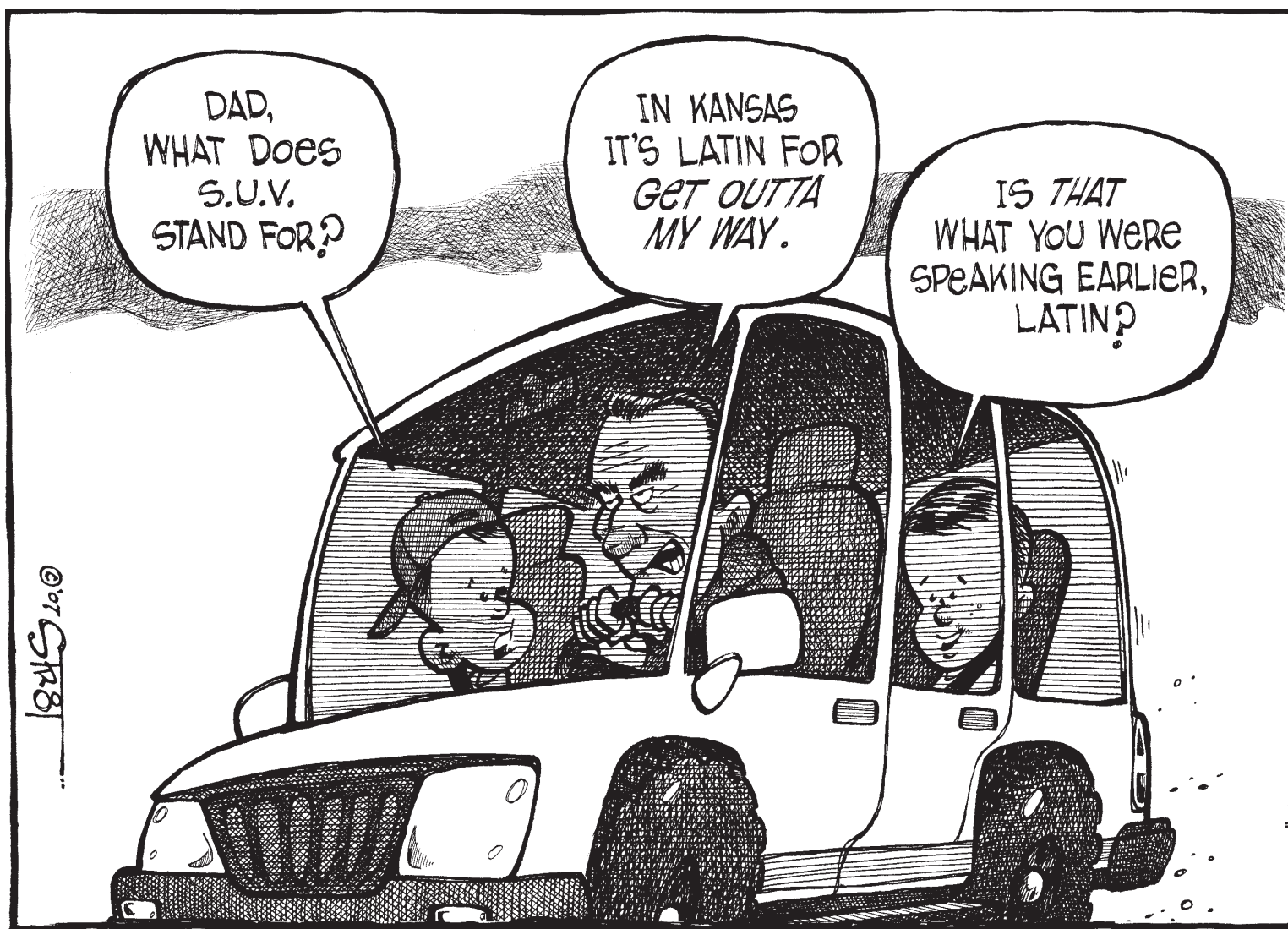


from our viewpoint...

Is there an answer to exiting Iraq?

