

from our viewpoint...

Debates may not change many minds

The presidential debates this year so far have been tense. You can see the pressure in the performance of both President George Bush and challenger John Kerry.

The finale in the series is set for Wednesday night from Arizona State University, and is supposed to be on domestic issues. I am sure there will be several mentions of the war in Iraq worked in by both sides. That seemed to be the big topic of both the first two presidential debates, and certainly was the top issue in the vice-presidential match.

The 90-minute shows are followed by at least half an hour of commentary by the various spin doctors, and then the polls take their turn. The ones from Sunday indicate very little change in the race, and it remains a close contest with the election three weeks from today.

Watching the debate Friday, we were interested in the discussion about the possibility that the next president will have a chance to appoint a new justice to the Supreme Court. What surprised us was that President Bush said he would not appoint someone who would make rulings based on their own opinions.

“Another example would be the Dred Scott case,” Bush said, “which is where judges years ago said that the Constitution allowed slavery because of personal property rights. That’s a personal opinion. That’s not what the Constitution says. The Constitution of the United Sates says we’re all ... you know, it doesn’t say that. It doesn’t speak to the equality of America.

“I would pick somebody who would not allow their personal opinion to get in the way of the law. I would pick somebody who would strictly interpret the Constitution of the United States.”

In 1845, Dred Scott and his wife Harriet filed suit for their freedom in the St. Louis Circuit Court. After 11 years, the Supreme Court took up the issue and in a landmark decision, declared that Scott must remain a slave.

The court ruled in March 1857 that provisions in the Constitution established that slaves were personal property. The decision did much to solidify the positions of the slave states and the abolitionists. It was three years after the decision that cannons began firing on Fort Sumter in Charleston Harbor, opening the Civil War.

It took the 14th Amendment plus the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s to repeal slavery and change the way blacks were treated. This was one of the few things the founding fathers got wrong in the Constitution over 200 years ago. Human rights have come a long way, but President Bush is wrong to think that the judges make decisions based solely on personal opinions, and he should brush up a bit on the Constitution before he brings up slavery to try to make a point about how judges make decisions.

We believe the debates are providing a clear division on some of the major issues, but there are enough points to give both sides plenty of spin room to try to convince the undecided voters.

It will be interesting to watch the final debate, and as the campaigns move into the final days, we will await the tabulations with great interest.

Voter registration in Kansas closes on Monday, so if you’re not registered, do it now. — *Tom Betz*

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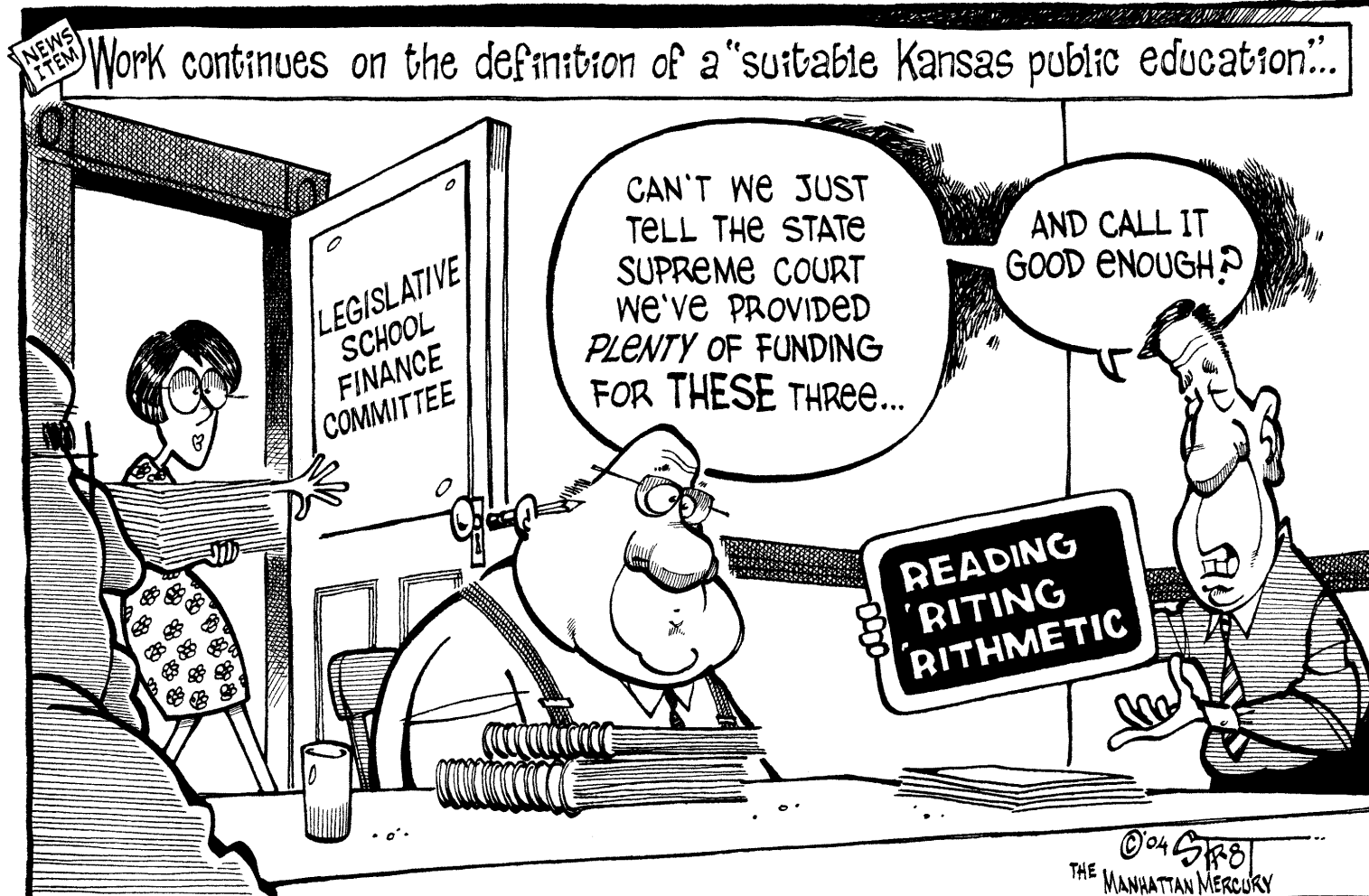
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‘Room parties’ take place of Halloween

