

commentary

from other pens...

Rising tuitions, taxes excuse for state failure

Manhattan Mercury on education funding:
 There are clear differences between the Local Option Budget for public schools and the new “tuition ownership” taking effect at the state’s public universities.
 For example, the LOB is a mechanism by which local school boards can generate money by raising the property taxes of district patrons. ... With tuition ownership, public universities in Kansas have the authority to set their own tuition levels and to keep the money tuition generates rather than send it to the state and hope to get their fair share back.
 Despite their differences, what’s becoming increasingly apparent about the LOB and tuition ownership are similarities linked with legislators’ reluctance to provide enough money for education at any level in this state.
 The LOB, for example, was established to help school districts provide more education than the state mandates. ...
 Too often, however, the local option budget hasn’t been optional at all. Districts strapped by a variety of circumstances, including unsympathetic or short-sighted legislators, found themselves raising local taxes to pay not for extras but for basic educational services.
 Kansas Board of Regents institutions are aware of how short-sighted the Legislature can be. On more than one occasion, lawmakers have reneged on funding for multi-year programs designed to make already sound universities even more competitive nationwide. ...
 The burden both for public universities and public schools in Kansas is to convince the Legislature to increase its investment in education. That’s long been a hard sell.

The Topeka Capital-Journal on the state’s meth problems:
 The illegal drug problem is often shrugged off as being foreign in origin. Yet, the methamphetamine scourge reveals the truth.
 Our problem is chiefly home grown. ...
 Indeed, it is Kansas — not the border states — that is consistently near the top in the number of meth labs nationwide.
 Think it doesn’t affect you? Think again. If your house or business has been broken into, if you’ve passed by a homeless person, if you’ve detected a foul odor from the mysterious couple’s home across the street, if a friend’s daughter has suddenly lost weight and started acting peculiarly, chances are you’ve crossed meth’s path.
 Even if, by some miracle, you didn’t come in direct contact with an addict, the people paid to protect you certainly do: Law enforcement officers risk their health and their lives busting meth labs and arresting manufacturers all over.
 This is one area of the manufacturing sector that isn’t hurt by the economic downturn. ...
 Methamphetamine is produced in clandestine labs by “cooks” who usually have no chemistry training. Meth labs range from the sophisticated to the crude and can be set up in a car trunk, bathtub, closet or anywhere else there is space to mix chemicals.
 The result: Government agencies say they have been pushed “close to exhaustion” in the fight against meth. ...
 As long as we have drugs such as meth, we’ll never lack for problems.

