



## Free Press Viewpoint

### Secular society works for everyone

Two Florida school administrators face possible jail time for a prayer over lunch at a boosters meeting held to dedicate a new fieldhouse.

While religious-right groups claim the administrators, Principal Frank Lay of Pace High School and Athletic Director Robert Freeman, could be jailed for praying, that's not exactly the case.

The men face contempt-of-court citations for breaking a judge's order to avoid pushing religion at school. The American Civil Liberties Union, which filed the original suit asking for the order, says it did not ask for the contempt charges and did not suggest that anyone go to jail.

The civil liberties group, which has at times defended everyone from Communist protesters to neo-Nazis, says it just wants to keep religion out of schools.

"The ACLU is trying to keep us from praying again," someone will say. "Aren't we a Christian nation? Weren't the Founding Fathers all Christians?"

But the union would be as apt to defend people's right to pray as it is to stick up for individual children's rights not to be forced to pray.

And, no, we are not a Christian nation. By law, under the Constitution, we are a secular democracy. No law makes us a Christian nation in the sense that England is officially Christian or Iran officially Muslim.

It's true that many groups came to the New World so they could practice religion the way they wanted to. It's also true that most of these same groups had no plan to let anyone else practice religion the way they wanted to.

While much of New England was settled by rather severe Protestant groups, the forerunners of our Congregationalists, the south was settled by orthodox Church of England followers, Anglicans with a mix of Protestant and Catholic leanings. The free-thinking brothers Wesley had to flee colonial Savannah, Ga., facing legal problems.

Maryland was founded as a haven for Catholic colonists, who at times were unwelcome elsewhere – Georgia included. But few colonial cities were exclusively Christian. Jews were represented in America from the first days.

The Founding Fathers, led by Jefferson and Madison and a few others, saw the need to guarantee our rights, something the Constitution itself was mostly silent on. They recognized the most basic of our freedoms – religion, free speech and the press, assembly and political speech in the efficiently written First Amendment. The First not only guarantees our right to pray, but forbids the government from "respecting any establishment of religion."

It's this provision Santa Rosa County school officials were accused of violating when a federal judge issued an order forbidding them to foster prayer in school.

Anyone who's actually gotten involved in school prayer disputes knows the divisions of colonial times have not left us. Baptists complain if Mormons are allowed to talk in school, and Catholic parents are suspicious of Baptist theater groups.

The Fathers wisely put all that aside, banning organized religion from not just schools, but all public affairs. They did this for the protection of our religious rights, all of us, and not to harm or belittle religion.

We should thank them for their courage and foresight, not complain that we can't mount the 10 Commandments in school. For a government that can compel one prayer can just as easily ban the next. — Steve Haynes