Ah, the war. We seem to have proven that the U.S. is no good at occupying hostile territory. Not to say that we told you so, but we predicted that four years ago. No one doubted that American forces would enter Baghdad — or that we would conquer all of Iraq. The question was whether we could, should or would, hold it. When we toppled the cruel government of Saddam Hussein, our troops were welcomed by millions of Iraqis. After four years of fighting, you wonder if they aren't even more anxious today to get the war over with than we are. Meantime, our troops are tied down in a war of attrition in which we are far less willing to lose men and political capital than the enemy, who appear to be a distinct minority including many foreigners. It is a war we are winning by any measure except will. We are simply too nice to occupy a place like this, where friend and foe look so much alike. We care about civilian casualties, and unlike many armies, ours prosecutes people who step over the line and abuse prisoners or civilians. That's good, but it makes it tough to fight the sort of ruthless opponent we face. You have to be vicious to hold occupied territory. The Romans knew that. So did the Nazis. So did the Russians. Americans are not that way, and more power to us. But before you vote to cut and run, remember that no one in the Mideast — save for al-Qaida — wants us to just up and leave. Everyone wants the war to be over, yes. No one wants us to just leave. The result would be chaos, experts and Mideastern leaders say, a blood bath followed by "ethnic cleansing" on a large scale. Central Iraq would be left to a Taliban-style government, Kurds would take over in the north, Shiites in the south. Oddly enough, that's pretty much a U.S. Senate resolution last month calls for, a three-way division of Iraq. Iraqi leaders condemned the idea. The fall of Iraq would allow Iran, a huge nation led by a terrorist, to turn all its resources to producing unrest in Afghanistan, leading sooner or later to victory for the Taliban in that mountainous nation. And a return to the cruel theocracy which saw women victimized and unbelievers persecuted until four years ago. We may not have gotten into Iraq for the best of reasons, but do we want to walk away from a war we are winning by most any objective measure and leave people to that fate? What kind of country are we, really? What do you think? It'd be good to hear from the average voter, from the anti-war liberals and from the veterans back from the lines. Why not write and let us know. Congress is waiting to hear from you. There has to be a way to extract our troops from this place and leave some semblance of hope for the human beings we leave behind. Who has the magic answer? — *Steve Haynes*



Pampered college kids

Boy, are college kids living like kings. I feel bad for them.

According to The Associated Press, many universities are tearing down traditional dormitories in favor of upscale living quarters — posh facilities that offer private suites, granite countertops, designer furniture and satellite TV.

Today's college kids don't have to worry about much. Maid and laundry services are now available. Heck, kids don't even have to pack up the station wagon when moving in. Moving companies do that for them.

Why are universities pampering these kids? They have to attract students.

More than 90 percent of today's students had their own bedroom. They aren't used to sharing. They aren't used to working hard to attain things, either. Their dual-income parents gave them every nicety our prosperous civilization offers.

My college experience was certainly different.

To come up with my Penn State tuition, my father worked overtime while I labored as a stonemason. Even with college loans, I had just enough money to buy what I needed (a college education) but never enough to buy what I wanted (nice clothes, a car, even a Friday-night pizza).

I worked some unpleasant jobs in college: dishwasher, janitor, handyman, grass cutter. I worked as a bouncer, too, which involved kicking drunk people out of bars and mopping up that which some patrons couldn't keep down.

I sold my plasma. During the first semester



tom purcell

• commentary

of my junior year, I went to a medical clinic twice a week. They sucked out my blood, spun off the plasma, then gave me my blood back. Not only did I make 10 bucks every time I went, I noticed that one beer had the effect of three — which translated into great savings at the pub.

Of course, selling my plasma nearly killed me. When my mother discovered how I'd gotten so pale and gaunt, my father had to keep her from strangling me.

To save money my senior year, I managed a rooming house. It was a big old dump of a place. It was allegedly haunted, too. A high school fellow who lived there shot himself in 1932 — in the same room I lived in. I never saw the ghost, though.

That job involved shoveling coal to keep the furnace going, picking up knocked-over garbage cans to keep the rats and raccoons away, and settling disputes with some very colorful tenants who were always squabbling about something.

My parents visited me there once and when they saw my room, the centerpiece of which was a lumpy bed sitting on cinder blocks, and the bathroom I shared with 14 others (don't ask), my mother grew as pale as I was after selling my plasma twice a week for three

months.

