

EDITORIALS

Tuition tiff

Regents should retain power

In the absence of compelling evidence for such a proposal, one has to wonder why state lawmakers think they should take over tuition-setting decisions from the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education. Do they expect us to believe they can do a better job of managing higher-education operations than the people who were put in the position to do exactly that?

Senate Bill 791, which recently passed out of the Senate Appropriations Committee by a 10-8 vote, would return tuition-setting authority to the Legislature during the 2010-11 academic year. The Legislature granted tuition-setting authority to the state regents in 2003, with the proviso that tuition be kept within certain legislatively mandated limits.

Since then, the regents have kept tuition hikes within legislative limits, noted state Higher Education Chancellor Glen Johnson. "As the legislative process continues, it is important to note that our colleges and universities have kept tuition below the limits set by the Legislature in 2003, allowing Oklahoma to remain among the top five most affordable states in the country," he said.

What's more, regents use

Keep politics out of setting tuition rates.

the advice and recommendations of local governing boards to make their decisions. Each institution has access to detailed information on the needs of each facility, and it goes without saying that leaders of each school are extremely sensitive to the mission of each and what specific markets will bear. Because each school's market and mission are different, rates of increase must necessarily vary from institution to institution.

It also goes without saying that no school leaders or regents want to raise tuition any higher than is absolutely necessary. Obviously, each hike in tuition increases the chances of driving prospective students away.

Oklahoma offers among the most affordable higher education options in the entire country. Surely everyone would agree that affordable education ought to continue to be a top priority.

Maybe the Legislature and education leaders ought to concentrate more on finding ways to keep tuition affordable, and to the extent possible, keep politics out of setting tuition rates.

Forced habit

Driver's license law isn't needed

On Monday, the House Judiciary Committee approved a proposal that would prohibit people from wearing anything on their heads in their driver's license photo.

Committee Chairman Rex Duncan, R-Sand Springs, took another legislator's bill (that was designed to deal with a completely different issue) and persuaded the committee to put in his ban on eyeglasses, scarves or other head wear in driver's license pictures — with no exception for things worn for religious reasons.

Duncan said the proposal started with a recent Norman incident in which a Muslim woman got into a dispute with the tag agent over a driver's license picture involving her hijab — a traditional head scarf worn by Muslim women. The tag agency wanted her to push the scarf past her hairline, which she felt violated her religious practices.

Later, the Department of Public Safety accommodated the woman in accord with the agency's previous policy and took a new picture with her hijab at her hairline.

The situation was resolved amicably: The department got an identifying picture; the woman got to maintain her religious practices and obtain a driver's license.

The situation didn't need legislation, but Duncan acted anyway.

How's this for an unintended consequence: We're sorry, Sister Mary, but if you want a driver's license, you'll have to take off your habit.

Duncan's proposal pushes the bounds of constitutionality and would, no doubt, get the state engaged in a long, embarrassing and costly legal battle.

And it isn't necessary. The Department of Public Safety has a system for dealing with the issue, and the Legislature should just butt out.



LETTERS

The arts count

Recently, Congress passed the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, and the arts were included in a small way—\$50 million for the National Endowment for the Arts to be distributed to states. This was a good move. The arts are essential to the health and vitality of our communities.

The nonprofit arts community is responsible for 6 million jobs in this country — and generates \$166 billion in economic impact. When employers look at relocating they look for three things: quality of education, safety, and level of arts and cultural opportunities (quality of life issues). The arts matter.

However, even more important than economic impact is the positive impact that the arts have on children's lives and their futures. Children exposed to the arts on a regular basis stay in school longer, exhibit less aberrant and antisocial behaviors, perform significantly better on standardized tests, and are much more likely to attend college.

Through arts education programs offered by the Arts & Humanities Council of Tulsa and numerous arts organizations in our community, we are able to see firsthand the tremendous difference that the arts make in children's lives, especially those from at-risk and underserved communities.

During these challenging economic times it is easy to talk about slashing spending on the arts. However, research shows the arts make a major difference in our quality of life. They improve our outlook and give us hope.

Now more than ever is the time to support the arts and arts education — for our community's sake.

Ken Busby, Tulsa

Editor's note: Busby is executive director and CEO of the Arts & Humanities Council of Tulsa

Anti-science pandering

Once again I find myself dismayed by the anti-scientific posturing taken by

too many of Tulsa County's state senators and legislators. On Feb. 17, the Tulsa World reported "School science bill is killed." This bill would have permitted public school students to be "unresponsive" in regard to issues relating to scientific topics which would in any way contradict their religious teachings. Evolution (the very basis of biological science) was cited as the reason why such an anti-science law was required.

Sen. Randy Brogdon, R-Owasso, the author of this bill, it would appear, does not know that students in the United States, in general, and Oklahoma, in particular, are falling further and further behind their counterparts in Europe, Asia and the rest of the world — and this at a time when effective scientific education will be directly responsible for determining our future standard of living. As scientific literacy falls, so will our standard of living. Sen. Brogdon might also not have realized that one of the main reasons the voters rejected the Republicans in the last election was because of the anti-science portions of their platform (anti-evolution; anti-stem cell research).

However, most likely Sen. Brogdon was attempting to continue to pander to the anti-science voters in his community. And it is reasonable for a politician to do such a thing. Unfortunately, such anti-science posturing is bad for our students and ultimately has the potential to be tragic for our nation.

John Morgan, Bixby

Dastardly measure

Recently, the House of Representatives voted unanimously to kill 10 percent of Oklahoma's black bear population. Then only seven of our senators had the courage to vote against this dastardly measure. All but these seven also agreed that it is a fine thing to lure bears with food, and then kill them. Once more, Oklahoma's wild animals are seen only as pawns in a political game.

