

commentary

from other pens...

Death penalty ruling didn't go far enough

The Hays Daily News on death penalty:

The Kansas Supreme Court did not strike down the state's death penalty law, which we wish it had, but it did deal it a blow in a ruling late last month.

While it was a strictly constitutional assessment of the capital punishment sentence, it pointed out clearly the arbitrariness of legalized execution.

The state's highest court rejected the part of the Kansas law that calls for the death penalty when the crime's aggravating factors are equal to its mitigating factors. ...

The court said that provision of the death penalty law violated the "federal constitutional provisions against cruel and unusual punishment and the guarantee of due process." The court pointed out the "fundamental fairness" that requires a tie go to a defendant in a matter of life or death.

The ruling was in keeping with a fundamental principle of the American judicial system, that being the burden is on the prosecution and the defendant gets the benefit of doubt. ...

The immediate effect of the ruling was to void the death sentence for Gary Kleypas, convicted in 1997 of fatally stabbing 20-year-old Pittsburg State University student Carrie Williams. Kleypas was the first person sentenced to die in Kansas since the death penalty was reinstated here in 1994. ...

Though sadly they did not go so far as to kill capital punishment altogether in Kansas, state supreme court justices are to be commended for their astute ruling and for going as far as they did. ...

Legislators should weigh in on this serious matter. Kansas should be required to rewrite its death penalty law to pass constitutional muster. Better yet, our state should not bother. Legislators should finish the job the state supreme court has started and overturn the death penalty in Kansas.

It is time to end this madness and stick with life imprisonment without possibility of parole.

The Hutchinson News on hate-crime data:

Kansas seldom grabs headlines for hate crimes. But that doesn't mean the state is without hatred.

Far from it. David Coleman Jr. of Kansas City woke up New Year's Day find a swastika painted on the back window of his car. ...

Police say they're investigating the incident as a possible hate crime.

A week earlier, a fire destroyed Kathi Firms-Hubert's trailer at Hillcrest School in Lawrence, where she taught intensive English to young international students.

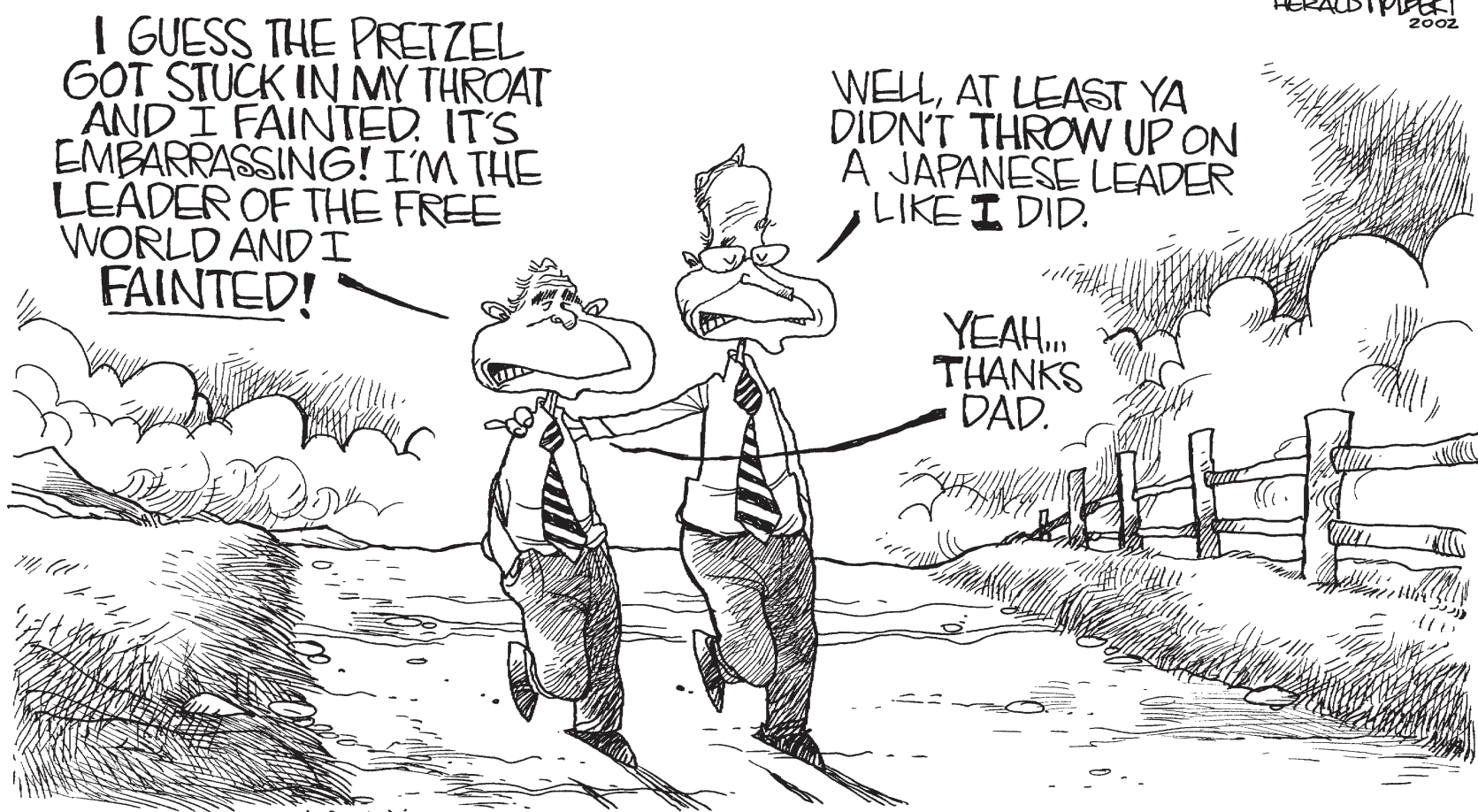
... Earlier, vandals painted swastikas on trailers at the school. ...

