

from our viewpoint...

## State has worst 'welcome' signs

Kansas has some of the worst "welcome" signs in the nation. If you don't believe us, go up to the border and check - if you can even read the sign.

We can't. That's the first problem.

In an apparent effort to save scarce state cash, the Sebelius administration got these down to nearly the size of a "city limit" sign. And while we applaud frugality, you gotta be able to read the sign to get the effect.

We think the sign says "Welcome to" before Kansas, but who can read it on a postage stamp? A temporary "Welcome Hunters" sign is a lot bigger.



Our neighbor to the north, by contrast, has big, bold signs that feature a covered wagon or a cowboy and a slogan, such as "Nebraska, the good life." Nothing fancy, but readable.

Kansas once had such signs, big green ones that said "Kansas, Midway USA." These featured an oversized sunflower with a "stalk" - really the I-beam holding up the sign - set at an angle.

A separate panel that read, "Robert B. Docking, governor," offended the Republican Legislature and may have set the stage for later changes. None was for the better.

As governors came and went, so did the signs. All would be replaced as a new administration hired a new ad agency which produced new slogans and logos. What waste!

The sunflowers fell, their sign extension taken up by "Ah Kansas" logos. That slogan, paid for by the Bill Bennett regime, was forgettable, as was the later "Kansas, simply wonderful."

The Joan Finney administration replaced those with a Kansas logo that seemed to explode into confetti, product of yet another agency. Then, under Bill Graves, the governor's wife, Linda, designed a sign with a big, ugly sunflower and a purple background.

Those came down when the Sebelius gang hired yet another agency to produce yet another state "image." A wavy logo appeared on everything from stationery to signs, but the size dropped so far you can't read 'em.

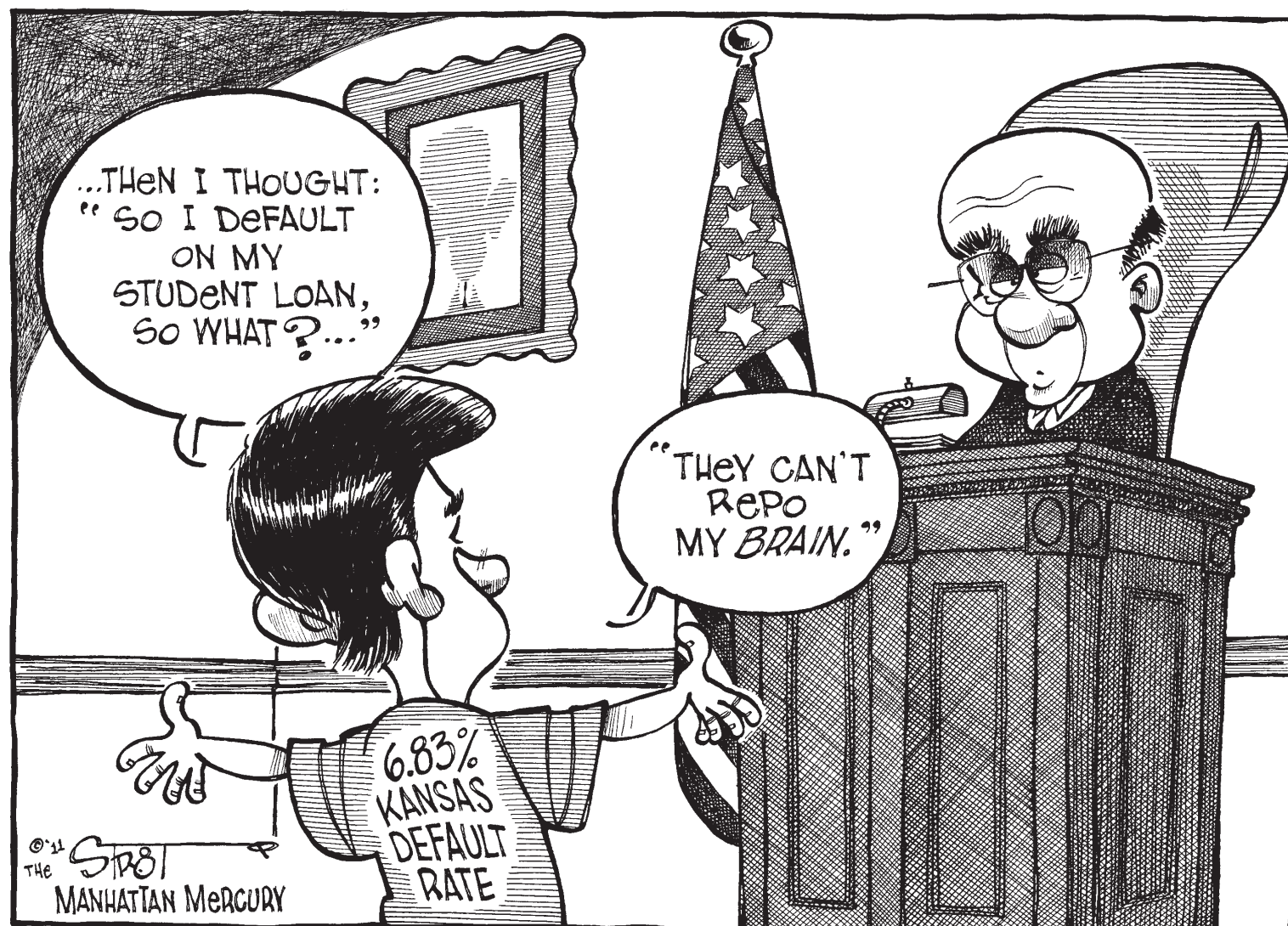
If there's a theme here, it's that governors can waste a lot of money paying ever-willing agencies to produce an "image" that will be canned four to eight years later. No Legislature should allow money for that.

