

from other pens...

Training needed on open meetings

While we encourage interested citizens of all stripes to run for public office, we do not assume for a minute that any of the elected officials possess all of the knowledge necessary to be effective.

On-the-job training takes care of many details and nuances. So does mentoring by others and one's willingness to learn. Some offices even have orientation sessions provided to ease the transition into governance.

You might be surprised to learn, however, that there is no mandatory training regarding two very basic laws — the Kansas Open Meetings Act and the Kansas Open Records Act. The laws govern the very manner in which elected and appointed officials conduct business. And of the approximately 10,000 elected officials in our great state, not one of them has been required to verse themselves on these laws. While many of them take the time on their own to sit in on such basic training, there are many who don't.

A bill proposed in the Senate (SB 194) would correct that. The bill would require new officials to get training within 90 days of being elected. It would cover members of all local offices and bodies — from county and city commissions to the specialty districts such as water, sewage and cemetery districts.

We believe this not only needs to be worked out of committee, it needs to be signed into law.

The number of open government violations every year is high. And while there is the occasional purposeful skirting of the law, most are committed out of ignorance. Not every district court clerk, for example, knows exactly what portions of a criminal procedure need to be made available on request. Not every county commissioner knows that as a member of a three-person commission, it's illegal for two of them to discuss public business outside of a declared public meeting.

Not every nonprofit organization that receives public money understands what portion of its financial records needs to be shared with whomever asks. Not every city commissioner or council member knows what can be discussed in closed session — or even how to properly excuse themselves into closed session. Examples abound.

We believe the public is served best by a government that is transparent, open and easy to watch. We also believe the open meetings/open records laws codify that very sentiment.

It's incumbent on every decision maker involved with conducting the public's business to learn these laws. While common sense should prompt voluntary education, it is not working in all cases.

For the sake of the public, the Legislature needs to force all elected officials to learn the law.

— *The Hays Daily News*

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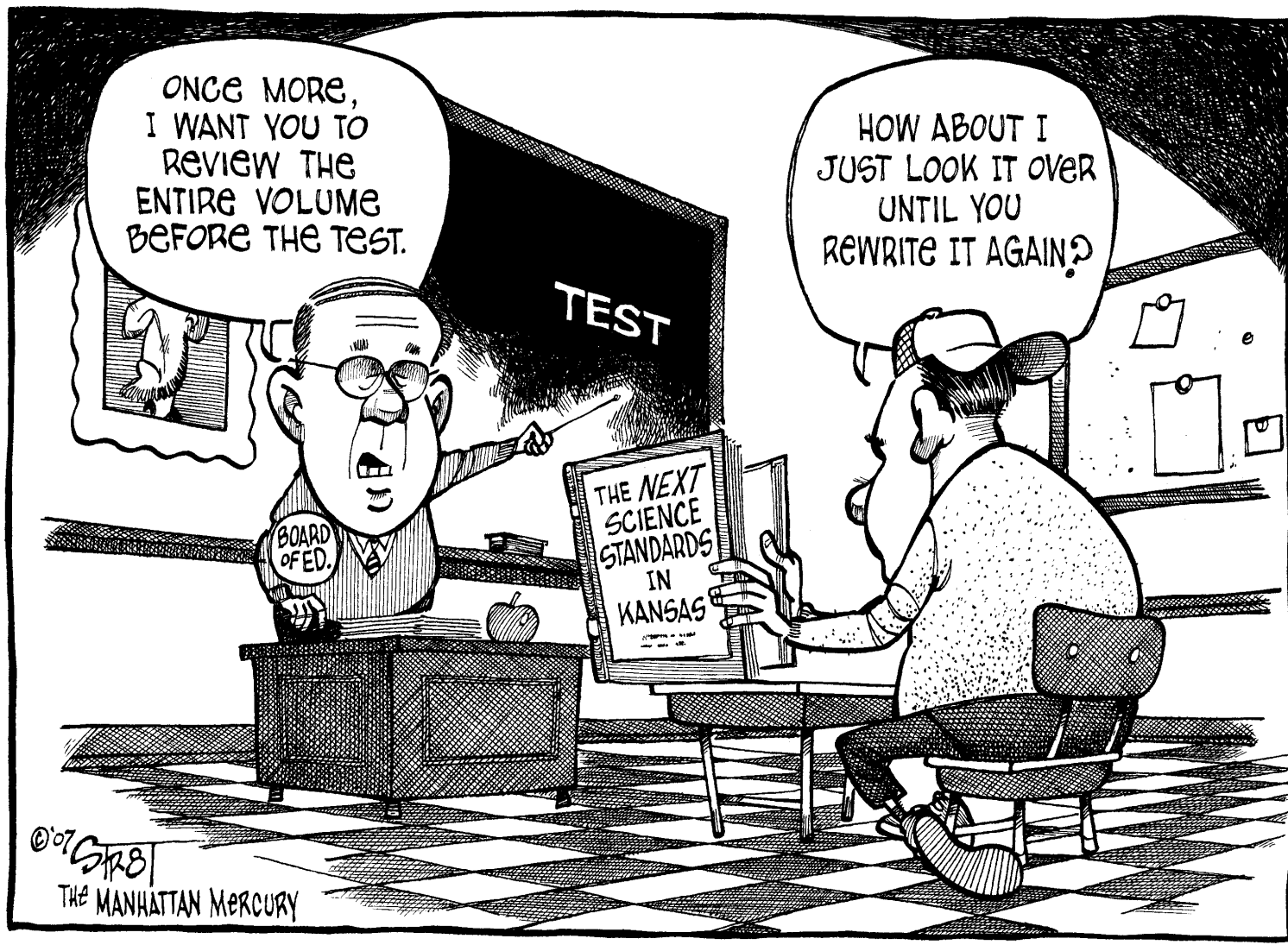
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People of Tunisia are sort of like us

