

Opinion



A Kansas Viewpoint

52 heads held high

By Lt. Governor Mark Parkinson

I love our state motto, Ad Astra Per Aspera: To the stars through difficulties. It encapsulates the strength, resilience and determination displayed by the pioneers, soldiers, farmers and small business who have tamed this prairie state for nearly 150 years.

It is a motto I saw personified in the graduating eighth graders and high school seniors in the town of Greensburg just over one month ago.

Their homes destroyed, their school obliterated and their town wiped off the map, the students of Greensburg came together on Cannonball Golf Course, not only to celebrate the achievements and accomplishments of their school careers, but also to demonstrate to the world – Mother Nature included – that they would not go quietly into the night.

Their graduation symbolized more than the rite of passage thousands of Kansas teens experience every year. The ceremony saw the people of Greensburg declare their strength, their resilience and their determination in the face of incalculable odds.

Further, their neighbors in Haviland rose to the challenge as well, providing shelter, support and volunteers following the tornado. This doesn't surprise me, since the area's residents have continually displayed servant leadership.

Robert Johnston served as the president of Barclay College for a number of years, but recently returned to the school as head of the maintenance department. Not because he needed the pay, not because he necessarily wanted to, but because it needed to be done. That's leadership, and the people of Haviland have continued to display it to this day.

I am continually impressed with the character of individuals throughout our state; however, I was especially inspired by the perseverance, commitment and willpower of those 52 young men and women as they each walked across that stage with heads held high, resolved to face the world and any challenge, obstacle or setback the future might throw at them.

Ad Astra Per Aspera: To the stars through difficulties.

To the students and people of Greensburg, this phrase is more than a motto. To them, it is a way of life.

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. Opinions do not necessarily reflect the *Free Press*.

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Textbook television

Are you smarter than a fifth-grader?

Don't answer my question, but if you have not tuned in and watched the show with the same name on FOX, I would encourage you to do so soon.

"Are You Smarter Than a Fifth-Grader" is a show hosted by Jeff Foxworthy that allows adults a chance to win \$1 million. The show is produced by Mark Burnett, the same guy who produces "Survivor," the Eco-Challenge adventure race, "The Apprentice," "The Restaurant," "The Casino," "Rock Star," "Combat Missions" and "The Contender." The guy obviously has too much time on his hands or does not require a lot of sleep.

However, "Are You Smarter Than a 5th Grader" has been on since February and I don't believe any adult has yet to claim the fame of being smarter than a fifth-grader.

There's a TV class of children who are actual fifth graders who are available to assist the contestant with content taken from grade-school textbooks.

Two questions from each grade level, first through fifth, plus a final bonus question tends to stump even the most knowledgeable people. Each correct answer advances the contestant up the board of questions toward the \$1 million dollar bank.

The "classmates," one of five cast members who are fifth-graders, help the contestants, most of which who have had to look in the camera and profess they are not smarter than a fifth-grader. I'd probably be one of those confessing.

I could probably do well in the area of geogra-



Jan Katz Ackerman

• From Where I stand

phy, but forget the math. In my line of work, that's what editors are for.

Anyway, the show airs in the United States, Canada, the Middle East and Romania. Wow, we must have a world full of people who either think they are smarter than a fifth-grader or else they use the show as a tutorial.

While laughs tend to out number the amount of correct answers, I'd suggest you locate the show on your television line up and see if you are smarter than a fifth-grader. It's a hoot if you ask me and it's not just for red necks.

Speaking of children, if you are not a fan of goofy television shows and you have an interest in finding quality activities for children please check out the web site www.JCPlayZone.com.

Offered by Lutheran Hour Ministries, JCPlayZone is a safe, online play space for children age 2 to 6.

Lutheran Hour Ministries offers a variety of media programs and ministries focused as reaching millions of people around the world with the saving message of Jesus Christ.

Lutheran Hour Ministries maintains 41 international ministry centers, airs programs on television and radio and offers workshops for congregations to grow and enhance spreading their faith and reaching those who do not know Jesus.

The web site is just one of many of the services, but it's a fun, interactive location parents can feel free to let their children play on the Internet.

The site offers games, music, activity and craft suggestions at the touch of the computer mouse.

