

commentary

from our viewpoint...

Kansas legislature needs new discipline

The Kansas Legislature needs discipline. By Friday, it had gone a record 105 days without coming up with a balanced state budget. In fact, in four months, the Legislature hadn't accomplished much at all.

The Republican leadership and the governor complained that the delay was costing taxpayers money, but the members seemed not to care.

Moderate Republicans, who nominally run things, were busy trying to get a tax increase passed to save state government as we know it. Democrats, playing political hardball, were insisting on income tax hikes or none at all, and conservatives, listening to the voters, were standing firm on no increase.

It's hard to believe there's not \$250 million in waste somewhere in state government. There have to be programs the state could do without, but Gov. Bill Graves was insisting on an all-or-nothing approach that would cut state schools and higher education the most. He knows those are the programs people support and that get the lion's share of the money.

The legislative leadership is weak and ineffectual, bled by years of feuding between moderates and conservatives in the Republican party. The Democrats have taken advantage, hoping to capture more seats and maybe even the governor's chair this fall.

The result has been a mess. The state budget is in disarray, the session has dragged on and it looked likely that a special session would be needed to settle the budget crisis. The two houses had trouble even draw new lines for the states' congressional districts.

We can't provide strong leadership for the House or the Senate. Maybe they will take care of that themselves next year, or maybe the Democrats will.

But we do offer a solution for part of the problem. Legislators need to cut their session from 90 days to 60 and put themselves on salary. Nothing gets done for the first month of the session anyway, and 60 work days would be plenty to get state business completed. The budget will get done only in the last hours, regardless of when the session starts or ends.

Then the members would be free to go back home to their jobs and families. They'd make more and the state would pay less.

Paying them by the day only encourages them to stay on. If they didn't get paid after 60 days, our bet is that they'd have the session wrapped up and be out the door on time.

And did we mention, no overtime. If they force a special session, we wouldn't pay legislators salary or expenses. It'd be on their nickel.

Ah, short sessions would be so sweet. — *Steve Haynes*

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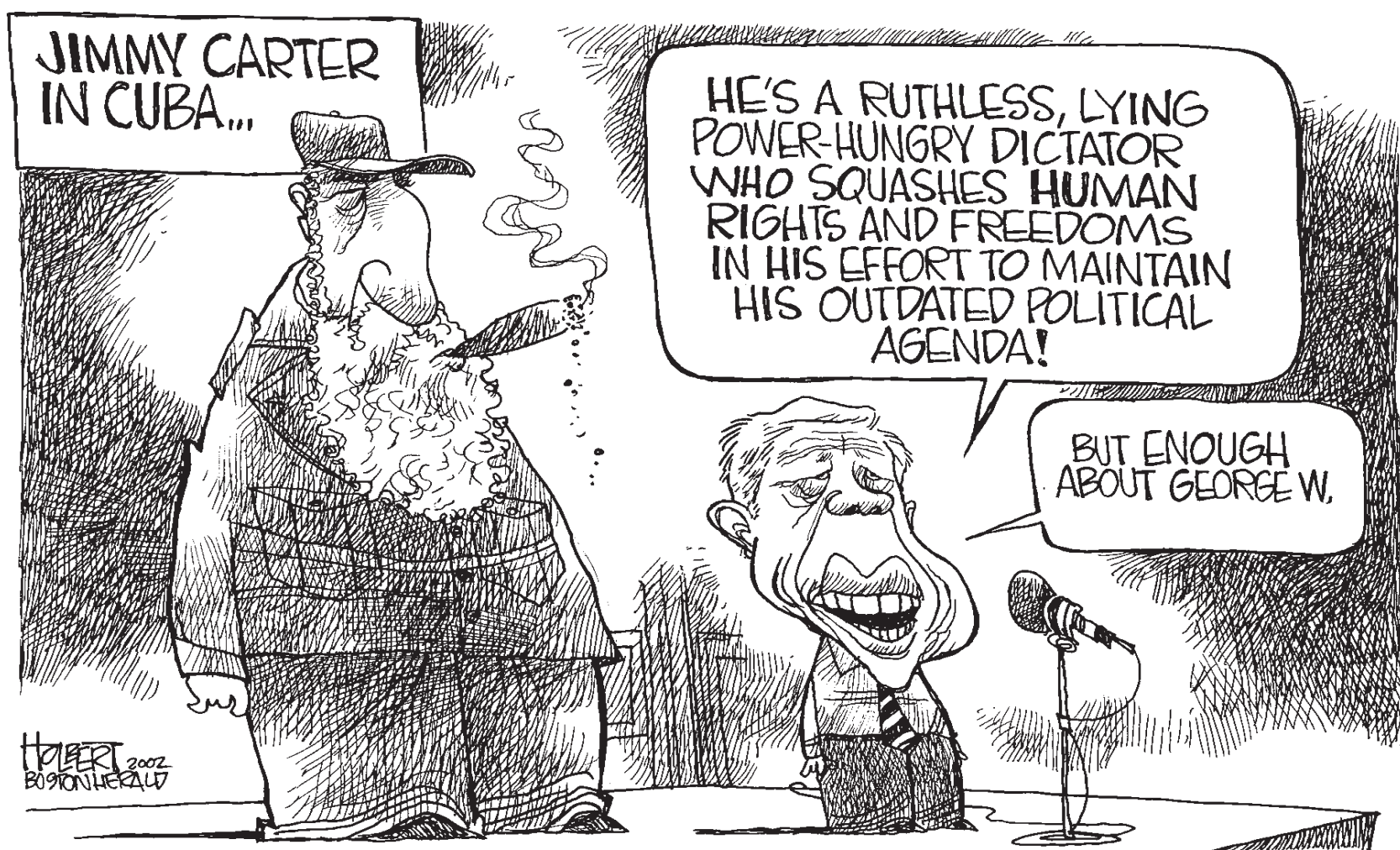
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Size of school more important than gender

