

Other Viewpoints

State wants to force tracking of bullies

The Columbine High massacre was more than a dozen years ago. We were supposed to have learned a lesson from that horrific ordeal, when two troubled teens – victims of bullying, we later learned – took matters into their own hands and killed 12 students and a teacher during an all-out assault on their suburban Denver high school.

That was supposed to be our wake-up call – our tipping point to a growing problem. But bullying, we're constantly reminded, hasn't stopped on our high school campuses.

It is still happening everywhere. Even here.

And it has caused activists to renew their efforts to convince the Kansas Legislature to expand the definition of bullying and cyberbullying. The Associated Press reported this week that state Board of Education member Walt Chappell is pushing for modifications to a bullying law passed in 2007.

The current law requires school districts to implement anti-bullying plans but doesn't say how districts should handle or track reports of bullying.

"There's a lot going on behind the scenes," Chappell told the AP. "There's a firestorm, actually."

The bullying issue came to a head recently when the parents of a Haysville-Campus High freshman led a protest at the school, saying the school didn't respond well when their daughter was bullied.

The student since has transferred to another school, but the transfer was denied at first because she is a freshman. The girl, who had threatened suicide, is now seeing a counselor and is doing better, but her parents have begun a statewide effort to make sure bullying incidents don't go unreported – or be brushed off as "kids being kids."

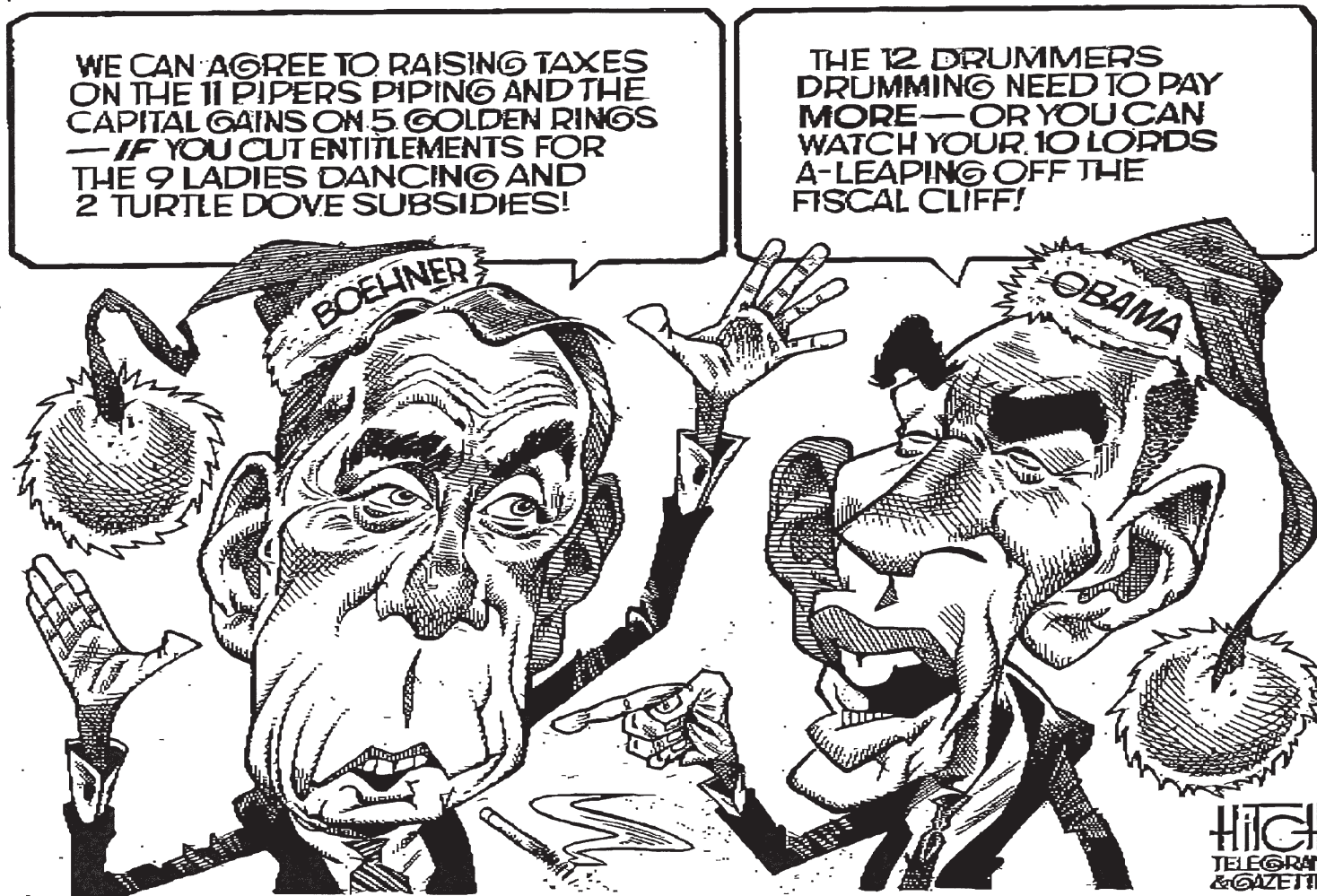
The Hutchinson school district's bullying policy, for one, is too open-ended. It aligns with the Kansas anti-bullying law and is intended to send a clear message that bullying will not be tolerated. Its intent is to create an atmosphere where all students feel respected and valued. However, it does little to address the need for reporting and tracking cases.

