

Opinion



A Kansas Viewpoint

Charting the course with charter schools

From The Wichita Eagle

The majority conservative members on the Kansas State Board of Education invited criticism last fall when they chose an education outsider and school choice advocate, Bob Corkins, to oversee public education in the state. And they got it, including from this editorial board.

The howling has quieted some, but the skepticism persists: Can an attorney with no education or management experience be effective running the Kansas State Department of Education, especially as the state's 300 school districts scramble to comply with the federal No Child Left Behind law?

Corkins is making an impressive effort to inform his perspective by visiting schools and talking to superintendents and others on the front lines of K-12 education in Kansas.

With the state board having chosen not to pursue private-school vouchers at the Legislature this year, Corkins also is focusing energy on possible changes in the department to promote best practices and redistribute workload.

Where Corkins' agenda still departs most from school districts' is on charter schools. Kansas has 26 such schools now, and Corkins and the state board seek to modify state law to make it easier to start such schools.

But if Corkins thinks more charter schools are essential to enabling more students to succeed in Kansas schools, he needs to better explain their unique value. He complains that the 26 such schools are charters in name only and "not fulfilling the intent." But saying that a true charter "is creating a more autonomous laboratory for change" doesn't clear things up.

Would focusing more resources and energy on charter schools produce better student outcomes? So far, the research is hardly definitive.

Much of Corkins' talk of reform still seems engaging as theory but a distraction, frankly, from teachers' daily quest to help students find success.

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 jvannostrand@nwkansas.com or pdecker@nwkansas.com.

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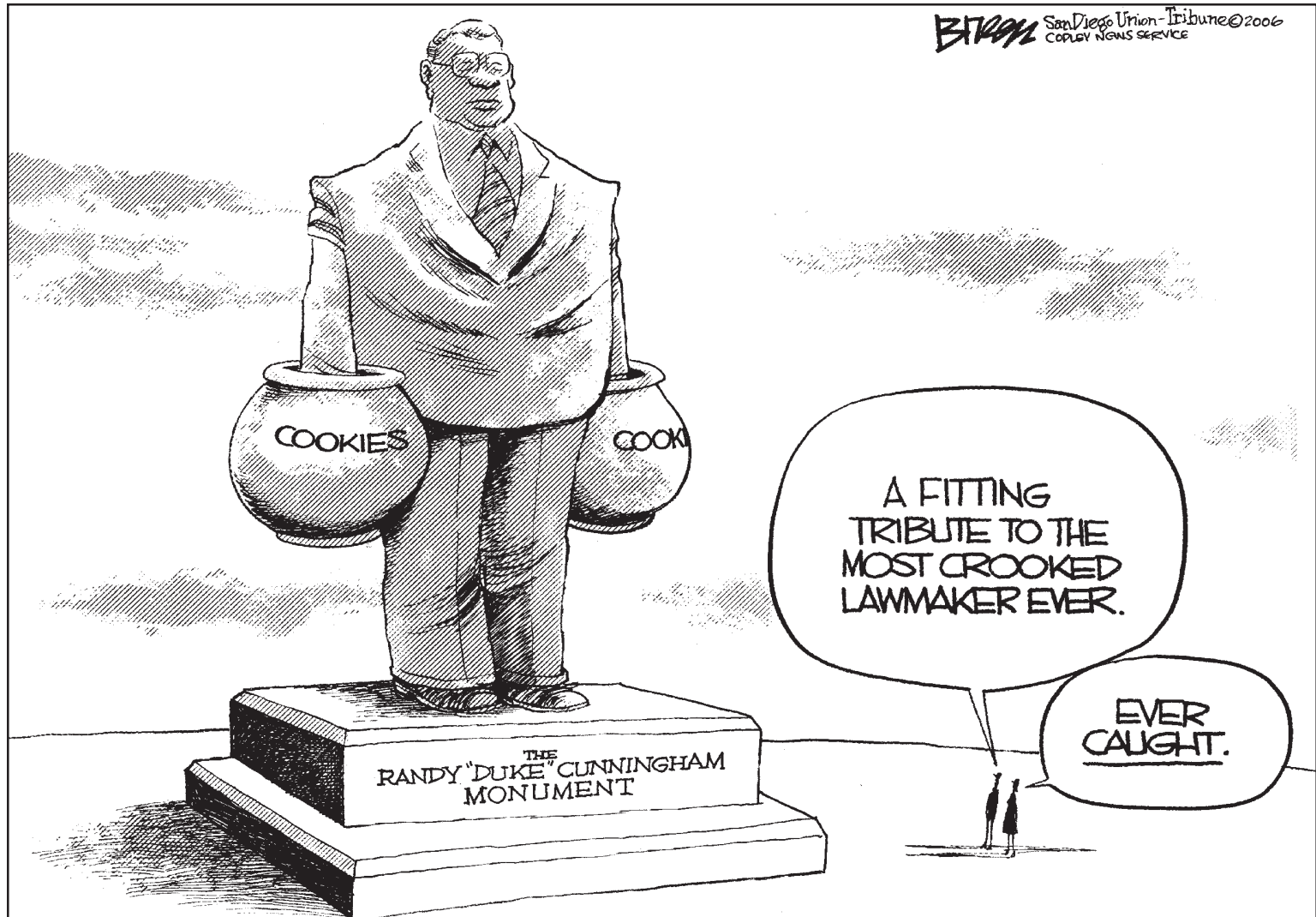
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It takes a village to raise a child

In recent weeks, a lot of good information has been surfacing in newspapers, from law enforcement agencies and people around town offering advice for parents and others interested in protecting our youth.