The second lesson might be that simple is better, that any slogan should be enduring - or on a plate that can be easily changed with the administration - and that the sunflower is the most recognizable symbol we have.

We've been the Sunflower State, the Wheat State and a lot of other things. Sunflowers are attractive and the image sticks around.

Kansas should put up permanent border signs. The rest is just politics - or the fuzzy thinking of underage kids at some New York agency.

Make 'em big enough to read and leave 'em up. That's the way to do it. - Steve Haynes



## Can't get worked up over school mascot

I just can't get too worked up about the Red Devils mascot and logo for the Oberlin high school teams.

Given its history, this tradition is harmless enough. The story goes that the editor of the Norton newspaper wrote, back in the 1920s, that the Bluejays had to play "those red devils from Oberlin" the next week.

It's not recorded what the school's mascot was at the time, if any. But the sobriquet apparently caught the fancy of the Decatur Community High student body, and Red Devils they became.

The mascot has come under attack time and time again, but it's a strong and dearly held tradition. In a day when many such images, team names such as "Indians" or "Chiefs," come under fire as politically incorrect, Red Devils seems sort of tame. Several colleges, the most prominent of them church-sponsored, use devil logos.

One Kansas town found out the hard way, you can't just copy someone else's mascot, at least, not if you sell merchandise with the logo on it.

Lord protect us from the do-gooders of the left and the right. And while you're at it, from big-time colleges and their lawyers, too.

Besides, arguing about symbols like the Red Devil just keeps us from dealing with the real problems in our society. Church leaders, some of whom seem to have nothing better to do, ought to be tackling these.

Our society used to have rules. Some may



**steve haynes**

• along the sappa

have been arbitrary and unfair, but they served the common good by promoting behavior that was best for the individual, the family, for society as a whole.

And in those days, rules was rules: Marriage was considered sacred, sin was wrong - and a young woman who got pregnant out of wedlock was expected to give the baby up for adoption.

Starting about 1960, all of that went out the window. Our parents' generation started getting divorces. Blacks pushed for civil rights. Drugs became prevalent. The states muscled the mob out of the gambling business. And "Keep the baby, Faith" was not just a funny turn on a slogan. "Living in sin" became the thing to do.

Many of the changes were for the better. Many were long overdue. But with the rules thrown out the window, we lost the certainty that some things simply were for the best.

And so today, even though research shows that children do better with two parents, a stable home life, more financial support and a strong moral upbringing which gives a sense of responsibility, we're not allowed to criticize those who choose some other path.

Not that it's impossible for a single parent or a couple living outside the bounds of matrimony to raise good children, but that it's a lot more difficult. The child of a single parent will more often grow up in poverty, without strong discipline and moral guidance, without a strong male figure to influence their development.