Law enforcement agencies in 48 states and the District of Columbia reported 8,063 hate crimes in 2000. According to the FBI, 50 of those crimes occurred in Kansas, but only one city — Wichita — provided figures.

Federal law does not compel state and local agencies to report hate crimes. If it did, the extent of Kansas hatred might outrage people. ...

Kansans of good will cannot tolerate hate crimes. But when their communities refuse to participate in the FBI's annual Hate Crimes Report, they help give cover to racists and zealots statewide.

Hatred in Kansas is not isolated. It is not rare. It only looks that way because communities mask the problem.



A HALLMARK MOMENT

Enron spotlights needed reform

The Bush administration might be as pure as Caesar's wife in this Enron thing. It might have done nothing unethical or illegal in return for the millions the company plowed into Bush's campaign and the Republican Party.

But it doesn't matter. The heavy donations raise suspicions about impropriety, which is enough to spark an investigation. And an investigation is enough to turn what might be a benign story into a front-page scandal for the president and his staff.

What more will it take to convince the Republican holdouts in Washington that America needs campaign-finance reform?

A campaign-finance reform bill is pending in the House of Representatives. It would ban "soft" money, the unlimited and unregulated donations to political parties. The Senate has already passed a version of the bill, but the Republican leadership in the House is refusing to let the bill go to the floor for a vote.

As they stonewall, investigators and the press will be excavating the many money trails between Enron and the White House, looking for quid pro quos.

No one believes Enron gave millions to the Republican Party out of patriotic fervor. Or that Enron Chairman Kenneth Lay donated \$100,000 toward Bush's inaugural balls so he could get a good seat.

A businessperson expects a return on an investment. During Bush's two gubernatorial races in Texas, Lay personally contributed \$122,000 to the



joan ryan

• commentary

campaigns. He and other Enron folks, along with Enron's political action committee, gave \$980,615 to Bush's presidential campaign, according to the Center for Responsive Politics.

The company donated money coast to coast, counting among its recipients 71 current senators and 188 current members of the House. But it is Bush with whom Enron allied itself most closely. The connections seem endless.

Top contributors to Bush's presidential campaign included the employees of the law firm Vinson & Elkins. Enron, as it happens, is a Vinson & Elkins client. When James Baker and Robert Mosbacher left the elder Bush's Cabinet, Enron hired them as consultants. Baker reportedly hustled Enron contracts while accompanying the elder Bush on a Persian Gulf War victory tour of Kuwait.

