

from our viewpoint...

Competition answer to school overhaul

How to solve the school mess?

Mayor Rudy Giuliani has convinced us where Speaker Newt Gingrich never could: The solution lies in competition.

That means a complete overhaul of our school system, but then why not?

It's a mess today. Everyone agrees on that.

Let's be fair. American schools, whatever their faults, remain among the best in the world. Government interference, first by states and then by the federal government, shackled them with an increasing burden.

When it appeared they were dragging, the solution always has been more money and more rules. Neither works.

Neither produced the kind of drive for excellence we perceived our schools as having a century ago.

Part of the problem is expectations. For much of that 100 years, we've pushed every year to get more and more kids into schools. Out here in rural America, most kids succeed. Most graduate, almost all of those go on to some kind of post-secondary education.

In our cities, though half, even 75 percent of minority students still drop out. Without education, they face a bleak future of unemployment, poverty, crime, drugs and despair.

The No Child Left Behind Act, supposedly President Bush's crowning achievement, set even more regulations and spends even more money, but it won't work. All men may be created equal, but not all of us have equal capacity for learning, at least school learning.

But No Child may be the saving grace for our schools. It may finally make things so bad we see that More of the Same isn't going to cut it. Thick books of federal and state regulations won't teach kids anything. Teaching them to pass standardized tests won't get them a job.

The solution, the mayor says, lies in creating competition, competition among public and private schools, church schools, charter schools and for-profit schools. If every parent gets a voucher to spend, and every parent shops for the best education for her children, then soon, only the best schools will survive.

Freed from burdensome regulations, public schools ought to be able to compete. Teachers could teach again, principals could supervise and discipline.

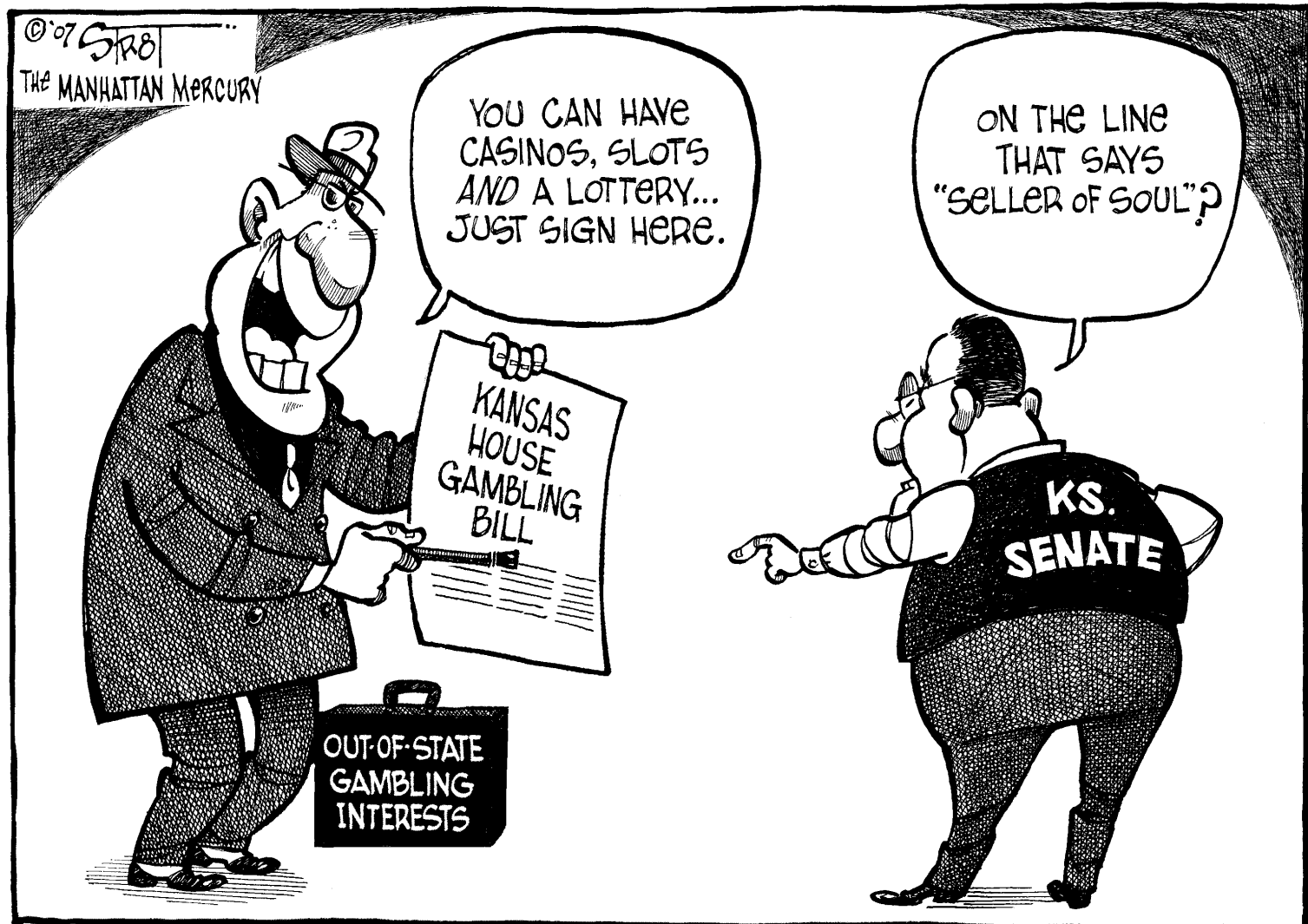
Only the market will tell, of course. There's no telling what education would look like in 50 years, but it'd be far better than the mess we have today.

Scary? Sure.

The education establishment — school boards, superintendents, teachers, everyone who draws a school paycheck — they won't like it, not at first.

Change scares people. But we've been living with change for years now, and even teachers agree it hasn't been good.

The old days aren't coming back. We'll have to jump into the future, and the American experience shows, time and time again, with airlines, trucks, railroads, cars, appliances, that competition is the way to make things better. Let's get with it. — *Steve Haynes*



Statuary Hall immortalizes our history

Saints and sinners, rebels and kings, American citizens and those who came before statehood, all are immortalized in the National Statuary Hall at the Capitol in Washington.

We were in Washington for the National Newspaper Association's annual Government Affairs Conference. The meetings give us a chance to talk to our legislators, visit the embassy of a foreign power and hear some interesting speakers.

This year we got a special treat, as Rep. Chet Edwards from the 17th District in Texas took us on a private evening tour of the capitol. Rep. Edwards, a Democrat, has the distinction, if you want to call it that, of being President George W. Bush's congressman.

We visited the Senate floor, looked at a two-man debate going on in the House, looked at old rooms and new rooms, antechambers and hallways. Each had a story — sometimes lots of stories. Here were places where history was made.

The Statuary Hall held a special fascination for me.

The hall was the meeting place for the House of Representatives from 1807 to 1857. Now it houses a collection of larger-than-life figures of those who went before.

The statues, up to two per state, spill out of the large round room into halls on all sides.

By one door stands California's Father Junipero Serra with a cross. The early Spanish



cynthia haynes

• open season

explorer and Franciscan monk spread Catholicism over Mexico and California in the 1700s. A couple of statues down is Huey Long, an infamous governor and U.S. senator from Louisiana, who was assassinated. The populist Long was both loved and hated, called a hero and a dangerous influence.

A short walk around the hall brings you to the statues of a couple of Confederate heroes: Robert E. Lee, Virginia, and Jefferson Davis, Mississippi — patriots who turned their back on the Union in favor of their home states.

Another rebel statue is that of Po'Pay, of New Mexico, who helped lead an uprising among his fellow Pueblo Indians against the Spanish in the 1600s, before our founding fathers were even born.

Oklahoma's Sequoyah, a Cherokee; Wyoming's Washakie and North Dakota's Sacagawea, both Shoshones; and Nevada's Sarah Winnemucca, a Piute, represent native Americans.

Kings are represented by Kamehameha I, who established the kingdom of Hawaii in

1810, and Thomas Starr King, California, and William King of Maine.

Kansas has Dwight D. Eisenhower, who replaced former Gov. George Washington Glick, and John Ingalls, a U.S. Senator and noted wit.

Some Kansans hope to replace Ingalls with a statue of Amelia Earhart.

Many names and faces were unfamiliar. I admit I don't have a clue about the significance of the statues of Lewis Wallace, Indiana; John Wheeler, Alabama; or Jason Lee, Oregon.

However, I recognized Texas freedom fighters and pioneers Stephen Austin and Sam Houston; Hawaii's priest to the lepers, Father Damien; Oklahoma's own Will Rogers; Missouri painter Thomas Hart Benton; Pennsylvanian and steam ship inventor Robert Fulton; Colorado scientist Florence Sabin; and a couple of patriots, Massachusetts' Samuel Adams and Virginia George Washington.

Other names from history, famous orators, judges and leaders, include Utah's Brigham Young, Nebraska's William Jennings Bryan, South Carolina's John C. Calhoun, Kentucky's Henry Clay, Tennessee's Andrew Jackson, Ohio's James Garfield and New Hampshire's Daniel Webster.

It's a strange place that brings all these people of different beliefs and backgrounds together — in the heart of a country which believes in diversity and freedom.

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I'll wear a blond shag haircut, a leisure suit and sing a syrupy Barry Manilow tune. If that doesn't get me onto 'American Idol,' Simon Cowell can eat his own head.

Ah, yes, you sum up America's fascination with fame and celebrity. Both are explored in 'Fame Junkies,' an interesting new book by Jake Halpern.

Fame Junkies?

Did you know that more people watch 'American Idol' than all three major network evening news shows combined?

It's no wonder. Things haven't been as compelling since Rather left the air.

Did you know, according to a study by Harvard University and the Kaiser Family Foundation, that 31 percent of teens are convinced they'll be famous? They believe they're entitled to fame — that it will solve all their problems.

It'll solve my problems. The waitress at the diner will finally go out with me.

Halpern interviewed 653 middle-school students in Rochester, N.Y. When he asked them if they'd rather be a personal assistant to a celebrity, a corporate CEO, an Ivy League president, a Navy SEAL or a U.S. senator, 43.4 percent of girls chose 'celebrity assistant.'

I'd rather do chores for a celebrity than be a senator. Though I have to admit rubbing cream on Rosie O'Donnell's bunions would get a little old.

When given the option of becoming famous, beautiful, stronger or smarter, boys chose fame almost as often as intelligence. Girls chose

Craving fame



tom purcell

• commentary

fame even more often.

That isn't a fair question. Fame has nothing to do with intelligence. Isn't that made clear every time Hollywood actors open their yaps?

Our longing for fame is a recent phenomenon. Consider: In 1963, according to Gallup, Americans most admired Lyndon Johnson, Winston Churchill and Martin Luther King Jr. In 2005, Bono and Donald Trump topped the list.

Hey, common sense: You're fired!

Halpern told me there are two types of kids who long for fame most: the spoiled ones whose parents taught them they were the center of the universe, and kids who were underappreciated by their parents.

Talk about underappreciated. My mother used to hang a Budweiser around my neck so the old man would read to me.

The longing also correlates to the self-esteem movement of the 1970s. By praising everything children did, adults unwittingly created teens and young adults who can't take criticism and who demand the praise they think fame will bring.

Ah, the good old days. When we played kickball, we weren't permitted to compete, and everybody got a trophy!

The result is that we've created a society of young narcissists.

We have?

Five psychologists just released an interesting study. It found that today's college kids are more narcissistic than previous generations. Narcissists tend to lack empathy. They're consumed with self-love. They crave fame because they want the adulation of millions.

I don't need to be adored by millions. But a few hundred thousand would be nice.

Freud had a term for what is going on: wishful thinking. We've created a generation of kids who are lost in a fantasy world. They see themselves as they'd like to be, rather than as they really are. You have to wonder what happens when people who crave fame fail to achieve it — or when people who achieve it realize it doesn't solve their problems and ends up creating even more.

Why don't you ask Britney Spears?

It makes me realize how lucky I was to grow up as I did. We had only three television channels — no celebrity shows were on. And I was part of a big family. We had to learn how to share and laugh and be considerate. Narcissistic behavior would have gotten us grounded.

Look, as delightful as this discussion is, you still haven't answered my question. You think the blond shag haircut, leisure suit and a syrupy Barry Manilow tune will get me to the big time?

Why not. It worked for Barry Manilow.

Tom Purcell is a nationally syndicated humor columnist. Email him at Purcell@caglecartoons.com

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