While going through this material, I decided it might be a good idea to devote some of this information to a column. One such article dealt with illegal drug activity and warning signs to detect abnormal behavior. The following are highlights:

There are many things families can do in the battle against illegal drug distribution, meth use and production.

We can effectively be an "extension" of the eyes and ears of local law enforcement. Some of the warning signs of illegal drug or meth activity may include:

- High traffic cars and pedestrians stopping at a home for only brief periods. The traffic may be cyclical, increasing on weekends or late night, or minimal for a few weeks and then intense for



Patty Decker

• Deep Thoughts

a period of a few days, particularly pay days;

- Visitors appear to be acquaintances rather than friends; People bring valuables into the home — televisions, bikes, VCRs, cameras — and leave empty handed;

- Visitors may sit in a car for a while after leaving the residence or may leave one person in the car while the other visits;

- "Lookouts" frequently younger people, tend to hang around the property during heavy traffic hours;

- Various signs such as people exchanging

small packets for cash, people using drugs while sitting in their cars, syringes on the lawn, or other paraphernalia lying about;

- Regular activity at extremely late hours, frequent commotion between midnight and 4 a.m. on weeknights. (Both cocaine and meth are stimulants, and users tend to stay up at night.)

A lot of money is spent each year advertising how to keep our children safe from drugs and other harmful activities.

A lot of good people are looking at places for our youth to gather after school and on week-ends and it's important that we all do our small part.

Consequently, if you suspect drug or meth activity, please contact your local law enforcement agency immediately. In Colby, the police department is 460-4460 and Thomas County Sheriff's office is 460-4570.

Decker is editor of the Free Press.

Keep taxpayers' money at work at home

Traveling my District the past three weekends was both a humbling and enjoyable experience. The 40th Senatorial District is comprised of six House Districts and together we logged over 1,800 miles, not counting the trips to and from Topeka.

Attendance at our town hall gatherings was better than average, and many topics were discussed. I will highlight a few that seemed of importance throughout the tour.

I would like to defend my vote against SB-264. In my opinion, this bill would have adversely affected our community banks, and that is why I voted against it. This bill would have changed the public funds investment policy in Kansas by allowing out-of-area banks to hold idle public funds.

Many of our County Treasurers and School Boards feel that their hands are tied when it comes to finding institutions to invest their idle funds. My feeling is that there is at least one Community Bank in each of my counties that can hold these public funds.

I've always been a supporter of Community



Ralph Ostmeyer

• Senator 40th Dist.

Banks. I think the wisdom of keeping Kansas taxpayer's money at work within their taxing jurisdiction makes good business sense. These community banks provide continual competitive interest rates for local governmental units, capital available for local development, and opportunities for economic activity that has the potential to generate tax revenues.

Allowing public funds to be invested in out-of-area banks could hurt our local economy. The impact of the loss in rural areas would be magnified by the fact that it would be much more difficult for borrowers in these areas to secure alternative funding resources. This is especially vital for agricultural and small business pur-

poses because of the lack of interest or expertise of lenders outside of the local market.

John D. Wong, Ph. D., wrote a summary about the public funds investment policy for the Kansas Bankers Association and Community Bankers Association. After reading his article and contacts from community bankers in my district, I feel that I made the right decision.

There are presently four school finance packages being debated, and we will know little until funding options are decided. On a positive note, the state estimates for 2006 ending balance is \$318 million above 2005 figures.

A number of Eminent Domain bills will be discussed before the end of session and I hope this legislature can produce a good policy on this issue. We need either a statute or a constitutional amendment that will protect all Kansans.

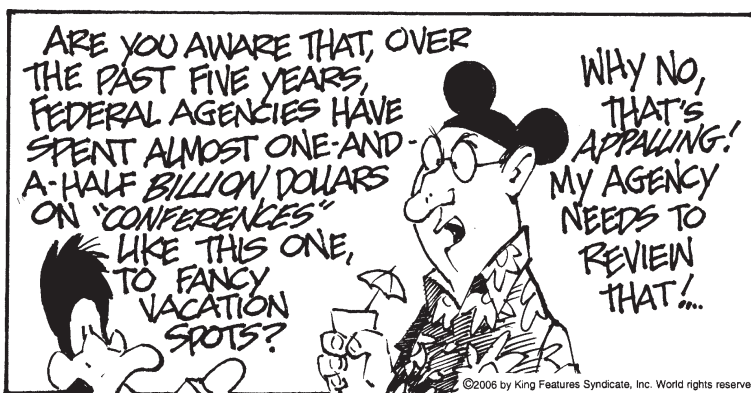
I can't thank my county Farm Bureau Associations enough for helping to organize the town hall meetings this year. Even though the drought continues, I sense a lot of optimism in all communities. I appreciate the courtesy and respect shown during this tour.

About those letters . . .

The *Free Press* encourages and welcomes letters from readers. Letters should be typewritten, if at all possible, and should include a telephone number and an address. These are used for verification of the writer only. If, however, you want your address and telephone number to appear with your letter, please ask us to do so when you submit your letter, or include a note with your letter. Most importantly, all letters must include a signature. Unsigned letters cannot be published. We reserve the right to edit for clarity and length, and, likewise, reserve the right to reject letters deemed to be of no public interest or considered offensive or libelous. You can expect your letter to appear in print within 24-48 hours of receipt. Letters to the Free Press allow readers to become engaged in public debate on topics they deem important. Please consider sharing your thoughts with the family of Colby Free Press readers. Thank you.

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