Yet I was WAY better off than today's college kids. It was by NOT living in the lap of luxury that I enjoyed many memorable experiences — experiences that helped me develop.

Because I was broke, I was forced to work odd jobs. I worked with interesting people from all economic levels. I gained valuable insight into their lives and their struggles.

Because I lived in a dump, I was forced to share a bathroom and kitchen with total strangers. I went on to become good friends with some of these people. I learned how to interact, socialize and get along — skills that have been helpful in the business world and in life.

I graduated from Penn State eager and hungry to succeed. I found a job as a writer and was able to buy my first brand-new car, a 1984 Pontiac Sunbird. There is no satisfaction greater than that.

Many of today's college kids won't enjoy any of these experiences. Too many, thanks to parents who lavished them with all kinds of stuff they didn't need, will remain spoiled, self-centered and full of self-importance.

When they finally go out into the real world, they won't be happy to find what reality has waiting for them. They'll have to learn a humbleness that I was able to get out of the way in college.

That's why I feel bad for them. Their college experience won't be one-tenth as valuable as mine was.

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A few questions for Fred Thompson

Fred Thompson's opening shot in launching his campaign on the Jay Leno show was impressive, but now he has to forget the sound bites and the folksy advice and get down to brass tacks.

To begin with, he has to give the voters in the primary states a good reason to pick him over all the other Republican candidates. He has to tell them not only where he stands on the issues, but also what he plans to do about them.

It's not enough to say he wants a better America — after all, everybody wants that. He has to spell out how he plans to get there.

What is he going to do to give us the smaller government candidates keep promising but never seem to provide?

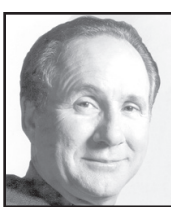
What is he going to do to win the war in Iraq and the war against terrorism?

How does he plan to create a fairer income tax system that rewards hard work rather than punishes it?

He needs to answer those questions and be very specific in his answers.

The voters won't want to know how he feels about issues — they can get all that touchy-feely stuff from the Democrats — they want to know exactly what he plans to do about them, and how he plans to do it.

He has to explain how he plans to deal with Capitol Hill, where the Democrats control both



michael reagan

• making sense

houses of Congress and aren't exactly enthusiastic about the Republican way of doing things.

For that matter, what would he do while running for the presidency to help his party regain control of the Congress in the 2008 elections if he's at the top of the ticket? While the media consider that impossible, the utter failure of the Democrats in Congress to do anything worthwhile gives the GOP a fighting chance.

In other words, what would he do to provide the coattails that could carry Congressional candidates into Washington with him?

Does he understand that he needs to reach out to Republican officeholders and candidates all across the nation and help them stay in office or win a seat in Congress in order to build the kind of organizational support he will need to win the various state primaries?

Does he understand that the national polls that show Giuliani ahead and Thompson running in second or third place are meaningless? What does count are what the locals and state polls

show, because that's where he'll win or lose.

Does he realize how much hard, grueling, boots-on-the-ground campaigning in every nook and cranny of Iowa and New Hampshire, South Carolina and Florida he'll have to do? Is he ready to develop calluses from shaking hands with tens of thousands of voters, and blisters on his feet from slogging through hot streets or getting his feet cold and wet plowing through snow banks?

The voters don't want to know how he feels about America; they want to know how he feels about them. Does he see them merely as prospective votes, or as fellow Americans he really wants to serve and protect as their president?

Fred Thompson must realize that Republicans are looking for more than a presidential candidate — they're hungry for a leader. The GOP hasn't had a genuine, inspired leader since Newt Gingrich, and before that, my dad, Ronald Reagan.

Given that fact, how does Fred Thompson plan to fill that void? How does he plan to provide the leadership his party craves?

Fred, last night in the debate (which you passed up because you made the judgment that you would rather be watched by six million Jay Leno viewers rather than the mere one million who watched Fox), you allowed John McCain to resurface and tell everybody that a candidate is not elected to manage the presidency, but to be the nation's leader.

You need to present your leadership vision to the voters in concrete terms. How do you plan to lead your party, and how do you plan to lead America?

Running for the presidency is a tall order. If you're ready to do all these things in the months ahead, and do them with every ounce of energy and determination you can summon up, you may well be the leader this nation desperately needs.

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