

commentary

from other pens...

Out-of-district tuition is unfair tax burden

Lawrence Journal-World on out-district tuition:

The continuation of out-district tuition payments to community colleges in other counties places an unfair tax burden on local taxpayers. One of the attractive aspects of the legislation that united state universities, community colleges and vocational-technical schools under the supervision of the Kansas Board of Regents was the provision that would drop the fees counties pay to subsidize community colleges in other cities.

Those "out-district" tuition payments were created as a way to help support community colleges that were largely funded by local property tax levies. Other counties were required to pay a set fee for each of their residents that attended a community college in another county. ...

As part of the Higher Education Coordination Act of 1998, however, community colleges received significant state support that was intended to allow them to reduce their dependence on local property taxes. To be fair, the legislation also called for out-district tuition payments to be discontinued.

Unfortunately, that pledge along with other commitments made in the higher education act have fallen victim to difficult financial times. Not only will state universities not receive money that was promised in the legislation to raise faculty salaries next year, but out-district tuition payments will not be dropped.

This is a double-whammy to local taxpayers. Although Kansas University employees have been told there will be no salary increases next year, all of those employees who live in Douglas County will be paying local taxes that will go to support community colleges in other cities. ...

The unfairness of the situation is obvious, and it is a stark reminder that multi-year promises made by the Kansas Legislature often are hard to keep and shouldn't be the basis for any hard financial planning. ...

The Salina Journal on Blue Cross-Anthem case:

Executives at Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Kansas say a merger with Anthem Insurance Companies is the best for the company and its customers.

Kansas Insurance Commissioner Kathleen Sebelius disagrees and says the merger will mean unnecessarily higher rates for the state's policyholders.

It will be up to the Kansas Supreme Court to decide which side is right. ... Sebelius blocked the merger earlier this year. Officials with Anthem appealed that ruling to Shawnee County District Court, where Judge Terry Bullock overturned Sebelius' decision. ...

Sebelius based her decision at least partly on a study by Insurance Department attorneys. Reports say they worked independently of Sebelius and estimated the proposed merger would increase premiums by \$248 million over five years.

What could possibly drive rates so much?

That's easy: Profits.

Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Kansas is a mutual insurance company, owned by its policyholders. Anthem is a publicly held corporation and is expected to return a profit to shareholders.

If this merger goes through, then a portion of Anthem's profits will come from those who count on Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Kansas for medical insurance coverage.

Profits are not a bad thing. ...

But profits and public ownership are not required for successful organizations. A number of mutual insurance companies provide excellent service to policyholders without public ownership and profit demands.

There is little proof that under Anthem the Blues' operations will improve enough to justify the higher rates this merger will demand. Sebelius was correct in blocking this sale for the sake of policyholders. The Supreme Court should agree.



HOLBERT BOSTON HERALD 2002

I'm adopting a 1-year-old

I will be adopting a 1-year-old when I get married in September.

He's really cute and spunky, but he can be a menace.

He eats shoes, socks, purses, money, eyeglasses, water bottles, toilet paper, M&Ms, lip gloss, gum, beetles, hair clips — really anything he can get his little paws on.

He pees and poops on the floor sometimes, threatens people who walk or ride their bike by the house, knocks over the trash can and whines when he doesn't get his way.

Grandma said Ike's childhood has been too "permissive," and I agree. He could use a little discipline. I just don't want to yell the evil stepmom. Besides, it's hard to yell at him when he looks up at you with those big brown eyes and cocks his furry little face to the side.

Ike is my fiancé's miniature schnauzer. He was born in mid-March of last year, but Mitch didn't get him until early July.

Mitch said he bought Ike from a breeder in Andale. When the breeder was taking a trip to Denver, he said, she met him at midnight in the McDonald's parking lot in Goodland, where she handed over the tiny puppy.

Mitch named him "Eisenhower Cyclone I," af-



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• unraveling

ter President Dwight D. Eisenhower, who is from Abilene, and the Ottawa Cyclones, a girls' basketball team Mitch used to coach.