I'm not one to condemn the woman who decides to keep her baby, but in an era when we question parents who spank their children, shouldn't someone stick up for what's best for the baby?

Or do we live in a time when doing whatever feels good is not just your right, but OK, too?

After the beating death of yet another Kansas child at the hands of a live-in "boyfriend," someone said that "It's never OK to leave your baby with your boyfriend." But what about having the baby out of wedlock, or having the boyfriend rather than a stable family life? Those may not amount to abuse, but is anyone going to argue that this lifestyle is good for children?

As a Christian, I do believe in Satan, the Devil. I'm pretty sure I see his handiwork in our society. It's always been there. Temptations abound.

But instead of tilting at metaphoric windmills, shouldn't we tackle the real issues head on, for the sake of the children?

I wouldn't start with a high school logo. Start with the kids.

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## Tree-house Heaven



**Insight this week**

• john schlageck

cess to plenty of lumber. Dad had several piles blocked up in our big shed. There were several abandoned barns we raided to build our tree houses. We also built rafts and planes.

Before we began construction on our tree house, we made a wooden ladder up the side of the trunk. For this we sawed two-foot lengths of lumber and secured them to the tree with two nails. Add any more and the boards would split.

We hoisted lumber for the platform of our tree house with ropes and secured it in a good deep crotch in the elm. On this first tree house, we didn't stop with a simple platform but continued with walls that extended waist high.

Once finished, we proceeded to hoist all the essentials for our fort above ground. This included Red Ryder bb guns, binoculars, a tarp in case of rain, plenty of water and hand-picked fruit from our trees at home.

Every once in a Blue Moon, we'd haul up an old galvanized bucket, fill it with dry twigs, build a fire and roast marshmallows over the flames. There was always a rope on the bucket in case the fire raged out of control and we needed to move it out of our tree house.

Harken back to the days when you were a kid. Being outside was fun. Heck, it was everything and more often than not messy.

But that was fun. Acceptable. It's what we did.

Messy meant jumping in the middle of a mud puddle with your clothes on. Messy meant scaling a giant dirt pile down next to the elevator but most of all being a kid meant messing around in the vacant to next to the church.

Growing up in a small rural community of 50 hearty souls, this vacant lot was a fertile source of education as important as any classroom. It was our world of make believe, where we played, laughed, cried, cultivated our imaginations and learned to get along with others.

It was here, away from parental oversight our values developed and we morphed from childhood to manhood. We didn't even realize this was happening. We were just living every day in the present and having fun.

This vacant lot is where we played football, pom-pom pull away, rollers, bouncers and flies, constructed forts, dug tunnels and built our first tree house. All the things our parents would not let us do in our own yards.

One of our first tree houses was a real challenge. First, my brother, Albert and I had to select the best and tallest Chinese elm in the row north of the church. This tree had to sport a straight, heavy base limb, preferably the thickest one to support our structure.

Living in a small, rural village we had ac-

## where to write

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From our perch high above the mere mortals who walked some 25 feet below us, we lived our days in another world. One of our favorite activities involved bird watching. We loved seeing the Robbins and King birds carefully building their nests. We couldn't wait to see the eggs the momma birds laid and patiently sat on until they hatched into the ugly, naked chicks.

We watched for hours as the parents brought wiggling worms to the chicks who ate everything dropped into their snapping beaks. Seems they never got enough. Ever wonder how many careers of future biologists began in a vacant lot?

And while we tried to be there when the young birds flew for the first time, we didn't always see their inaugural flights. We often wondered how many made the grade and how many were snapped up by marauding neighborhood felines.

One of the absolute best things about our tree house was the advantage it gave us for picking off the pesky sparrows which were the only birds we were allowed to shoot with our bb guns. We didn't like them much anyway because they were such scavengers and ate more than their fair share of bird seed.

The vacant lot in our little village was our ticket to an abundance of far-away adventures. We went on safari with Smilin' Jack, tracked down Indians with Jim Bridger and battled at the Alamo with Davey Crockett. Just about anything we could think of we did as youngsters using our imaginations and the vacant lots.

Some days we did nothing at all but lay on our backs while looking up at the big sky of Western Kansas. Thoughts rolled through our minds like the passing clouds overhead.

We didn't want for much as youngsters in those days gone by. Everything we desired was right there in the vacant lot.

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