can be expected through the impending reauthorization of the Individuals With Disabilities Education Act.

Our State Board of Education is currently in the process of adopting new licensure standards for education professionals and adopting new graduation requirements that will affect curriculum development in many Kansas school districts.

At the same time, the State Board will be considering new QPA regulations to comply with the No Child Left Behind Act. While nearly everyone agrees that new resources will be necessary to achieve the goals contemplated by these actions, neither the state nor the federal government seems ready to commit those resources.

Throughout the process of addressing these concerns, the Kansas Association of School Boards and the National School Boards Association will continue their efforts to represent the views of local boards of education through their advocacy efforts.

Today, however, I would like to share with you a concern I have about an issue that has been raised by many, both inside and outside the political arena. It is an issue that sometimes we ig-

John Koepke

• Guest Editorial

nore or fail to confront, in spite of its potential to severely damage the quality of public education in our state.

That is the issue of administrator quality and compensation. While many of the overt criticisms of public education have been rebutted, we have not been as vocal when confronted by those who contend that overpaid and redundant school administrators have exacerbated the problems of public education. I believe that we are making a serious mistake by our failure to respond aggressively to this concern.

The evidence of our failure is all around us. More and more school administrators at all levels are opting for early retirement. The pool of candidates entering administrator training programs is in a state of continual decline. Those who train administrators in our higher education institutions tell us more and more of their students do not intend to enter administrative positions when they complete their training.

We frequently espouse the value of data-driven decision making. Study after study has shown a direct link between student achievement and the quality of building level administration.

Other studies have shown a similar link between the quality of building level administration and the quality of central office administration.

We ignore these studies at our peril. KASB and other education entities in Kansas have been proud of the fact that the level of student performance in Kansas has remained high and even improved in some areas in spite of our fiscal shortcomings.

Some have seen this as an excuse to avoid fur-

ther expansion of educational expenditures. Others have suggested that we need to ensure that existing resources are redirected to the classroom and away from administrative expenditures. Some have directly suggested that school administrators are overpaid and that we employ too many of them.

As a practical matter, I do not know of any other enterprise, whether private business or public entity, which spends as little of its available capital on administrative costs as public education. It seems to me that it is time we acknowledge the Herculean efforts of our school administrators in raising student achievement at a time of severely diminished resources.

Instead of suggesting that budgets be balanced by reducing administrative overhead, we should be taking steps to ensure that sufficient resources are being devoted to administrative salaries and benefits to ensure that the most qualified and creative people in public education are encouraged to enter this critical field of endeavor.

It is imperative that those who know their work best, the school boards who employ them and the association that serves them, take up the cause of support for those who administer our public schools.

If we do not do so, we will suffer through this period of fiscal peril with an ever diminishing pool of administrators willing to be buffeted on all sides by a lack of gratitude for their efforts.

It is my intention to make every effort in the future to ensure that I do not contribute to this lack of appreciation, either by acts of commission or by my failure to respond when the quality or integrity of school administrators is challenged.

I urge each of you and your local school boards to join me in recognizing the valuable service provided to our children by those who administer our public schools.

John Koepke is the executive director of the Kansas Association of School Boards.

Doonesbury

• Gary Trudeau