Ike's parents were named "Unleashed Beast" and "Sassy Suzy." That pretty much explains his personality a lot of the time.

Don't get me wrong, Ike can be a sweet puppy. He's just a good patience tester.

Depending on the puppy's mood, we have two nicknames for him. One is "Good Ike" and the other is "Terrorist Ike."

He's the Terrorist Ike when he does things like pulling my purse off the table and tearing apart everything inside, or scattering the contents of the bathroom waste basket all over the house.

He's Good Ike when he scratches at the door to warn you he has to go to the bathroom, sits down when you tell him to or lays calmly in your lap.

But I admit, even when he's bad, he's still pretty cute.

A couple of days ago, while Mitch was in the middle of making a sandwich for lunch, the phone rang and he went into the dining room to answer it. When we both walked out of the kitchen, Ike jumped up and grabbed one of the bread slices off the plate.

After Mitch hung up, I noticed the bread on the kitchen floor — mayonnaise side down, of course. At first I was angry because we've yelled at Ike so many times for jumping up on the counter, but then I laughed when I saw the puppy's face.

He was busy trying to lick a big blob of mayonnaise off his eyebrow, but his tongue wasn't long enough to reach it. I couldn't stay mad at him for long.

Mitch and I have been trying to train Ike. We've taken him to a trainer in Burlington and are trying to teach him how to sit, heel and come.

But it's tough. Neither of us is very aggressive and it's not in our nature to scold people — or animals.

The trainer said teaching a dog is a life-long process. They'll always try to test your boundaries, he said.

I guess it's just practice for when Mitch and I try to raise a real baby someday.

And I imagine, just like Ike, the cute, funny, tender things kids do more than make up for their mistakes and messes.

To sleep perchance to survive

I've been falling asleep on the couch a lot lately. My wife is not impressed and, to be honest, it's a habit that I used to criticize my own father for. However, like so many faults I've seen in others, now that I'm doing it myself it doesn't bother me nearly as much. In fact, I would say falling asleep at seemingly inopportune times, or just being tired for no reason, are signs of great maturity. A few short years ago, instead of falling asleep, I'd be up and active well into the evening, fixing the stove or replacing a roof shingle or plumbing a sink. So when you add up the cost in terms of money spent to have a professional repair my repair, and, of course, time lost due to injury, you realize that sleeping on the couch is the safest, smartest investment of my time and financial resources. And as soon as my wife remembers some of my other waking nocturnal interests, she will agree wholeheartedly.

MY ANTI-HERO

When I was growing up, movies and television provided us with a lot of heroes. Men who always did the right thing at the right time. Men who were honest and true and fought for justice and "the American way." These were ideals, and it's good to have someone like that to look up to, someone who gives you a goal to strive for. However, when we fall short of the mark and pale by comparison with these icons, that can make us look bad, especially in the eyes of our wives. That's when you



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need to go the other way. You need to introduce the anti-hero into your spouse's life. Let her see someone on television who's way worse than you are. Someone who will make your indiscretion seem harmlessly trivial. If you're in minor trouble, a couple of episodes of "Judge Judy" might do it. If you're in the deep stuff, you may have to watch "Cops" or even "America's Most Wanted." All you need to do is to expose your wife to three men who are worse than you, and you're off the hook. If that can't be done, maybe it's time to turn yourself in.

MIDLIFE JOB PERKS

In every job there are little extras that make the position more desirable. For some it's a signing bonus, for others it's a title. Here are some job perks that would appeal to the average middle-aged guy:

- Coffee on an I.V. drip.
- Office near the men's room.
- Voice-activated computer so you don't have to reach around your stomach to access the keyboard.
- Large font inter-office memos.
- Phone set up for outgoing calls only.
- No office parties. Ever.

• The boss is older than you.