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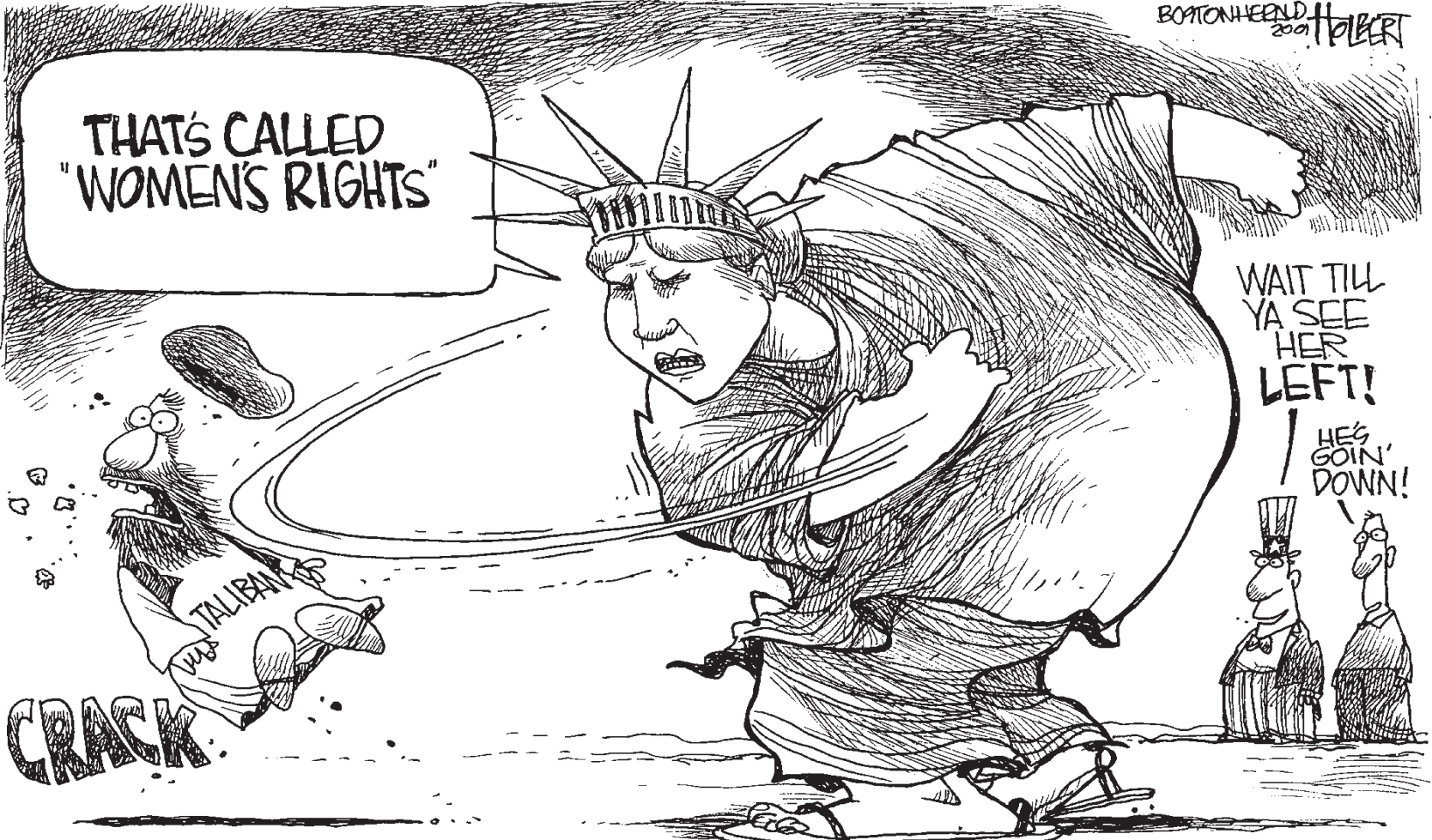
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Don’t mix science and religion

The reaction to last Sunday’s news that scientists in Worcester, Mass., had cloned a human embryo was swift and unequivocal. The embryo was the size of the period at the end of this sentence. It was nowhere near viable enough to grow into a human being. It wasn’t even developed enough to produce the hoped-for stem cells, which has been the purpose of the research.

But the embryo was a step forward in the cloning field nonetheless, letting loose the cries of doom and evil, of imposing immediate bans, of predicting the end of civilized society. I’m all for a reasoned debate on the topic, but from the immediate reaction, a reasoned debate isn’t likely any time soon.

A German doctors association called the development “a nightmare.” A Vatican spokesman issued an “unequivocal condemnation,” saying that killing an embryo to harvest the stem cells is ending a human life.

President Bush called the procedure “morally wrong” in that “we should not, as a society, grow life to destroy it.”

It seems that there are two main camps against cloning embryos. One opposes it for religious reasons. An embryo, no matter how primitive, is a human being and therefore cannot be destroyed.

The second group is the “slippery slope” contingent. If we allow this research to go forward, they say, we are headed for “The Boys From Bra-

One hobby that I’ve never understood is skydiving. I believe everybody has a voice inside that tells them not to do dumb things. (If you’re married, you have two of them. And the loud one isn’t even yours.) This voice stops you from doing idiotic things like stepping into oncoming traffic or quitting your job to become a mime. Or jumping out of an airplane.

Skydiving is crazy. But they tell me that if you get a bunch of guys to go with you, it’s not crazy, it’s bonding. So I suggest you go skydiving only if you can get a bunch of guys to go with you. But first, you all have to ask your wives if it’s OK with them. If the wives say “no,” the guys don’t go. And if the wives say “yes,” I’d say their marriages are in serious trouble.

THOSE WERE THE DAYS

You and your wife pretty much see eye-to-eye. Or as close to eye-to-eye as married people get if they look at each other. But her taste in music is becoming a problem. If she’s not playing “Dancing Queen,” it’s either “Waterloo” or “Can You Hear the Drums, Fernando?” She’s worn out three ABBA’s “Greatest Hits” CDs and all of your patience. What you have to understand is that she’s not just listening to music. She’s reliving her life the way it was before she met you. And if you could go back in time, you’d see her the way she sees herself — at a disco in a tube top with three pounds of blue mascara and a Harvey Wallbanger. She sure looks hot. Of course, you looked pretty hot back



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• commentary

zil,” in which scientists cloned dozens of little Hitlers.

