

from our viewpoint...

## Young Olathe boy gives state a boost

Thanks to an Olathe youngster, Kansas came in for some great publicity at last Thursday's 2007 National Geographic Geographical Bee in Washington.

Suneil Iyer, 12, a student at Indian Trail Junior High in Olathe, placed second, winning a \$15,000 college scholarship.

The winner was 14-year-old Caitlin Snaring, a home-schooled eighth grader from Redmond, Wash. She not only won a \$25,000 scholarship, but a lifetime membership in the National Geographic Society. Caitlin had the distinction of being only the second girl to win the bee since its debut in 1989.

This bee, like all the others, is tough and challenging. No short cuts. You either know the answer or you don't. No prompting. It's you and you alone in the spotlight.

The winning question was: "A city that is divided by a river of the same name was the imperial capital of Vietnam for more than a century. Name this city, which is still an important cultural center."

The answer? Hue.

While watching these kids perform so well, we chalk it up to the classroom teacher, the face we don't see, but one deeply involved in the process.

When we see these kids stepping up and making us proud, don't we sometimes wonder what the problem is, because all we seem to hear is more of the negative than the positive about our nation's classrooms?

Have we forgotten there is a lot of good being done?

Are we not paying attention?

Teachers are not the kind of people to pat themselves on the back. We need to do that for them. It certainly would be in order for us, right here at home, to pen a thank-you note recognizing our teachers for their efforts, their successes, and the good care and attention they give our children throughout the school year.

No truer words were spoken than these: "Where would anyone of us be were it not for a teacher?"

You know the answer.

—Tom Dreiling, *The Norton Telegram*

## where to write

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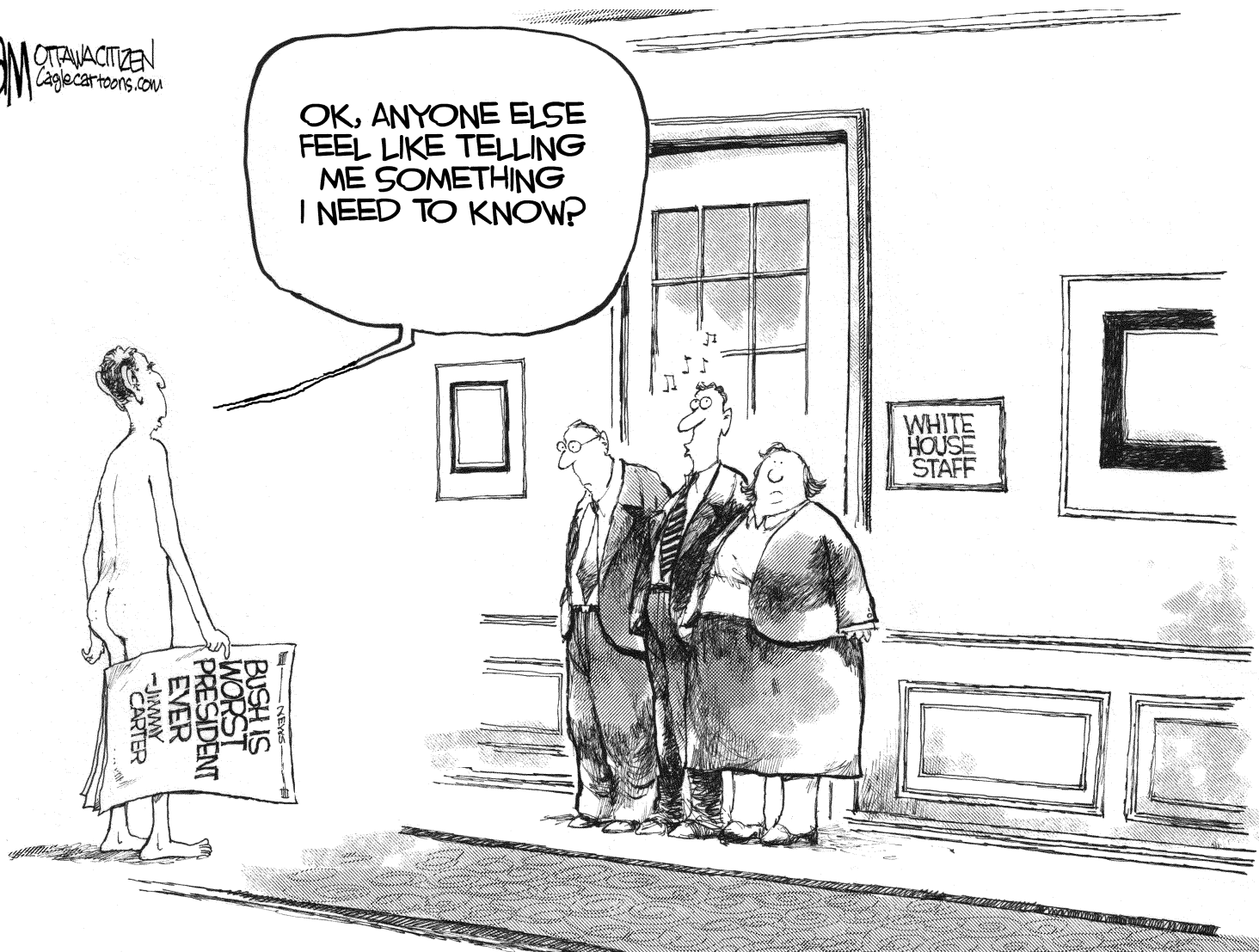
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## Impressed by the new Kansas signs?