DANGEROUS SIGNS

I was in a department store the other day, and I had a very unsettling feeling. Although the store carried thousands of different items in a variety of styles and colors, I had this sense that there was nothing here that I really needed. Not one thing in the store that was going to make enough of a difference in my life to make it worth the purchase. I was turning into a marketer's worst nightmare — the reluctant consumer. I always read about how advertisers want the younger market. They're not interested in advertising to guys like me. I'm beginning to understand why. We've run out of money, interest and storage space. And we've lost the naive optimism that got us to buy things like hot tubs and expensive sunglasses. We see ourselves as we really are, and it makes us very difficult to manipulate. The only sales tool they have left is sex and the clock is ticking, believe me.

Quote of the Day: "Artificial intelligence is no match for natural stupidity." - 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 new book "Duct Tape is not Enough: A humorous guide to midlife." (Hatherleigh Press, 2002). Watch for the feature film Red Green's "Duct Tape Forever" at a theater near you.

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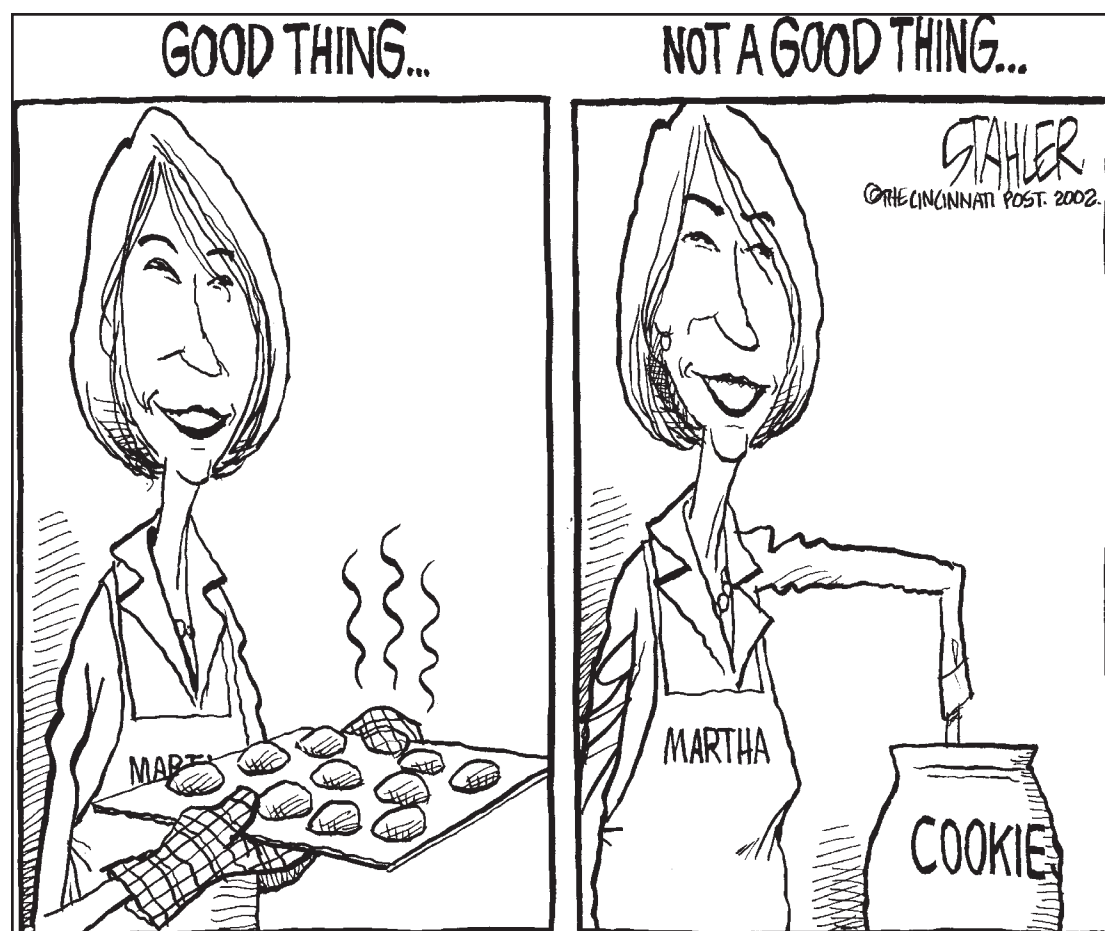
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