

# commentary

from other pens...

## State assessment tests hint of tough future

**The Chanute Tribune on state assessment tests:**

Chanute students' performance on the latest state assessment tests was not only disappointing but also a hint of the difficulties that lie ahead, not only for Chanute but for all Kansas schools.

School districts face the task of improving performance, but with less money. And the stakes for failing to achieve adequate performance have never been higher.

For years, the state has been administering assessment tests as part of its Quality Performance Accreditation program, which was adopted in December 1996.

But now the tests have new significance. In January, President Bush signed the No Child Left Behind law, which requires that states ensure that all students receive a satisfactory education.

That might seem so sensible as to be obvious. But the reality is a little more complicated.

Kansas has a reputation for having among the toughest state assessments in the country. Many states still don't even have them. It's fair to wonder whether states who didn't think assessments were needed in the past will be keen to adopt tough tests now, since failing to meet those standards will jeopardize federal aid for their schools. It wouldn't be cynical to assume they'll be tempted to err on the side of leniency. ...

The danger here is that benchmarks cut both ways. Kansas adopted tough standards in order to improve its education system. Critics are liable to note that since so many students aren't meeting those standards, the state should allow alternatives ... say, vouchers.

It shouldn't, not yet. Kansas should keep its standards high, and provide the resources required to meet them.

**The Wichita Eagle on Kansas and Cuba:**

A delegation of Kansas trade officials and farmers returned last week from Cuba, where they were making deals. It was free trade in action. And we'd like to see more of it.

The Kansas group, led by Lt. Gov. Gary Sherrer and including Lt. Gov.-elect John Moore and representatives of state agriculture groups, met with Cuban trade officials to lay the groundwork for future sales that could benefit Kansas farmers.

Sherrer, a Republican, also called on the Bush administration to normalize relations with Cuba and ease the 40-year-old trade embargo. ...

He's right. We're already moving in that direction. In 2000, Congress relaxed the embargo to allow exports of American food and medical supplies to Cuba on a cash-only basis — a change that this year alone has resulted in \$165 million in agricultural sales, according to the Kansas Department of Commerce & Housing. And trade experts estimate that — absent the embargo — the United States in coming years could supply up to half of Cuba's estimated \$950 million annual food-import market.

Sherrer says that Kansas' share of that market could be \$20 million to \$30 million a year — nothing to sneeze at, given our farmers' desperate need for expanded markets.

That said, some question the wisdom of an American Farm Bureau Federation proposal to allow the Cuban government to buy on credit; the Bush administration argues that Cuba doesn't pay its debts, a charge underscored by Cuba's \$11 billion trade debt with other nations. ...

Embargo supporters say that relaxing the trade ban would only reward Cuban leader Fidel Castro for oppressing his people. Others argue that any relaxing of sanctions needs to be tied to improvements in human rights. ...



## Stitches reminder of Roman honeymoon

Oldest daughter Felicia is getting the stitches out this week. The ones she got in Rome on her honeymoon.

After visiting Florence and Naples, the newlyweds ended up in the Eternal City on the last leg of their two-week honeymoon trip to Italy.

The first day in Rome, they visited the Vatican and gazed at the wonders of the Sistine Chapel. The second day was spent in an Italian emergency room instead of the planned trip to the Coliseum.

Felicia said she was shaving her legs in the shower while her husband Nik stepped out onto the fire escape to smoke a cigarette.

As she raised her left leg, she slipped and fell on her rear. Her foot kicked out and hit the gutter of the shower, bruising her toes and putting a long gash in the top of the foot.

Realizing she would need help, daughter grabbed a hand towel and wrapped it around her foot, which was quickly turning the shower into a massacre scene. Applying pressure she crawled and hopped out of the bathroom calling for her husband.

No answer.

She opened the door to the hall a crack and called softly, not wanting to wake any other hotel guests.

No answer.

She finally sat down and started crying and yelling.

Nik still didn't hear her, but he had finished his



**cynthia haynes**

• open season

cigarette and headed back to the room. What met his eyes was his bride sitting on the floor dripping and crying and a bathroom covered in blood.

At that point, he was almost ecstatic to find out that it was only her foot that was injured.

He quickly called the desk for a taxi and helped her dress in his jeans — her's wouldn't fit over the bloody towel — an oversized T-shirt and his flip flops.

He asked why she hadn't pulled the emergency cord in the bathroom. She explained that she refused to pull the cord because she was naked.

Of course, he said, most people take showers fully clothed, so that made all sorts of sense.

The emergency room was in a teaching hospital, Felicia said, probably attached to the City University but she wasn't sure. What she was sure of is nobody spoke English.

She finally handed them her passport and insurance card and let them take care of her.

While she was waiting to be seen, Nik snuck out for another cigarette. While he was gone, they came

for her and he couldn't find her since no one spoke English.

While eventually someone figured out that the Americans were together, he says he's giving up smoking. It's getting too hard on his nerves.

