

Opinion



A Kansas Viewpoint

Kansas better pay attention

From The Wichita Eagle

The campaign for Kansas attorney general has begun to fulfill predictions that it would be the state race this year with the most compelling candidates and the most suspense.

It's the charismatic politician versus the veteran prosecutor, sparring over what the job of the state's top law enforcer is and ought to be. ...

It's also generating by far the most interesting news of the state's races. In one week alone:

— The candidates have mixed it up in two debates, both of which incongruously touched on whether a bill Morrison supported had anything to do with why Reginald Carr was free to murder five Wichitans in 2000 (the Kansas Department of Corrections blamed its own clerical error).

— A Kline campaign memo was leaked to the media outlining a crass “church effort” to get out the conservative Christian vote and donations.

— Kline acknowledged that he has collected e-mail addresses from the attorney general's Web site and used them to solicit campaign support.

Meanwhile, Kline traveled to Washington, D.C., to testify before the Senate Finance Committee about an investigation into the billing and collection practices at nonprofit hospitals in the state. And Morrison began airing two television ads.

It remains to be seen whether Morrison, who switched parties to challenge Kline as a Democrat, can overcome his limited name recognition and Kline's endorsement by 89 sheriffs, the Kansas Troopers Association and the Fraternal Order of Police, as well as the credibility Kline has gained through four years in office and this year's big win in the death penalty case before the U.S. Supreme Court.

... Every chance they get, voters should draw out the candidates on issues beyond the obvious. Some of the most interesting moments concerned immigration, racial profiling, domestic violence and private prisons. Most important, Kansans should pay attention to this race, inform themselves and vote wisely. This could be close.

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Where to write, call

U.S. Sen. Pat Roberts, 109 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, 2443 Rayburn House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515. 202/225-2715 or Fax 202/225-5124
State Rep. Jim Morrison, State Capitol Building, 303 SW 10th St. Rm. 171-W, Topeka 66612. 785/296-7676 e mail: jmorriso@ink.org web: www.ink.org/public/legislators/jmorriso
State Sen. Ralph Ostmeyer, State Capitol, 300 SW 10th St., Rm. 128-S., Topeka, Kan. 66612, 785/296-7399 ostmeyer@senate.state.ks.us

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155 W. Fifth (USPS 120-920) (785) 462-3963
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State award-winning newspaper, General Excellence, Design & Layout Excellence, Column Writing, Editorial Writing, Sports Columns, News, Photography.

Official newspaper of Thomas County, Colby, Brewster and Rexford.

John Van Nostrand - Publisher
jvannostrand@nwkansas.com

NEWS

Patty Decker - Editor
pdecker@nwkansas.com

Tisha Cox - General Assignment
tc Cox@nwkansas.com

Jan Katz Ackerman, Area Reporter
ackermanjk@ruraltel.net

ADVERTISING

Crystal Rucker - Advertising Sales/Director
crystalr@nwkansas.com

Jasmine Crottinger - Advertising Sales
jasminec@nwkansas.com

Joe Hayes - Advertising Sales
jhayes@nwkansas.com

BUSINESS OFFICE

Lea Bandy - Circulation Manager
lea@nwkansas.com

Jeanette Applegate - Bookkeeping & Ad Building
japplegate@nwkansas.com

Evan Barnum - Systems Administrator
support@nwkansas.com

NOR'WEST PRESS

Jim Bowker - General Manager

Richard Westfahl, Lana Westfahl, Judy McKnight

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Learning from experience

Seems like school just barely got started and already parent-teacher conferences are scheduled the first week in October.

Even though all my children have graduated and are now on their own, I still can remember and appreciate the importance of parent-teacher conferences.

In my family, those meetings were sometimes real eye-openers — particularly in the early years when my children were first introduced to the school setting.

I remember one such encounter with my daughter's kindergarten teacher, and at that time, I believed Tracy could do no wrong. As I proudly walked into the teacher's room for our conference, I expected to hear a glowing account of her activities.

Although her kindergarten teacher did have nice things to say about Tracy, she also wanted to talk with me about some inappropriate behavior.

I was shocked. “Tracy keeps biting one of Sam's fingers,” the teacher told me, “and she really needs to stop. Sam was crying and he might even need a tetanus shot.”

Of course, I assured the teacher I would talk with Tracy about this, as I sat dumbfounded and somewhat taken aback with the tetanus shot lecture. I'm not sure if most parents think this way, but I really didn't want to believe that my precious little daughter could do that.

Following the conference, though, I spoke to her about it.

“Trace, you haven't been biting one of your classmate's fingers — have you?”

No sooner had I asked the question than her eyes welled up with tears.

“No, mom, I wouldn't do that. I don't know why Sam keeps accusing me of that or why the teacher is picking on me,” she said.

Reassured that I was right about my daughter, it didn't take me long to call the teacher back and let her know she was mistaken about the finger-biting allegations.

As the years went by, and conferences focused



Patty Decker

• Deep Thoughts

more on academics and less on behavioral issues, I forgot all about the finger biting incident. That is, until one day when my daughter, who is now 26, brought it up. She told me she really did bite the little guy's finger, but was to afraid to admit it. She didn't want the teacher or her family to think badly of her.