This measure was defeated last year because the estimated bear population was too low. So what did they do? Inflate the figures.

The original population estimate by the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation was 200, based on reports and sightings. In only a few weeks, that population estimate increased to 800. There were two nuisance bear reports recorded before House Bill 1464 and Senate Bill 450 were introduced. All of a sudden bears were "crossing the border from Arkansas" and "harassing campers."

I had hoped that our elected representatives would see through this nonsense. That did not happen. Our lawmakers must realize, before it's too late, that Oklahoma's wild animals belong to all of us. Most of us do not wish to see them harassed, wounded and killed for the entertainment of the few.

Paula Silver, Bristow

Too many superintendents

Former school superintendent Mike McGregor's recent letter to the World (Feb. 17) forgot to mention one glaring error in Oklahoma's education problems. That is a glut of overpaid school superintendents in districts, some of which only contain a few students at best. Still, all the duplication of services and costs are on board.

With their handsome salaries, usually several times that of any teacher who actually works, they are bleeding Oklahoma's education dry. All these little "kingdoms" should be abolished and consolidated into about 10 or so districts, saving millions of dollars.

I am also always amazed when Tulsa needs a new superintendent we have to scour the nation. Why not hire someone from the city that is familiar with the problems faced by educators?

From the past results, I know they would never be much worse than past performers.

Burdette Payne, Tulsa

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR ■ TULSA WORLD, BOX 1770, TULSA OK 74102 ■ LETTERS@TULSAWORLD.COM

Upholding law requires courage, Mr. Holder

Lecturing a conscript conclave of Justice Department bureaucrats, Attorney General Eric Holder last week called America a "nation of cowards" for not spending more time talking about race.

Reading his speech, however, one recalls the sage counsel of Pat Moynihan to President Nixon in 1970: This whole subject might benefit from a long period of "benign neglect."

One point Holder did allude to, without specifics, was this:

"It is not safe for this nation to assume that the unaddressed social problems in the poorest parts of the country can be isolated and will not ultimately affect the larger society."

Fair point. And what are some of those social problems?

A 70 percent illegitimacy rate in black America, an incarceration and crime rate seven times that of white America, a 50 percent dropout rate in many urban high schools, African-American graduates reading and computing on average at eighth-grade levels.

And about these problems what is the black leadership doing?

Unlike Bill Cosby, the heroic Holder was virtually mute. Rather, he is upset that "on Saturdays and



Patrick Buchanan

Creators Syndicate

Sundays" we don't go to church or hang out together. But why are the free associations of Americans, of whatever creed or color, any of Eric Holder or Big Brother's business?

Having insulted us, perhaps Holder will start doing his own sworn duty. For one area where he has a lead role is enforcing the nation's laws — in particular, the U.S. immigration laws. For the federal failure to enforce these laws is a contributory cause of one of those "unaddressed social problems in the poorest parts of the country."

Case in point — rampant unemployment among minority youth.

According to the Center for Immigration Studies, among African-Americans 18 to 29 with only a high-school degree, unemployment is now 20 percent. Among black adults who do not have a high-

school diploma, it is 24 percent. Among teenagers under 18, black unemployment is 30 percent.

Among native-born Hispanics with only a high-school diploma, the unemployment rate is 13.6 percent. Among high-school dropouts, 16 percent. Among Hispanic 16- and 17-year-olds, the jobless figure is 40 percent.

As these figures were compiled in December, before the last two months of sweeping layoffs, they surely understate the situation. And with both black and Hispanic dropout rates now reaching 50 percent in major cities, the social dynamite is piling up.

Last month, USA Today reported that the FBI estimates there are now 1 million gang members in the U.S. — up 200,000 from 2005 — and these gangs are responsible for 80 percent of all U.S. crimes.

From other studies, young Hispanics are 19 times as likely as white youth to join gangs, while African-Americans are 15 times.

These millions of teenagers, and unskilled and less-educated young adults with no jobs and little prospect of finding them, are recruiting pools for criminal gangs.

Who is getting the jobs for which these native-born black and His-

panic youths could qualify? Illegal aliens hold millions of them.

Last week, the CIS reported, "An estimated 6 (million) to 7 million illegal immigrants are currently holding jobs. Prior research indicates they are overwhelmingly employed in lower-skilled and lower-paid jobs."

Exactly what sort of jobs? "Illegals are primarily employed in construction, building cleaning and maintenance, food preparation, service and processing, transportation and moving occupations and agriculture."

With the exception of agriculture, a majority of the workers in these occupations are native-born Americans. Thus, illegal aliens are taking jobs Americans are not only willing to do, but are doing, and taking 7 million of these jobs from young Americans now out of work.

By failing to enforce U.S. immigration laws, the government is selling America's working class down the river.

In addition to the 7 million illegals holding jobs, legal immigrants have another 15 million. In 2008, when Americans lost 3.5 million jobs, 144,000 immigrants were admitted every month.

Why do we have an open-borders

immigration policy that annually allows in millions, legal and illegal, to compete for jobs, when 10 million Americans are out of work and half a million are losing their jobs every month? The political correctness and moral cowardice of our Lords Temporal, who refuse to call a time-out on immigration until our own people go back to work, is killing the American dream for millions.

According to the census, as reported in The New York Times on Saturday, 97 percent of immigrants from Mexico do not speak English at home. They are less skilled and less educated than the average American.

Says demographer William Frey, "The new immigration magnets especially in the Southwest are disproportionately attracting young Mexican men who are willing to accept low wages."

What further proof is needed that mass immigration from the Third World is taking jobs from Americans and driving down their wages when they do find work?

Here is a problem more serious than whether black and white elites are getting together on weekends to gabble about race. But, dealing with it, Mr. Holder, will take courage.