President Bush is reversing three decades of federal policy by paving the way for single-sex public schools. It's part of his new school reform plan. He wants local districts to have the latitude to create such schools, if they believe they're necessary, without worrying about violating Title IX's prohibition against gender discrimination.

Bush has an unlikely ally in Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton, D-N.Y. She is bucking her friends in civil liberties and women's rights groups, who say that separate is never equal, whether for race or gender. They say that after decades of bringing women into the mainstream of society, segregating them in schools would be a giant step backward in the quest for equality.

But Bush and Clinton, among others, recognize that different students respond to different learning environments. One size does not fit all. Choices in learning environments, Clinton says, "maximize the achievements of every student."

Hooray and hallelujah. An education idea that doesn't include the words "test" and "standards" and "accountability"! An idea that acknowledges all kids aren't the same! However.

I can't board this bus, even if Hillary is driving. If we're going to reform public education, why choose single-sex schools, of all things, as the structure? I have nothing against them. But the research is inconclusive. Single-sex schools haven't been shown to produce better results.

Smaller schools have. It's proven. And since we don't have a lot of money to spend on education reform, we ought to go with the sure thing.



joan ryan

• commentary

Just last month, the Journal of School Health published a study that reinforced previous research: As school size increases, so does student alienation. Bright, motivated students are likely to succeed in any environment. But the average student, the insecure student, the student with little home support — they wander anonymously along a path of least resistance and low expectations.

In smaller schools, students are likely to have a positive relationship with at least one adult at the school — which often can be the difference between sticking around and dropping out. Violence and teenage pregnancy rates are lower in smaller schools. Graduation rates are higher.

"Too many kids get lost in the crowd," says Dave Evertz of the Center for School Change at the University of Minnesota's Humphrey Institute. "They lose interest. They don't achieve their potential. They leave. We need to change the culture of schools, and the first step is to make them smaller."

There is a great all-girls school in Harlem called Young Women's Leadership school. It is often cited as an example of single-sex success. Every student in the past two senior classes has graduated. Were the girls successful because the school was all girls? Or were they successful because the school was

small — just 370 students in four grades — and had a clear vision of its mission?