The school newsletter on a friend’s kitchen table caught my eye.

“Room parties are scheduled to celebrate the fall season on October 29,” it said.

Wouldn’t that be, ah, Halloween?

“Shuh,” she hissed. “We’re not allowed to mention that word. Something about the ACLU.”

There will be, the newsletter notes dryly, “no costumes or parades.”

Nor, we suspect, will kids be allowed to have much fun. Blame the American Civil Liberties Union. Blame conservative Christians who see Halloween as devil worship. Blame our tradition of religious tolerance.

Halloween, the traditional eve of All Saints Day, does have a religious foundation. By legend, the forces of evil were bound to be out the night before Christians remember God’s chosen.

That’s how we get the images of the commercial Halloween of today — witches, black cats, wickedly leering jack-o-lanterns — all minions of the underworld, forces of Satan.

It’s not that most of us believe that the witch down the block can change herself into a cat, or that somewhere, a coven meets this night to worship his evil name. It’s that there’s a religious connotation to the holiday at all.

There are people who believe in the forces of evil, and think we glorify them by having a holiday replete with Satanic signs.

The same school holds a “winter seasonal



steve haynes

- along the sappa

festival,” where kids gather at the city auditorium and sing carols, but none too religious to cause concern. It’s a sort of sanitized Christmas show, minus “Oh, Holy Night.”

At least the kids still get to show off for their grandparents.

So this is the impasse we have come to.

We are a country founded on the principle of religious tolerance, but we have come to the point where we can’t tolerate religion in our public life. That’s not what the founding fathers envisioned.

In their day, tolerance meant putting up with other Christian groups, so long as they weren’t too weird. Colonists tended to cling together with others of like mind, and most did not admit any other church. New England was Protestant, the South mostly Church of England, and Maryland was founded as a haven for Catholics often shunned or persecuted elsewhere.

But the principle of tolerance took root, was enshrined in the Bill of Rights and today has grown into something far beyond what anyone 200 years ago could have envisioned.

A thank you to the Shopping Spree sponsors

To the Editor:

I want to thank the sponsors of the shopping spree.

I am still numb and it is hard to realize I won.

I got lots of nice things from Aten Department Store, Waness Carpet, Miller’s Electronics and Mann’s Jewelers. And great eats from Hank’s.

I would have gone to Hitchcock, too, but I dry land farm.

I want to thank *The Goodland Star-News* for holding the shopping spree. We had fun doing the shopping with Ann Hamilton and Kathryn Gurfinkel.

Gladys Cullum

St. Francis



from our readers

- to the editor

To the editor:

The Goodland Star-News had an article about an “accident” on Page 1 on Friday, Oct. 1.

We are all shocked at the attitude of some drivers. The way some people drive is the problem, not something else.

The word wreck is a better term than accident. An accident is something that happens when it is not anyone’s fault.

where to write

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As a young nation, we had no need to consider the views, let alone the rights, of Muslims or Jews, atheists or unbelievers.

Today, we take seriously everyone’s rights, and we are in danger of losing the religious foundation of our heritage.

Neither Halloween, with its celebration of candy, gluttony and commercial decorations, nor the secular Christmas is worth fighting for. We may not believe in witches, but we don’t believe in Santa Claus, either. Right?

What we need to preserve, along with the right of each American to worship as he or she pleases, is our sense of morality and purpose as a nation. And that includes our religious heritage.

We don’t need to go back to the days when an entire state could subscribe, legally at least, to one church, or a public school district could be run by one religion. Most of us don’t want to foist our idea of religion off on someone else’s children. That’s not such an easy thing to handle.

A proposal by state Board of Education member Bill Wagnon that students should study history of religion along with science might be a place to start. Nothing is more important to our history than God. Nothing could be harder to handle in public schools.

Meantime, though, couldn’t seventh graders wear their costumes to the “fall seasonal party?”

This wreck was someone’s fault: A driver ran a stop sign.

He put everyone in danger by his driving. He killed the two children and injured two other people. There is no excuse for that kind of behavior. He should be charged.

If the whole family was made to take a driver’s training course and see the gory films, it might wake them up. People need to change their attitude and habits while driving or as passengers. It would make the roads safer. Seat belts are there for a purpose.

Jack Day
Burlington, Colo.

To the editor

Once again I pick up pen in hand to ask for help to get a kidney dialysis center here in Burlington.

They tell me we need 4-5 more people and then we can open one in Burlington.

If you or anyone in your area is on dialysis or will soon be starting on dialysis please have them contact: Helen Newbury 719-346-8150; Marie Smith 719-346-7299; or Chuck Nestor 719-767-5365.

We realize the weather for the winter is fast approaching and the hours on the road are not fun.

If you could contact us as soon as possible we would appreciate it.

Helen, Marie and Chuck
Burlington, Colo.

