

from other pens...

Experience in field good qualification

The Lawrence Journal-World on hiring a new commissioner of education:

It would seem that the most important qualification for the state's new commissioner of education would be experience in the field of education.

Apparently not, according to some members of the Kansas State Board of Education.

Six members of the board expressed displeasure Wednesday with the criteria established by the National Association of State Boards of Education, which the Kansas board hired to help them find a replacement for Andy Tompkins, who resigned as commissioner of education earlier this year. The consultants had evaluated the applicants according to certain skills. The problem? A group of board members said they believed too much weight had been given to candidates' experience in the field of education.

Although a minority of the board argued that education experience should be the top priority and the consultant's evaluation scale was sound, the six-member conservative majority of the board voted to change the criteria and presumably set the evaluation process back to square one.

Connie Morris, (from Wheeler), an outspoken conservative member of the board, complained, "Education expertise may have been given five times the weight of anything else." She added that too few points had been allocated for business, civic and political skills.

Some might say there is entirely too much politics on the state board already.

The board interviewed four candidates in June, but couldn't agree on a commissioner and decided to restart the hiring process. That wasn't a bad move if board members didn't believe they had found a satisfactory candidate. However, it's September now, and almost no progress appears to be made.

According to Board Chairman Steve Abrams, the board has "a bunch" of applicants for the job, but the work the consultant has done so far apparently was largely wasted because it didn't meet with the approval of a majority of the board. After a four-hour meeting in and out of closed session Wednesday, Abrams announced, "We're done, and there's no action." ... What, if any, progress can be made ... remains to be seen.

... Hiring a new commissioner of education is arguably the most important current piece of business facing the State Board of Education. It's disappointing to see the process mired in political bickering.



A weekend at home seems like a luxury

A weekend at home is such a luxury for us. It seems we're always gone, and things here just pile up.

Steve bought a bookcase in February and still hasn't had a spare hour or two to put his books in it.

This was to be the weekend to fill the bookcase, put together the miniature ox cart I got in Costa Rica, sweep the garage, weed the garden, water seal the deck furniture, fold all the clothes that have been sitting in baskets for the last two weeks and pick out pictures for a Rotary program.

Then there were the minor chores, like balance the checkbook, send stuff to the kids, slice the watermelon that's been in the fridge for a week, medicate the cats, and clean off the dining room table.

At the office, my list included entering a bunch of stuff into the business computer, doing payroll, sending out several letters, checking the mail, writing sports stories and my weekly column, checking on football, volleyball and cross country pictures and feeding the cat.

I also put nap, walk and fix breakfast, lunch and



cynthia haynes

• open season

supper, and go to church on my list. I like it to be complete, and I always want to be able to mark something off.

I was looking forward to a nice long holiday weekend.

And I got it.

I even got some of the stuff on my list done.

Steve did not get his bookcase filled. On the other hand, we did get the deck furniture water sealed, several flower beds weeded, all the clothing folded and the ox cart put together.

I didn't get the garage swept, although I started, and got about a dozen broom strokes done before it was time to stop and make lunch. I never got back to that project.

I got the most important things done. I got a

nap every day and a walk two out of three. We would have made it three out of three, but it rained, and we weren't complaining about that.

We got three meals a day and the watermelon got cut and devoured, along with hamburgers to celebrate Labor Day.

Steve got the checkbook balanced and we both got some work done at the office. The house cats got their monthly flea and tick medicine, and the office cat got fed.

We cleaned off the dining room table but covered it again as we started our weekly writing and editing chores. We both have desks, but prefer to sit at the table while working. At mealtimes we push the laptop computers aside to make room for plates and silverware.

It was a long, lovely weekend. I loved every minute of it, but where did it go?

One minute I was sitting down and making lists of what I was going to do, and the next it seems that it's time to start another work week.

Well, anyway, thank you, Lord, for long holiday weekend at home.

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nwkansas.com

N.T. Betz, Director of Internet Services

(ntbetz@nwkansanews.com)

Evan Barnum, Systems Admin. (support@nwkansanews.com)

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Interviewed by Bill Steigerwald

Larry Diamond is an expert on democracy, a Stanford University professor and a senior fellow at the mostly conservative Hoover Institution. Though he says he is a "moderate centrist Democrat" and was against our going to war in Iraq, in the fall of 2003 Diamond accepted Condoleezza Rice's request that he go to Baghdad and serve as an adviser to the interim American government.