What are the people of Tunisia like?

Well, sort of like us.

They're black and white and brown. They're mostly Moslems with a sprinkling of Christians and Jews. Many aren't sure what they believe, so they're sort of generic Moslems or quiet agnostics.

Tunisians feel a little bit gyped because they don't have much oil. Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates have gushers of the stuff. Neighbors Libya and Algeria have plenty.

What Tunisia has is the Mediterranean, with miles of beautiful beaches and a lot of not-so-good farmland along the salty coast. They have history and the Sahara, both of which are nice, but not so good for making a living.

The main industries are agriculture — olive oil, dates and citrus fruit, wheat, melons, aloe and vegetable — and tourism, mostly from Europe and other parts of Africa with a few Orientals and people from the former Soviet Union.

And they have their people — strong, hardworking, intelligent — and their government, led by two hardheaded presidents who saw that their country needed to use all its resources to move forward.

In 1960, under President Habib Bourguiba, Tunisia abolished polygamy and proclaimed universal suffrage. It took a few years for the old ways to die out, but under President Bourguiba and his successor, President Ben



**cynthia
haynes**

• open season

Ali, who took over in 1987, all Tunisians have the opportunity to attend school and for those who can make the grades — both men and women, a free college education through a master's degree.

While all is not sweetness and light in this Arab North African country, the people appear busy, happy and, for the most part, well educated. In a week, we saw no beggars and while many of the women wore traditional dress, it seemed to be because they wanted to rather than because they had to.

After being in Tunisia for most of a week — in Tunis, the capital, in the country and in a couple of other towns — I decided to make a scrapbook of faces.

On the road there was the policeman who didn't give our driver a ticket, even though he made an illegal turn. The driver got "The Sermon," known to cops everywhere, and the policeman posed for a picture.

In the mall were a woman and girl who smiled for the camera, and on the street the two boys who wanted me to take their picture, too.

One girl was walking down the street talking on her cell phone. The archeologist who organized an exhibit of ancient mosaics for the Getty Museum in California posed as well.

Our guide at Carthage was both gregarious and informative, while the movie maker we met was colorful.

Visiting small businesses and a government laboratory studying the effect of drought and salinity on grape vines, we met working men and women and their spouses.

At a school, a group of children sang to us, while their classmates smiled and acted shy, but they all brightened up when it was time to hand out the candy we had brought.

At the airport, the man helping get us through customs smiled and posed.

How are these people different? They wear a little more colorful clothes. Their diet is probably healthier. They eat lots of fresh fruit, vegetables and fish, and few Big Macs.

They go to church, date, raise families, play ball, eat at restaurants, hold hands, go to school, work and enjoy holidays just like us.

They speak a different language — sometimes two or three in fact. They dress a little differently and a lot of them don't like what our government is doing, but most say they like Americans and would go to America.

What would they bring home for souvenirs? Jeans and sneakers!

Nice to see leadership program in schools

To the Editor:

As a parent of two young children, it is nice to know that there is a leadership program in place in our schools.

My name is Jordie Mann and I am a new member of the Goodland Ambassadors and the new advertising representative with *The Goodland Star-News* and *Country Advocate*.

I would like to thank Dick and Sarah Short for their involvement and guidance with the Family, Career and Community Leaders of America.

I would also like to thank Mr. Short for bringing Michael Smith, national president, to explain how the club and its goals benefit both its members and the community.



**from our
readers**

• to the editor

Michael Wade Smith is a phenomenal young adult whose goals and thoughts are an inspiration to young and old alike; student or nonstudent.

Thank you Michael, and thank you Sarah Short!

Jordie Mann

Kanorado

What a concept, women without husbands

All right, ladies, the jig is up. Time for all of us to get married, you included.

I refer to a recent *The New York Times* report. After sorting through U.S. Census data, *The Times* determined that for the first time in American history, the majority of women, 51 percent, are living without a husband.

The story tore through the media like a lightning bolt. A slew of "I am woman, hear me roar" stories hit the airwaves. The storyline was clear: Women are finally free and independent, and the last thing they need is some sloppy spouse who leaves socks lying all over the house.

Well, nuts to that. Look, ladies, deciding not to marry for your own well-being is one thing, but it is we you're not marrying in the process. Your decision is killing single men — literally.

Single men partake in more risky behavior than married men. We eat badly, smoke more, and avoid doctors' offices. We die younger. And we're far more likely to wake up in a pile of crumpled newspapers still clutching the tequila bottle we began sipping from two days before.

The reason why is not complicated. We are social animals. Men and women are very different creatures, but we were made for each other. The Catholics call it complementarity — a man and woman, in union and harmony, round each other out.

Men need to be rounded out, too. Take dust. Because our brains take in less sensory detail



**tom
purcell**

• commentary

than a woman's, we don't notice dust the way women do. Thus, married men tend to live in orderly, dust-free homes, whereas single men, says P.J. O'Rourke, clean up their place about once every girlfriend.

It's not like single women are faring much better.

The *Times* article quoted independent women raving about their freedom and flexibility. A 32-year-old woman had already lived with two boyfriends and said that if she ever did marry, she might opt to keep her own place. Another said she likes being able to sleep on either side of the bed.

Oh, just admit it, ladies. You need us, too. Sleeping next to a burping, snoring lug of a husband may not be the stuff dreams are made of, but it sure beats sleeping alone. And when you hear a prowler rattling the door knob in the middle of the night, whom do you send to investigate? Your cat?

I know *The Times* is eager for a more progressive society — one in which the stodgy traditional marriage is kicked to the wayside — but

To the Editor:

I just finished a wonderful 10-week session and wanted to pass on the hope that when this is offered again, others will take the opportunity.

Pastor Ted Amos of the Christian Church initiated a grief recovery session for widows and widowers.

This was a wonderful way to get together with others and relay our grief, good times from the past and our hopes for the future.

We became friends and confidantes. This is the beginning of a new life for us. We need guidance to make that transition, no matter if it has been a matter of months or years.

Shirley Soellner

Goodland

the fact is marriage, imperfect though it is, is good for us.

Married people are happier, says the Pew Research Center. They enjoy life more — they enjoy sex more, too. Children raised by married couples fare better. Society fares better. Successful civilizations are built on the stability that traditional marriage brings.

But despite these simple and obvious truths, we keep trying to reinvent our nature. We keep trying to prove there are better ways to fulfill our simple needs — keep trying to leave every option open, so that we can be "free" and "independent" forever.

And we end up alone.

I can't imagine what old folks homes will be like 40 years from now. There will be an unprecedented number of elderly single people living alone. No children or grandchildren will visit them. No spouse will care for them. I wonder if *The Times* will do a front-page piece on that trend, too.

All I know is that my life would certainly be better if I woke every morning in a full home in which my children are laughing and my wife is smiling, rather than the way I often wake now — with a throbbing noggin because my single friends and I over-enjoyed our freedom and independence at the pub the night before.

Tom Purcell is a syndicated columnist. E-mail comments to Purcell@caglecartoons.com