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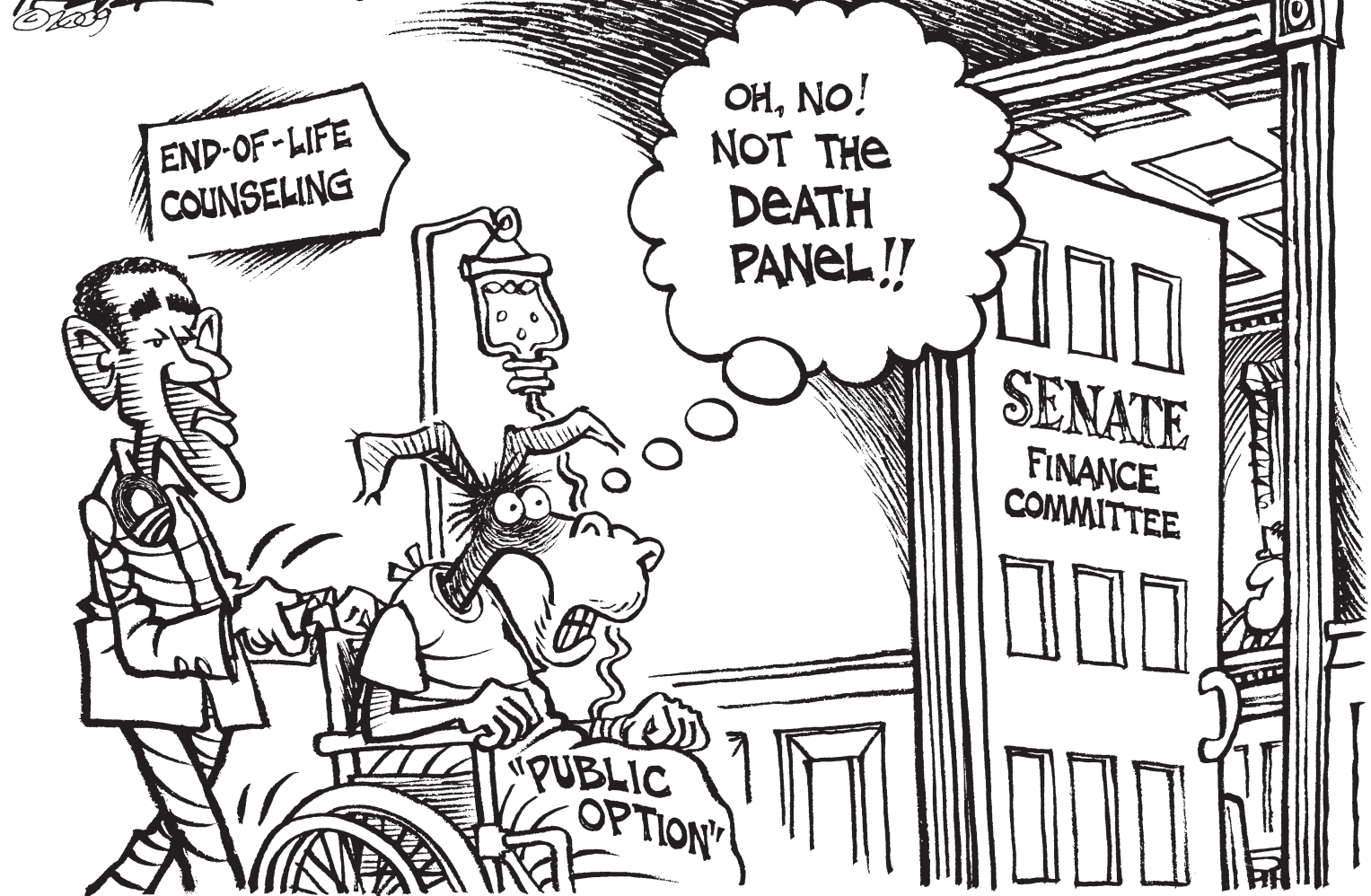
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THE ALBUQUERQUE JOURNAL



### Events mess up a perfect Saturday

It started out as such a nice day, too.

I had it all planned. I would have my coffee, take the dog to the vet for her annual checkup and shots, pick produce, dry the clothes, hang the shirts, get dressed and go to work at the pharmacy. A perfect Saturday morning.

Well, I got the coffee and I got the dog to the vet.

But, backing out of the parking lot my rear bumper came into contact with the side of a young man's car as he was headed to work at the vet's.

I never saw him until I stepped out of the truck to see what the heck I had hit.

The truck I was driving had a scrape on its bumper. His side panel on the passenger's side was pushed in and a tire rim trim was bent.

I felt terrible. He looked worse.

It's an awful thing to be a young 20-something and have your car crunched.

I had to shake my head in disbelief. I had become a statistic. That wreck was the most common type of accident in Oberlin — some old lady backs into something.



Cynthia Haynes

• Open Season

Dang, I hate to do anything that common. But, there it is.

The sad thing is it was my second backing accident in two weeks.

The first wasn't so severe and I didn't have to wait for the sheriff's office to show up to take a report nor did I lose much time. However, my husband was not pleased.

We had picked all of our first batch of sweet corn and he had pulled all the stalks. I dutifully put them into three bundles ready to take to the office.

I loaded the bundles into the truck but they were so long they stuck out the back so I left the back end up, got in the truck and started to

back out of the garage.

Did you know that with the back end up the truck won't clear the door?

I didn't but I found out really quickly.

The truck suffered no injury at all but I broke some plastic trim on the edge of the raised garage door and raised my husband's blood pressure.

I dutifully put the back end of the truck down as far as it would go, carefully backed out and took my three stacks of stalks to the office for transport to hungry horses in St. Francis.

I got into more trouble there because I left dirt all over the floor in the back room and the driver is allergic to corn.

Next time, I'll sack the stalks and make Steve take them to the office.

Maybe, I should make him take HIS dog to the vet, too.

Cynthia Haynes, co-owner and chief financial officer of Nor'West Newspapers, writes this column weekly. Her pets include cats, toads and a praying mantis. Contact her at c.haynes@nwkansas.com

### School funding reflects achievement

The state Board of Education asked for an increase of \$282 million for public schools for the 2010-11 school year, the amount the board says is necessary to fund school finance laws already passed by the Legislature.