Most educators would argue the latter.

The federal government might be ignoring the research, but local districts aren't. When DeWitt Clinton High School in the Bronx subdivided into small learning communities, attendance rose by almost 20 percent and the on-time graduation rates by nearly 50 percent. Patterson High School in Baltimore subdivided into smaller units and saw math scores rise 20 percent and writing scores 12 percent.

Minneapolis is transforming seven large high schools into more than 30 smaller ones. St. Paul has launched a similar restructuring, as have Cincinnati and West Clermont in Ohio. The Gates Foundation is so certain this is the right path that it has committed more than \$40 million to creating small high schools in urban areas.

I applaud the motive behind the push for single-sex schools. If parents who can afford private tuition have the choice of all-boys or all-girls schools, Bush and Clinton ask, why shouldn't all parents have that choice for their children?

If the federal government wants to give parents a choice, give us a choice to save our children from the huge factories that pass for high schools in this country. Give us the choice to send our children into schools where the administrators know their names and their teachers notice when their grades slip and their moods shift — schools where, truly, no child is left behind.

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

One at a time please



red green

• north of forty

I read in magazines that there are some men and women in this world who, although married, carry on long-term, secret affairs with other women and men. I don't understand how this is possible. Oh, sure, I know how a one-night stand works, but I'm talking about week after week, month after month, year after year infidelity. I've been married a long time, and I think I'm in reasonable physical and mental condition, and I can tell you I could never come up with the time or energy to fulfill my obligations to two different partners. A relationship is a full-time job. If you have two at once, those are two part-time jobs. Nobody ever got successful in a part-time job, not even in two part-time jobs. Especially these kinds of part-time jobs where you have to keep your lies straight, and your energy up, and everybody happy. I don't why these people do it. Maybe it's fun for them, but it would kill me. On a good day, I'm keeping my head above water with one relationship. I would never survive two. Or more. As far as I'm concerned, monogamy is not a hardship, it's a lifesaver.

THE SQUEAKY WHEEL GETS THE JOB

You always hear about people who belong to clubs or organizations, and they have problems with something, or they point out where some aspects of the operation are unsatisfactory, and they ultimately get put in charge of a committee, or even become president of the association. There's a lesson here. Keep quiet. Be satisfied. Even if it means lowering your standards. I think the same rule can be applied to relationships. Now some people feel that when one partner finds fault with some aspect of the living arrangements, it's really a demand for

the other person to solve the problem. I don't see it that way. I have more of a Country Club approach. I consider any complaint to be that person's way of asking for permission to make improvements. Do you see how that can reduce arguments and simplify life? I never cringe when my wife complains about the color of the living room, because I interpret that as her asking for permission to paint it. And the answer is "Absolutely, Honey. Knock yourself out. Whatever makes you happy." It's also the reason I never complain about anything.

NOT SEE WORTHY

Otherwise sane men often lose all sense when it comes to picking a name for their boats. Always remember that other people will see that name. And they will assume that name means something. That can hurt you. Here are a few examples of bad names for boats:

- Tax Dodge
- The Other Woman
- I.O.U.
- Cirrhosis of the River
- Howdy Yawl
- Ketch Me If You Can
- Breaking Wind

THE UNBIASED JUDGE



If you're concerned about reducing the costs of heating your house in the winter and cooling it in the summer, you need a new approach. Identify the fattest and thinnest people who live in your home. They are about to be given special status. The fattest one will be solely in control of the heat setting for the coldest months, and the skinny one will be at the helm for turning on the air conditioning in the hot times. The principle here is that you put the decision in the hands of the person who will benefit least from the result. It's why they have eunuchs guarding harems, and taxpayers deciding on government spending, and men shopping for engagement rings.

Quote of the Day: "If you want to hire a great salesman, look for an ugly guy with a beautiful wife." - 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." Watch for the feature film Red Green's "Duct Tape Forever" at a theater near you.

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