Games such as "Bubble Bugs," "Dino Drop," "Word Search," "Bramble Ramble," and "Noah's Ark Match" can be played online. Coloring pages, along with craft ideas and recipes can be downloaded and printed off for use by older children or with the assistance of a parent or family member of younger children.

I'm not one to go who usually suggests allowing children to use the Internet for such activities due to the fact, like television, such sites can become glorified babysitters. However, JCPlayZone.com is one site, if I have grandchildren, I'd allow them to frequent the site.

Anyway, don't take my word for either the fun or attention capturing effects of "Are You Smarter Than a Fifth-Grader" or JCPlayZone.com, check them out yourself. Have fun!

— Jan Katz Ackerman is a reporter for the Colby Free Press

Is there any hope?

So how does the U.S. get out of Iraq?

Like the gazelle that wakes up among a pride of sleeping lions, carefully. Very carefully.

It'd be fair to say that nearly everyone in the Arab world thinks we made a mistake getting into Iran. It'd also be fair to say that hardly anyone wants us to just pull out.

Mohammed Hussain Al Shaali is minister of state for foreign affairs for the United Arab Emirates, with the title of foreign minister. A career diplomat who has spent much of his life in the U.S., Mr. Al Shaali is convinced the U.S. must leave Iraq, less certain how that can happen.

"The most devastating situation in the region is in Iraq," he tells a group of American editors. "Nobody knows how it can be resolved in the foreseeable future. Nobody has a plan.

"Hundreds of people are killed every day.... The more prolonged the war, the more who are killed, but so far, nobody knows how to get out."

Like many U.S. allies in the region, he said, the U.A.E. tried to advise America not to invade Iraq. No one wanted to listen to our friends, he said.

"We have to have a plan," the minister said. "These people deserve peace."

Continued warfare can only encourage the extremists, he said, inviting them to move into other countries, "exactly like what is happening in Lebanon today."

It's tough to administer a large and diverse country like Iraq, he said, but the U.S. made a mistake when it decided to try without the help of existing institutions.



Steve Haynes

• Along the Sappa

"They didn't just occupy Iraq," he said. "They dismantled the country. How can you administer a country after that?"

He said the U.S. needs to have a clear plan, not just cut and run.

"A sudden pullout would create chaos," he said. "I would like the U.S. to believe its first priority is bringing peace to the region.

"Most of these issues will disappear then."

He added that the U.S. should give regional institutions some role in whatever plan it comes up with. A plan which divides Iraq along ethnic lines won't work, he said, because nearly every Mideastern nation has similar divisions.

"If you divide Iraq," he said, "you would have to divide every country in the region. Instead of 200 members in the United Nations, you would have maybe 600.

"Would Turkey agree to a Kurdish state in Iraq? How long would it take before the Turkish army would move into that area?"

He suggested an Islamic force to stabilize the area.

"I think if it has a clear plan, it will work," he said. "The U.S. needs to make a clear statement that it does not want to stay.

"The countries of the region are ready to play a role."

At the Gulf Research Center, a think tank in Dubai, Dr. Mustafa Alani worries about what happens after Iraq.

"Iraq is now an importer of terrorists," he said. "One day those people are going to leave Iraq.... Iraq has become a university for terrorists, graduating a new generation."

The U.S. is in the fifth month of its new strategy, he said, with no sign of any improvement in the situation.

"There is nothing encouraging," he said. "Nothing is happening. Only three of 60 Iraqi units are capable of independent operations."

What can the U.S. do?

"You have very few options," he said. "Either cut and run, or a gradual redeployment. In all these scenarios, what you are going to face is civil war. It could lead to a regional war.

"Iran and other countries will not stand by and allow Iraq to dissolve. ... Turkey will not allow a Kurdish entity to form on its border."

Is there any hope?

"American pressure should force the Iraqi government to change the structure of the government," he said.

"The mistake was to neglect the Arab Sunni community."

In short, it's a long way from the current morass to any kind of stable regional solution, and Iran waits in the wings to take advantage of any void left by the U.S. More about that next week.

— Steve Haynes is president of Nor'West Newspapers including the Colby Free Press

Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce

Tinsley



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