The Kansas Association of School boards has opposed the law Chappell proposed, which would require districts to investigate bullying reports quickly, use state-mandated options for discipline and report the incidents to the state.

"We could require more reporting, more paperwork and more things to turn in than ever before," said Mark Tallman, executive director of the association, told the Associated Press. "But I've not seen any evidence that suggests those things actually make a situation better."

Clearly, this is a problem that needs to be addressed. Adding teeth to a law aimed at rectifying an ongoing concern seems like a plausible solution. The schools might cry poverty, claim the law would take more money away from the classroom and claim this is a solution they can't afford. But it may be a problem they can't afford to ignore.

– The Hutchinson News, via the Associated Press



Nightmares can be all too real

I woke with a start, and my heart was pounding. My wife, Donna, drowsily woke beside me and put a hand on my trembling arm.

"Is something wrong?"

I swung my feet out of bed and sat up, trying to clear my head.

"I just had a horrible nightmare that was so real."

"What was it?" she asked.

"I dreamed I was in a theater, and someone handed me a script and told me that I was to perform in a play in 10 minutes. I had never looked at the script before, but was shoved out onto the stage to improvise as best I could."

"What a strange dream."

"Yes," I replied. "I'm happy to wake and find out it wasn't real."

That morning, as I hurried to our normal routine, I was just putting pancakes on the griddle when the phone rang. Donna answered it, spoke briefly, then turned to me. "The community is putting on 'A Christmas Carol' and wondered if you would help."

The memory of the dream immediately returned.

"I am willing to help with tech and stuff, but after that dream, I think I'll forgo acting."

My children decided to try out and all received parts, but I only helped with mundane set issues. On opening night, I was on my way to the theater when I received a call from my daughter. Vandals had broken into the costume room and drew all over the boys' white shirts with red lipstick.

Other Opinions

• Daris Howard Life's Outtakes

"Dad, is there anything you can do?"

I hurried to the local thrift store and purchased every white boys' dress shirt they had – about 30 of them. When I arrived at the theater, the boys were desperately trying to clean their shirts and happy to see what I had. Though the styles weren't quite right, and the sizes didn't all match, they were able to make do.

I settled into the audience by Donna to watch the night's performance. Everything went well until the ghost of Christmas present entered the stage. He staggered about and stumbled through his lines. He barely appeared in the first act, having most of his performance in the second, so it was soon intermission.

As lights came up I stood to stretch my legs and visit with those around me. The director approached and spoke in a desperate tone.

"The boy that plays the ghost of Christmas present just passed out from working with the cleanser on the shirts."

She shoved a script into my hand.

"You're the only one I know that can do this on short notice, so you're on in 10 minutes."

I stood there in shock as I saw her disappear back to the stage. Donna nudged me, trying to get me to pull myself together.

"Honey, you better hurry."

"But what about my dream?"

She just shrugged.

"Look at it as a chance to prove it wrong."

I reviewed the lines the best I could and took my script on stage with me. But when the lights came up I couldn't read it anyway and discarded it. I then performed the most improvised role of my life.

When my part ended I slipped back to my seat by Donna.

"That was incredible," she whispered.

I felt my performance was anything but incredible, was sure she was just being nice.

When the play ended and the bows finished, the director, with a brief explanation, asked me to stand and take a bow. People cheered loudly, spurred on by the cast. I would have preferred to stay anonymous.

Donna hugged me, and I sighed heavily.

"I'm just glad the nightmare is over."

That was when the director appeared, shoved a script into my hand again, and said, "The boy that plays Marley just had an attack of appendicitis, so you're on for the rest of the play."

And that's when I learned that sometimes nightmares can play out more than once.

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Fear of violence a paranoid obsession

The vast majority of society, even here in the United States, is living in fear.