After she told me that, my jaw dropped to the floor. Even though it had been years ago, all I could picture was the look on her teacher's face when I told her that she was mistaken.

She must have said to herself, “Oh boy, another gullible mother!”

That was a problem for me with Tracy being my first born. Of course, I have since apologized to her for that. It's not easy being the first child — I think I believed more of what she was saying, but also was tougher on her with discipline.

By the time our two boys became school age, I started becoming a bit more realistic when it came to teacher conferences and I tried not to get the rug pulled out from under me as I had with the “biting” episode. It still happened with my other two sons, but that's all part of being a parent. As I look back on those special moments, what really has gotten me to thinking about parent-teacher conferences is that chapter of my life is over.

It was sure a mixed bag when the last of our children graduated from high school and so ended parent-teacher conferences.

Probably what helped prompt the parent-teacher conference memories was I happened to be reading something about making the most of conferences. In fact, there was a lot of good information that might be worth passing on to

other parents.

First of all, it never dawned on me that I only have 5 to 10 minutes with a teacher who spends hours each day with my children.

What should I ask when I go to the conference?

I am not good at planning ahead, which is why I probably hadn't thought of planning ahead before conferences.

In reading the material from Kansas State University, there were some good “dos and don'ts” for parents when attending a conference.

Here were a few of her pointers:

1) Arrive on time. This will send a message to each child that their parents care.

2) Don't be defensive. The biggest mistake parents can make is walking into the conference with a defensive attitude. The parent needs to focus on how to help their child.

3) Realize that your child may exhibit different behaviors at school than at home and be open to the teacher's comments. (Kind of brings back the finger biting incident).

4) Don't ask for examples of your child's work to document teacher statements.

5) Discuss specific strengths of your child as a learner. A parent-teacher conference isn't all about the bad things.

6) Ask the teacher for specific ways in which to help at home.

7) Help set two to four goals for the child for the next grading period.

8) Share with your child(ren) what the teacher reported.

9) Most importantly, give your child a hug and reassurance following the conference.

Maybe this will help some young parents getting ready to attend conferences in October.

Decker is editor of the Free Press. Her column appears on Fridays.

They want the whole world

By Steve Haynes

In case you've been wondering what this war is all about, al-Qaida has thoughtfully issued a video explaining.

Osama bin Laden and his troops, it seems, are just looking out for our immortal souls. And you thought they were just a bunch of nut cases out to blow things up.

The 48-minute video features Osama's No. 2, Ayman al-Zawahri, and a young American the FBI believes has been training as an al-Qaida terrorist.

The American, Adam Yehiye Gadahn, 28, reportedly makes a long speech in the tape, his second with al-Zawahri. He explains how God sent the Prophet Mohammed to correct the “errors” in Judaism and Christianity.

In his introduction, al-Zawahri exhorts us to convert before it is too late:

“To the American people and the people of the West in general ... God sent his Prophet Mohammed with guidance and the religion of truth.”

Gadahn warns American soldiers fighting “Bush's crusade” they're on the losing team:

“Instead of killing yourself for Bush, why not surrender to the truth (of Islam), escape from the unbelieving army and join the winning side? Time is running out, so make the right choice

before it's too late.”

So there you have it.

You thought it was about oil.

But it's oh so much more than that.

And yes, the terrorist leaders may be nut cases, but they're dead serious about this. Like those two crazy cartoon mice, Pinky and Brain, they spend every day plotting how to take over the world.

They think it can be done. They have a vision of a Muslim paradise here on earth, where every knee bows to Mecca and every tongue acknowledges Allah.

It seems so silly, such a ... nuisance. A tiny army without a country, fighting the great powers of the world. Trying to dominate them.

But stranger things have happened.

Bin Laden and his cohorts don't represent a majority of Arab thought. Most Arab leaders believe in a live-and-let-live approach to world affairs. While they have their issues, they know we all have more in common than the things which separate us.

“We are all sons of Abraham,” one said to me, referring to the three great religions based on “The Book.”

But al-Qaida represents, if not a majority, a movement, a dangerous one at that.

It's not an Evil Empire, not a powerful nation-

state, but more deadly.

The Russians were a threat, but only a threat. Armed to the teeth with nuclear weapons, they knew they could never use them.

The terrorists, however, have little to lose. It's more than likely that they will get and use a nuclear weapon. They would set one off in Washington with glee, shedding not a tear for the millions of innocents who would die.

War between Islam and the West is their goal. They don't care how many die, even if most of them are Muslim.

It's not that they want the U.S. out of their world. They want the whole world.

And if we don't stop them, they might win.

That would be a disaster for us — and for the millions of Muslims around the world who share neither their ideology nor their rabid fundamentalism.

It would be easy to say, “let them rot.” But Osama and his ken won't let us.

We owe a duty to the world, especially to our grandchildren, to put a stop to this menace. We cannot ignore it, for the penalty will be great.

So might the rewards of success.

For given the chance, all the sons of Abraham might just learn to get along.

Steve Haynes is owner of Nor'West Newspapers which includes the Colby Free Press.

Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley