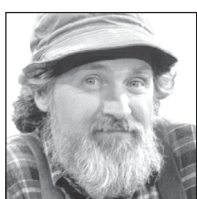
Neither argument warrants a ban on this research, as many countries and even the United Nations are likely to impose.

We can’t stop scientific progress because there might be negative developments down the road. These stem cells might someday serve as “starter stock” for growing replacement nerve, muscle and other tissues to cure diseases from diabetes to Parkinson’s. By cloning one’s own cells, the replacement parts are less likely to be rejected by the body. Should we let the “what ifs” stop us from such promising medical developments?

Of course, those who believe life begins at conception absolutely could not support cloning embryos for the purpose of harvesting their stem cells. I understand and respect this. President Bush and others have every right to stand by what they believe.

But their beliefs should not be shaping public policy. In other words, I don’t want someone else’s

Taking a dive



red
green

• north of forty

then too — three gold chains, four chest hairs and five bucks worth of breath mints. So what if you could walk up to her table and lay this on her, “Who loves ya, baby?” Would you care if they were playing Dancing Queen? No, because “you bad,” my friend. And she knows it. So forget about ABBA. You just have to ask yourself ... do you feel lucky, Punk? And if the answer is yes, make love not war.

HUSBAND-SPEAK

Communication is great, but you have to be aware that there are things you should never say to your wife. Here are a few examples:

— “This is all your fault.”
 — “I think your sister’s lost weight.”
 — “What have you done to your hair?”
 — “Let’s not do anything special on our anniversary.”
 — “The company would never fire me.”
 — “It seems like we’ve been married forever.”

LEST WE FORGET

Nov. 11 is an important day. Some call it Remembrance Day; some call it Armistice Day or Veterans’ Day. For me this year, it was a day when we

religion getting in the way of my science. If my son had bone cancer and stem cells from a cloned embryo could cure him, I would not hesitate to do it; I wouldn’t consider the microscopic clump of cells to be a human life but rather a means of giving new life to my son.

In fact, what we are calling embryos really aren’t embryos at all, according to some scientists. They’re “pre-embryos.” When these groupings develop naturally in a woman’s body, about half pass through without ever implanting in the womb. They are, scientists say, the raw building blocks of life, like an egg or sperm — not life itself.

Acceptance or rejection of cloned embryos ought to be a personal choice. Those who believe the grouping of cells is a human being could decline to use the procedure. Those who have no religious opposition to it should be free to embrace a treatment that could save their lives.

The House has already passed legislation banning the kind of procedure that produced this pre-embryo. With this latest development, the Senate is likely to take up the cause in the near future.

I hope the senators don’t give in to the emotion and overreaction that we’re seeing now. I hope they read the science journals carefully, listen to their constituents, and vote as legislators, not as clergy.

Joan Ryan is a columnist for the San Francisco Chronicle. Send comments to her e-mail at joanryan@sfgate.com.

were having a small dinner party. My wife sent me out to get a few last-minute groceries, including liquor. I arrived at the liquor store only to find that it was closed. I checked the “hours of operation” sign. It said the store opens at 11 a.m. I checked my watch. It said 11 a.m. I grabbed the door and started shaking it. Then I started yelling into the store for somebody to open up. “Hey! Come on! It’s 11 o’clock! What’s the problem?!” Then I looked at my watch again and noticed that not only was it 11 o’clock, but that it was also November 11. And then it hit me. I was spending the two minutes of silence yelling at somebody to open the liquor store. I looked around sheepishly to see if there were any witnesses. Just a lone taxi driver parked at the curb. The name of the cab company was “Veteran’s Taxi.” That was not my finest hour.

QUOTE OF THE DAY: “If your wife is having fun and you’re not, you’re still having way more fun than when you’re having fun and she’s not.” — Red Green

Red Green is the star of “The Red Green Show,” a television series seen in the U.S. on PBS and in Canada on the CBC Network, and the author of “The Red Green Book” and “Red Green Talks Cars: A Love Story.”

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