Sad to say we, here in the U.S., actually live in fear of violence that will take the lives of innocent bystanders. What is promoting this paranoid obsession?

The news media rely on the public's hunger for all the details surrounding the events such as the killing of innocent children and adults in the Newtown incident. The gun rights advocates promote fear of the government if any talk of gun control or accountability comes up. The anti-gun folks emphasize the bizarre incidents of wanton random slaughter.

The most outspoken – loudest – of both sides fail to acknowledge any value in their opposition's rhetoric. Yes, I said rhetoric! Very little of anything is new in the last decade or two of debate. Gun rights supporters hide behind the Second Amendment and gun-control advocates indicate they will not be placated until all guns are out of the hands of ordinary citizens.

The man holding a gun wins the argument, at least temporarily. But in the end, society does not want to be controlled by violence and mankind will opt for better methods of setting social standards and enforcing them.

I am one who thinks there should be sensible limits on the type of weapons and ammunition in the hands of civilians. I own a rifle, a shotgun and a revolver. My ammunition is limited to a box of shells for each. I determine who has access to those weapons.

Pest control is my main reason for owning weapons. I'm not a game hunter nor am I a collector. I have no fear of the U.S. government knocking my door down and confiscating my arsenal. If I am found to be psychologically or mentally unsound to a degree that I might use those weapons improperly, some agency



Ken Poland

• Ken's World

should remove them from my reach. Anyone who is mentally or psychologically unable to control themselves should be prevented accessibility to fire arms.

I'm well aware of the need for sportsmen who hunt wildlife to have a much larger supply of ammunition and a wider selection of hardware than me. But do they need semi-automatic weapons capable of firing 20 or 30 rounds in a matter of a few seconds? Do they need military assault-type weapons designed for mass killing of human beings perceived to be the enemy? Do they, individually, need an inventory of ammunition that exceeds the needs of a large hunting party?

Gun collectors are entitled to own any weapon they can acquire. But should they all be ready to load and fire at a moment's notice? Should anyone owning a gun be held accountable if those weapons are allowed to get into the hands of someone with ill intent?

The worn out cliché of the National Rifle Association and gun-rights advocates, "guns don't kill," is a profound piece of wisdom. Certainly guns don't install the magazine full of ammo and fire themselves, but they are certainly the most efficient means to inflict pain or death to the chosen victim – animal, human, tin cans or whatever. And the type of hardware and ammo has a significant value for guaranteeing accuracy and speed in delivery.

If the perpetrators of the recent massacres in schools and public places had only small-caliber weapons with limited load capacities, the death toll and injuries would most likely have been smaller.

The environment, culture and technology are quite different today than when the Second Amendment was written. The country had no intention of maintaining a standing national army. Law enforcement agencies were limited. The authors of that amendment were not fearful of their own elected government. The system of three branches of the government was their method of protection from the tyranny of power within the government.

The phrase "a well-regulated militia" indicates some a trained cadre that could be called on to defend society from whatever immediate dangers might be present, whether that would be invasion by foreign powers, wild animals or those with criminal intent.

Exercising your freedom to voice your opinion, debate issues and participate in electing government representatives is a much better way of protecting yourself from the hazards of society than arming yourself with an arsenal of military-type weapons. Every man with more fire power and every man for himself is not the way to guarantee a more peaceful society and protection of individual liberty.

Making mental health treatment accessible (maybe mandatory) to all, along with education, will meet our needs better than more "weapons of mass destruction." Artillery with 30-round clips of ammo, regardless of gauge, and semi-automatic firing capability qualify as weapons with mass destruction capability.

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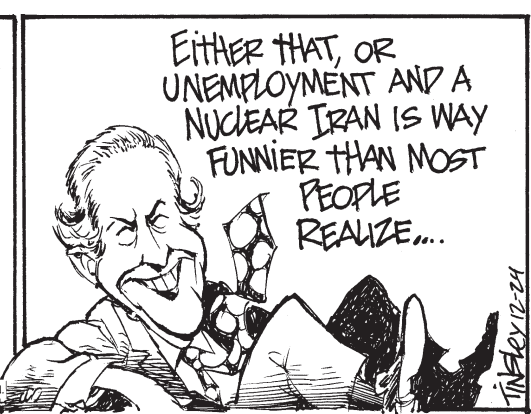
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Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley



In October, Joe Biden showed up STONED FOR THE VICE-PRESIDENTIAL Debate.



EITHER THAT, OR UNEMPLOYMENT AND A NUCLEAR IRAN IS WAY FUNNIER THAN MOST PEOPLE REALIZE...