Yet, Enron is just one of many corporations and labor unions that shovel money into political campaigns. It's the way business gets done in Washington under the current campaign-finance system. In the first half of 2001, for example, Lockheed Martin contributed \$550,875 and Boeing \$468,000 to political campaigns and parties. The two compa-

nies are vying for the \$200 billion government contract to build the strike fighter aircraft.

The airlines, as another example, collectively contributed almost \$7 million during the 2000 campaign. When business plummeted last fall, the industry won a \$20 billion government bailout. Not a bad return on investment.

The reform bill in the House will not eliminate influence peddling and backroom deals. The rich will always have greater access to power than the rest of us. But the less money that exchanges hands, the less likelihood of both corruption and the appearance of corruption, and the less likelihood that our elected officials will be embroiled in expensive and distracting investigations.

The supporters of reform in the House of Representatives need 218 signatures to force a vote on the bill. They're three shy. Not only should President Bush push for this bill to pass, business leaders should as well.

They saw what happened when Enron executives tried to call in a favor. They apparently were rebuffed, a violation of the unspoken pact between politician and major donor.

Maybe Bush's men refused to help out of concern for ethics or fear of scandal. Or maybe they simply understood that such help would serve no purpose: With empty pockets, Enron no longer had anything the Bush administration needed.

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

You have to want to

I needed to get something at the hardware store the other day, and I asked my wife whether she wanted me to pick anything up for her while I was out. She said, "No, I'll go with you." The next thing you know, we're well into our second hour at the mall, looking for shoes. There was a time in my marriage when I would have said something negative about how a man who only needed drywall screws was being asked to give opinions on 20 or 30 pairs of shoes that all looked pretty much identical to him. But I know better. I just schlepped along quietly, feeling as though I must be a pretty good guy to go shopping with my wife and not complain. But I was wrong. My wife had to take me aside in a quiet corner by the drinking fountain and point out how my attitude was ruining the entire shopping experience. "This is supposed to be fun, isn't it?" I nodded my head while I suppressed the truthful answer. And then it struck me: When you have a life partner, it's not enough that you do things with them; you have to want to do them. So, not only do I have to go shopping with my wife, I have to want to go shopping with my wife. Otherwise it just isn't going to work. I understand that now, and that's why I've signed up for acting lessons.



red green

• north of forty

rebellion against multi-tasking. Men need to focus. We function better doing one thing at a time. When you meet a couple who have no children, nine times out of 10, they have a TV in the bedroom. Men are single-minded. When I'm watching a fireworks display, that's the only thing I'm there for. I got up out of my easy chair, put on my pants and went down to the park. In order to get value for my efforts, I need to take in as much of the fireworks display as possible. I want to see it, hear it, feel it and smell it. I don't want to have a conversation or eat pizza or look around for the restroom. I told my wife that she could talk to me when the fireworks are over. That was a mistake. I don't have a heated garage.

DIFFERENT TOOLS FOR DIFFERENT FOOLS

Some handymen have a large toolbox with lots of fancy tools in it. Not me. I like to keep it simple. A few common tools can do the job of many specialized ones:

HANDYMAN'S TOOL	MY TOOL
Reciprocating Saw	Axe
Circular Saw	Swinging Axe
Phillips Screwdriver	Hammer
Flat Screwdriver	Chisel
Chisel	Flat Screwdriver

Router	Gas Lawnmower
Scroll Saw	Chainsaw
Belt Sander	Paved Driveway

A SAD STORY

As baby boomers get older, there are continual repercussions throughout society. I noticed one of them last week when I was in one of those hairstyling-for-men places, where they wash your hair and massage your neck and do any kind of style you want. Unfortunately, these days most of the men who go in there look like me. Male-pattern baldness is a problem. When it comes to hairstyles, less is not more. But the worst part is the professionally trained hairstylist spending most of the appointment hacking tufts of hair out of ears and noses. I can't help thinking that this is a person who once had a dream.

QUOTE OF THE DAY: "Never roast marshmallows over a processed firelog." — 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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