As the state continues to struggle with the effects of the recession and faces deep budget cuts, criticism of that request has begun.

The Flint Hills Center for Public Policy noted that public school enrollment is almost unchanged between 1997-98 and 2009-10, yet total expenditures – federal, state and local – have risen by 83.6 percent, or \$2.5 billion. This means spending per pupil has increased over 83 percent, or about 7 percent per year.

Was that increase excessive? Total personal income in Kansas rose from \$63.4 billion in 1997 to \$106.4 billion in 2008. (Figures for 2009 and 2010 are not available.) That is 68 percent or 6.8 percent per year – just slightly less than education funding increased.

How was the money used? Spending per pupil doesn't explain that a large share of the new money didn't go to regular classroom education but for targeted programs. Nearly \$600 million more in state funding went to special education, to help students at risk of failing, and to vocational classes and transportation costs. Another \$200 million was federal money for special education, aid for disadvantaged students, instructional and technology aid and school lunches. These targeted increases amounted to one-third of the total since 1998.

Without those dollars, per-student spending increased about 4.2 percent per year. The biggest expense for most districts is employee costs. From 1997-98 to 2008-09, average teacher salaries, including benefits, increased from \$36,505 to \$52,869: 45 percent or 4.1 percent per year.

Why did education spending increase? Although the number of students hasn't changed, expectations have increased dramatically. The Kansas Supreme Court's ruling that the state was not providing enough money was based on the state's requirements for student outcomes and the results of state assessments. Federal money increased with the No Child Left Behind Act. Local districts increased spending

### Other Opinions

• Mark Tallman  
Kansas Association of School Boards

for all-day kindergarten, safety and transportation, new technology and new buildings.

What has happened to student achievement? On every measure, Kansas students have improved; where there was targeted additional funding, improvement was even greater, and on every national comparative measure, Kansas improved faster than the national average.

• Between 2000 and 2008, the percentage of students scoring proficient on state assessments increased 42.1 percent in reading; 61 percent in math; 53.4 percent in science and 42.6 percent in history/government. These increases equaled or exceeded the increase in both school district budgets and state aid.

• For every student group that received targeted funding increases (students with disabilities, bilingual and free lunch), the achievement gap on state assessments narrowed. This raised achievement of minority groups, in many cases doubling or tripling their proficiency rates. Scores of "majority" students also went up.

• ACT college testing scores for graduating seniors increased every year from 2003 to 2008, exceeding the average and rate of increase for the nation and states with universities in the Big 12. Kansas has one of the highest rates of high school graduates taking the ACT.

• On the National Assessment of Education Progress, Kansas' combined fourth and eighth grade reading and math scores increased from 12th in the nation in 2003 to 11th in 2005 and seventh in 2007. Kansas now has the highest combined score among Big 12 states.

• Between 1996 and 2006, Kansas increased its ranking for graduation rates using the cumulative promotion index – the percentage of students graduating in four years – from 21st to 16th in the nation.

The Legislature's own Post Audit division found a "nearly one-to-one relationship between increased spending and student achievement" among Kansas school districts.

Why does this matter? Education is the most important factor in economic success. Between 1973 and 2007, inflation-adjusted income for high school drop-outs declined 15.7 percent; for high school graduates with no additional training, income increased just 3.3 percent; those with some postsecondary education increased 15.8 percent; and college graduates increased 36.3 percent. Low-skill jobs that support a family have disappeared. A high-wage economy demands a highly skilled workforce, which Kansas can deliver – for now.

Does Kansas spend too much on education? States with high educational attainment tend to have higher per capita and family income – and less poverty. Kansas ranks among the top states in the region in education spending, educational attainment and income. States with lower student achievement have lower incomes and more poverty. A recent study found states reap a benefit of \$209,000 for every high school graduate – nearly double the current 12-year cost of a high school education.

Improving education reduces welfare costs. Studies show that improving graduation rates reduces crime. Those with more education tend to have better health. Every additional student prepared to graduate and succeed in postsecondary training or college over the past decade was a successful investment, not a cost.

If Kansas is going to continue to improve its educational outcomes, the investment in education must also continue. That is what the State Board is asking for. It also means being honest about cost and priorities. The state budget has been hit hard by the current recession. But the state has also granted millions of dollars of tax breaks and exemptions that reduce revenue and shift the responsibility for supporting education and other public services.

Our education system will determine whether the next generation can make the American dream a reality. Previous generations believed in sacrifice for the future. What choice will this generation make?

### Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley

