

commentary

from other pens...

Candidates are split on cloning debate

The Olathe News on the cloning debate in the Attorney General race: The two GOP candidates for Kansas attorney general waded knee-deep into the turbulent waters of the cloning debate. ... One called for an immediate ban-it-all bill against cloning and the other promoted a more cautious approach.

... Phill Kline is a longtime vocal opponent of abortion. He said he supports a bill being drafted by a bipartisan group of Kansas legislators that would ban cloning in the state.

David Adkins, Kline's opponent in the GOP primary, suggested that Kline's stance on cloning is based more on promoting his anti-abortion agenda than on an understanding of the science of cellular cloning.

... Even Americans who fundamentally support cellular cloning for therapeutic uses express some discomfort on the issue. There was that same public uncertainty when medical science first researched heart transplants and in-vitro fertilization.

... A flat-out ban on cloning at this time would be shortsighted and even cruel. Kline argues that "our nation is great because it recognizes the inherent potential of every human life." And yet he would coldly slam the door shut on the tremendous potential medical benefits of cellular cloning to victims of disease and their families.

An immediate ban-it-all bill at the state and national levels would be a knee-jerk overreaction. David Adkins is on the right track in counseling deliberation and debate on the issue.

The Salina Journal on cloning:

The argument over the moral consequences of human cloning gained new fury ... after a Massachusetts company announced it had cloned a human embryo. Opponents and supporters rushed to defend or condemn the prospect of additional cloning.

President Bush called cloning "morally wrong" and urged Congress to ban the practice in any form. On the other end of the spectrum, researchers argued cloning provides an important avenue to stem cell research, which could unlock keys to fighting disease.

Out of the ensuing clamor one voice offered a suggestion that bears repeating. Kansas' own Sen. Sam Brownback said he is considering a call for a six-month ban on all cloning in order to give the Senate time to study the issue.

Currently there are inadequate controls on the use of cloned human cells. The House passed a bill that bans cloning in July. A similar bill is bogged down in the Senate.

Lacking any action on that legislation, it makes sense to put a halt to further cloning until Congress has a chance to debate the ethical and moral issues of mechanically reproducing a human life so cells can be harvested for research.

Until that debate takes place and legislation is enacted, researchers are left to make these decisions based on the needs of the marketplace. ... And patents and profits are never the best factors for determining moral issues.

In the best cases, we look to Congress to set the legal parameters that define the nation's conscience. The Senate can help fulfill that role by following Sen. Brownback's suggestion of temporarily banning cloning, at least until the issue can be thoughtfully debated.

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Practicality, not politics

Markina was raised by the state of California. Her social worker has six thick files chronicling her childhood: her series of foster homes, her many schools, her interactions with governmental services, her stays in juvenile hall.

When I met her, she was 16, angry, and back in juvenile hall, this time for assault.

"She should be in a residential mental health facility," Markina's probation officer told me. "But I don't know of a program that will take her, and I don't have time to do the research on what else might be out there. I have headaches every day trying to figure out what to do."

She candidly predicts that Markina will someday seriously hurt someone. Then a judge is likely to send her to an adult prison. She'll serve the time, get out, hurt someone else, return to prison, serve more time and so on, until perhaps she herself comes to a violent end.

This much is clear: All the punishment California can heap on Markina won't shape her into a decent human being. The state already had that chance and blew it.

I have all the Markinas of the world in mind while the California Supreme Court hears arguments challenging the constitutionality of Proposition 21, the get-tough-on-kids law that voters passed last year. Among many questionable provisions, the law demands longer sentences for certain juvenile crimes and makes it easier for prosecutors to try teen-agers as adults, thereby sending more teen-agers to adult prisons.

I hope the Supreme Court finds the law illegal, as the state Court of Appeals did earlier this year. But



joan ryan

- commentary

my opposition to Proposition 21 has never been about constitutionality — it has been about practicality.

Imagine a flooded basement. Instead of searching for the source and patching up the leaks, you continue to bring in bigger buckets and more workers to bail the rising water. You spend fantastic amounts of time and money on the consequences of the problem instead of on its causes — which pretty much guarantees you'll be employing bailers and buying buckets until the end of time.

If our goal is to reduce juvenile crime, we won't get very far by slapping juveniles with longer and harsher sentences. We need to be patching up the holes in these kids' lives before they're beyond patching.

I know you have heard this before. People have been saying it for decades. Yet, the juvenile justice system still rarely prevents children like Markina from marching inexorably toward adult prison. The system fails them in enough ways to fill a book.

The most glaring of these is mental-health care. It is the rare child at juvenile hall who hasn't been sexually or physically abused, usually by a family member. They have been twisted by trauma and hardened by betrayal. Only consistent, vigilant care by doctors and professional counselors has any

Off-hand questions, on-target answer

I've been married for quite a while. In fact, I've been married longer than I was single. You'd sense that in a flash if you saw me in person — the hunched shoulders, the cautious gait, the avoidance of eye contact. And if there's one thing I've learned about women in all this time, it's that you have to watch out for the off-hand questions. Don't worry about the straight-out, interrogation-style stuff where she stands directly in front of you and asks, "Where have you been?" or "Do you know what time it is?" or "Why is the shed on fire?" Those are the easy ones. You can say anything you want because she's already guessed the answer and probably doesn't even expect one.

The important questions are way sneakier. She'll be reading the paper or looking for something in the fridge or removing her make-up, and she'll put on her most casual just-making-conversation voice and say "Did you notice that blonde woman in the blue dress?" Your instincts tell you to say "no" — but don't do it. Just say, "Which woman?" She'll then say, "The one you were talking to over by the pool." (Aren't you glad you didn't say "no"?) Now you have a problem because this next answer will determine your immediate future, especially if it's bedtime. More important than the content of this answer, it must be the perfect length and tone. She asked in a fake-casual way, and your answer should match. Eight words are perfect. Any more or less, and your wife'll be suspicious. I suggest, "She's our new receptionist. I think she's gay."

KEEPING TRIM

I spend most of the winter in Florida. I'm not bragging, I just want to add credibility to my next piece of advice. Old guys should have short hair. There is nothing masculine or artistically whimsical about straggly wisps of curly white hair fram-



red green

- north of forty

ing a wrinkle farm. Even if your hair is thick, you must keep it short. Generally, your hair looks older than you are, so letting it proportionately dominate your appearance will make you seem even more ancient than you deserve. When you're 18, maybe it looks good to see long, unkempt hair as a sign that you're just starting out. But at 60, you're not starting out, you're finishing up. And presenting yourself as "struggling" at that age does not enhance your overall image. So if you're an older guy, get your hair cut as often as you can. If you're cheap, get your wife to do it. Just make sure she has her glasses on and she's in a good mood.

THE NAME SAYS IT ALL

Big corporations spend a lot of time and money selecting names for their products and services. But in these days of so many entrepreneurs starting their own businesses, they often don't have the resources to pick their names carefully. If that's your situation, here are some names to avoid: — A crematorium called "Fired, But Not Forgotten." — A laxative called "Sprint." — A steakhouse called "Meat Here." — A large-sizes clothing store called "Grandiose Designs." — An after-hours vasectomy clinic called "Nick at Night."

WATCH OUT FOR THE PLUS-MINUS

I was watching hockey on television when I

chance of softening their anger and aggression.

But doctors and counselors are expensive.

Therapeutic hospitals and retreats — safe, productive places that are far removed from the violence that has defined these children's lives - are especially expensive and are seen by many as luxuries that bad kids don't deserve.

So we send kids to group homes, where too often the "counselors" are minimally trained and earn little more than fast food cashiers. Many group homes are simply human warehouses; troublemakers are parked there until they become adults, are deemed "rehabilitated," or run away.

Probation officers and social workers know their clients need more than this, but where can they send them? The few beds in the psychiatric hospitals that are available to juvenile-hall kids are always full. There's one ranch for San Francisco boys and none for girls. There are too few psychiatrists under contract with the county to provide reasonable outpatient services.

And we haven't even talked about the help that the families need.

Imagine if Proposition 21 money were spent instead on comprehensive mental-health care for kids in trouble. Maybe juvenile crime would drop, and we would have to scale back on all the new juvenile detention centers and prisons that California keeps building. And maybe we would use those construction dollars to build more schools.

Isn't that a radical notion?

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heard the sportscasters talk about a player's "plus-minus." This statistic represents the number of goals scored by his team while he's on the ice, minus the number of goals scored against his team while he's on the ice. For a good player it's a positive number, for a not-so-good player, it's not so positive.

I wondered whether this stat could ever be applied to a married man. His plus-minus would be the number of happy times his wife has when she's with him, minus the number of unhappy times his wife has when she's with him. If it's a positive number, he'll probably finish his career on her team. If it's a negative number, he'll probably be traded for someone younger, and future considerations.

QUOTE OF THE DAY: "You should always be ready for the call. It could be a pardon from the governor." — 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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