The foot was sliced through, with sinew muscle showing. It required both internal and external stitches — eight on the outside and who knows how many inside. X-rays showed that there were no broken bones and apparently no tendon damage.

The X-ray technician didn't speak any English but he did speak a little Spanish. Felicia said her Spanish was pretty rusty, but they were able to converse a little.

Two hours and 15 minutes after entering the hospital, the bridal couple were on their way back to the hotel.

Back in the room, the first thing they noticed was no blood. While they had been at the hospital, the maid had cleaned the place. She got a nice tip.

As for the emergency room, it was free. Apparently emergency room visits in Italy are gratis. Felicia says she's sending a donation to the hospital anyway.

After all, the folks there made sure she got to see Rome after all — she hobbled and took a lot of taxis, but they got to see the city.

And that, she says, is why European women do not shave their legs.

## Honest Abe didn't sleep here



**john milburn**

• ap news analysis

"They made the whole thing in Vermont, then took it apart and shipped it here piece by piece," Bob told me. He was showing me his new weekend house, a log cabin which Sue and I had watched going up all summer on a nearby hill. Bob is one of those hardworking CEOs who walked away with multimillions when his company went bankrupt. "I guess you could say I'm a self-made man," he likes to tell visitors.

Calling this place a log cabin is like calling the QE II a cabin cruiser. The peeled log beam spanning the front door is 136 feet long and two and a half feet thick. The logs that form the walls are five feet around. A wide, shallow groove has been carved into their undersides, so when they stack on top of one another their sheer weight makes the log-to-log connection airtight. No plaster is needed between the timbers to keep out the elements. All electrical wiring and plumbing had been drilled into the logs after they were taken apart but before they were reconstructed, so that no outside drilling or holes or wires are visible.

Three deer-antler chandeliers hang from the hand-hewn log ceiling in the ballroom. The floor is tiled in brown leather with animal skin throw rugs scattered around; the heads of moose, elk and caribou line the walls. You expect to bump into Teddy Roosevelt at any moment. The kitchen is a

rustic throwback to the days of the pioneers — granite countertops, Viking range, matching Zero-Kings refrigerators, Calphalon pots and pans hanging over the butcher-block island with vegetable sink. If Donald Trump ever runs for President and says he was born in a log cabin, this would have been the one.

The second and third floors have balconied bedrooms that overlook the ballroom from the inside, and also have dormered windows overlooking the valley. Lincoln's birthplace could have fit easily into any of the bedrooms, with plenty of room to spare for studying by candlelight.

Though our county may have more charming stone fences than any county on the planet, stone masons were busily placing new, old-looking ones all over Bob's property. From the glassed-in rear deck the view went on for 20 miles.

"See that," Bob said as he pointed to a mobile home about a half-mile away. He wrinkled his

nose. "There ought to be a zoning law against that. Why can't people build things like this," he said, waving his arms around his house, "things that fit into the environment?"

Vardon and Verbena Frasier live in that trailer. Verbena used to work in one of Bob's factories. She lost her medical insurance and 401(K) when Bob's company folded. Vardon drove the school bus until he couldn't pass the physical. Bad heart. The environment is way down on the list of their worries.

Until the bankruptcy Bob paid himself \$8 million a year plus bonuses. "She'd have been out of a job anyway. If we hadn't gone broke we were going to take the entire business to Mexico. To avoid the high cost of American labor," he told me. Verbena made \$22,000 a year.

"Why don't we keep the American jobs here and bring in extremely low-paid Mexican CEOs to run our companies?" I asked Bob. He thought that was the funniest thing he'd ever heard.

"Thank goodness you're not running a business," he said. "We'd all go broke. Did I show you the waterfall in the master bath?"

Jim Mullen is the author of "It Takes A Village Idiot: A Memoir of Life After the City" (Simon and Schuster, 2001). He also contributes regularly to Entertainment Weekly, where he can be reached at jim\_mullen@ew.com

## Can't take God out of everything

To the Editor:

As I was coming home on Thanksgiving with my children and their husbands and children, I was listening to the radio. The guy was talking with a Supreme Court judge from Alabama who put the Ten Commandments on the wall of the building. The people were objecting to the Words of God. I don't see how they can go to court to remove



**from our readers**

• to the editor

God from our government. Without God, there would be no court, because there would be no judges, lawyers, president or congressmen.

As soon as they call the first witness, the case would be over because they would have to swear or affirm that they would "tell the truth, the whole truth, so help me, God." And all the officials had take the same oath, to uphold the Constitution "so help me, God."

As far as I am concerned, separation of church and state means that a certain religion cannot be established for the whole country. In the olden days, with kings, etc., all had his religion. The fact is, the king was God. We don't want that.

We do not need to take God out of the flag salute or off walls of buildings in order to maintain our separation of church and state. He will still be there.

Howard Finley  
Sharon Springs

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### berry's world



OK! OK! I'M SELF-ABSORBED.  
YOU'RE SELF-ABSORBED. NO  
PROBLEM! WE LIVE IN A SELF-  
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