So is anybody impressed with the new "Welcome to Kansas" signs?

Didn't think so.

These little blue jobs have got to be the most underwhelming state welcome signs since, maybe, Mike Hayden's "Ah, Kansas" campaign.

It seems like every governor has to fool with the welcome signs. The results are mixed at best, worse when the governor has an ad agency design the signs.

That's what the Sebelius administration did — and it shows.

The signs match the current "Kansas — big as you think" campaign, on which the state Department of Commerce has spent millions.

Probably the best signs Kansas has had were the simple green ones Bob Docking put up when he was governor back in the 1960s. While they were just highway signs, they featured a striking diagonal support which served as a stem for the big sunflower rising over the top.

The text was simple: "Welcome to Kansas," with "Midway, U.S.A." in smaller type below. That marketing survived through the Bob Bennett era, though the Republicans quickly dismantled the smaller signs below which read "Robert B. Docking, governor."

Hayden's people covered the green signs in dirt brown for the "Ah Kansas" campaign de-



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signed by — you guessed it — an advertising agency. The agency replaced the sunflower with an indecipherable logo representing the state's attractions. They even peeled the green "stem" off the supports, though many of the diagonal poles lasted into the Sebelius era.

After the voters chased Hayden from office, the incoming Finney administration ditched the awful brown, replacing the signs with an agency-inspired version featuring the state's name exploding into confetti.

Honestly, I never did figure out what that was supposed to signify. The state was just exploding? No one ever told me, but I was living in Colorado by then.

Those signs lasted until Gov. Bill Graves' wife got tired of them. She designed the purple signs with the odd sunflower just now being replaced, five years into the Sebelius era.

And, yes, an ad agency gets the blame once more.

The new ones are attractive, really, as good as any, but they're so small you miss them if

you blink. Maybe the agency needed the money for more television ads.

Does anyone think spots on a few networks touting how "big" our state is will bring us business? Or impress anyone?

The best signs so far? Bob Docking's sunflowers, hands down. And I'm a Republican.

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My advice is, never let an agency art department near a highway sign. The two don't go together.

Colorado for years had carved brown-and-white wooden signs that proclaimed "Welcome to Colorful Colorado." Cynthia used to laugh at the visual disconnect, but the understated message was clear.

While Roy Romer was governor — a long 12 years — he had those replaced with nasty orange-yellow-and-purple signs with the same slogan designed by an agency.

Gov. Bill Owens thankfully had those replaced, replicating the wooden signs of yore.

Which proves that sometimes common sense does prevail.

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Anyone want to start a "bring-back-the-sunflowers" movement?

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1994-2001

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## The day without farm workers

Last year for one day, no one came to work in my peach orchard. A row of ladders stood empty. This was my day without immigrant labor.

Without workers, I cannot farm. If I cannot farm, my organic heirloom peaches and raisins won't reach people's dinner tables.

Without passage of immigration reform, I can't get enough help to harvest my fruits. This work is transient and something most Americans won't do, even with higher wages.

Under the current system, which gives so many immigrants illegal status, good workers from south of the border are forced to hide in the shadows, constantly fearful of deportation.

As the debate over undocumented workers unfolds, the growing of food seems to be left out. This debate isn't just about citizenship. It's also about who works the fields and how crops are grown. And it's about working conditions and treating workers fairly — something that I and other small farmers try to do as we labor side by side with our workers.

Immigration reform needs to grant some form of legal status to the nearly 2 million illegal workers on farms and acknowledge their contribution to the farm economy and rural communities.

At the very least, we should grant undocumented workers a guest worker status, ensuring fair treatment for their hard work.

Specialty fruits and vegetables depend on these hands. Now more than ever, a labor shortage threatens these crops.

I almost lost my raisin crop two years ago. Last year, pear farmers in Northern California were forced to let fruit rot on trees because there were not enough workers. I try to ripen my peaches to perfection, but lose many when I can't get pickers. Some of my best fruits fall from my trees.

Without labor, agriculture will mechanize the process as much as possible, substituting technology and capital for people on the land. This shift is not simply about the invention of a machine, but rather a dramatic change in how things are grown. It means rewarding plant breeders not for great flavor, but instead for fruit that works with machines.

I can imagine the ideal machined peaches of the future: Design them so they will simultaneously ripen. (My crews revisit a single tree



prairie  
writers circle

• david mas maumoto

four to five times, picking only what is ripe at the moment.) Breed a peach with a stem that snaps easily, so a tree can be shaken by a machine. Manufacture fruit that won't bruise when harvested, picked rock hard to survive a handless system.

But there is no technology that can replace the human touch without sacrificing good taste.

Sustainable and organic fruit farming demands constant attention and response to nature each season. Our systems are labor intensive. I need the human element on my farm.

Farming is an inexact science. There's an art to pruning and growing a perfect peach that requires years of practice and many hands. Without workers, I'll have no choice but to farm differently: The politics of undocumented immigrants can change the flavor on my farm.

But agriculture is morally wrong if the sole goal is to create a new pipeline of cheap labor. Farmers must acknowledge the value of the people in their fields.