What Diamond says he saw during his three-month stint — a series of blunders, miscalculations and ideological blindness by American authorities — is contained in his new book, "Squandered Victory: The American Occupation and the Bungled Effort to Bring Democracy to Iraq."

I talked to Diamond, who has not heard from Secretary of State Rice since his book came out, on Tuesday by telephone from his home on the Stanford campus.

Q: Is Iraq's constitution meaningful and will it work?

A: Well, it's meaningful because if the Iraqis do agree on a permanent constitution and if it's adopted by the country in a national referendum, it'll probably be the most democratic constitution the Iraqis have ever crafted for themselves. It will certainly be the constitution that has been reached by the most democratically representative process. That doesn't make a democracy in itself, but it's an important step forward along the road.

Q: Why did you agree to go to Iraq?

A: Because whatever you felt about the war, and whether we should have gone to war or not, the situation after Baghdad fell was very different than it was before we went to war. Indeed, the situation when Condoleezza Rice called me in November of 2003 remained what it was throughout the postwar period — one where I felt the American national interest was now very much at stake. If we did not succeed in stabilizing Iraq, I felt it would become what it was not before the war — that is, a haven for international terrorists, a really imminent prob-



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• commentary

lem for regional security and stability and a threat to the security of the United States. In addition to which, it was clear that many Iraqis, in the wake of the toppling of Saddam, were coming forward and struggling to build a democratic system of government and I thought those people deserved our help.

Q: What were our biggest mistakes, once we toppled Saddam?

A: Our single biggest mistake, which I talk about at length in the book, was the decision to establish an occupation (government) in the first place ... rather than moving fairly rapidly to an Iraqi interim government that would have been broad-based and selected through some process of consultation and dialogue, like the Afghan *Loya Jirga* (the tribal council that established a new post-Taliban government in Afghanistan).

Q: We are stuck with Iraq and now we have to fix it. What do we have to do?

A: I think the key is to see if we can find through some political means a way to narrow the base of involvement and support for the insurgency, because the overwhelming problem in Iraq today is that you just can't do anything. You can't travel the roads safely. You can't repair the electricity grid. You can't get the oil flowing too much beyond its prewar level because of the widespread dispersed and vicious violence.

Now much of the insurgency is classic, die-hard, dead-end ideologues, either al-Qaida, the former Baathist leadership or other zealots who are never going to be drawn in. But there are elements of the insurgency who are fighting for more tactical goals, to ensure that the Sunnis are going to have a full place in the political process and to get a firm commitment

that the United States is going to leave militarily at some point. Some of these more tactically motivated elements have been sending signals through international intermediaries for two years that they want to talk directly to the U.S. I think we should negotiate with them. I think we've made a mistake not to have done so.

Q: What else should we do?

A: One is to declare, very unequivocally, that we would not seek permanent military bases in Iraq. One thing that has united all the disparate elements of the insurgency is the belief the United States is seeking a permanent military foothold in Iraq and this needs to be resisted for Iraqi-nationalist or Arab-nationalist reasons.

Secondly, through a process of dialogue, we should seek to establish some sort of envisioned time frame for an American drawdown and withdrawal that would, be dependent on events on the ground.

Q: You've said the war in Iraq is "one of the greatest overseas blunders in U.S. history." How so?

A: Well, because, first of all, I think we shouldn't have invaded the country. But in particular, if you look at the postwar situation: Here we had this great military victory ... and then we squandered it by our arrogance, ignorance and lack of preparation for the postwar. Even if you think the war was not a blunder, the postwar certainly has been, in terms of the way we managed it and failed to resource it. We just have never had nearly enough troops in Iraq. I think it's too late now to build them up.

Another respect in which the war has been becoming a really historic overseas blunder for the United States is that it has significantly, and in deeply worrisome terms, decreased our overall military readiness. It's going to take us years to build it back up because of the obsession and neglect that has resulted from our fixation on Iraq.

Bill Steigerwald is a columnist at the Pittsburgh Tribune-Review. E-mail Bill at bsteigerwald@tribweb.com.

garfield

