

OPINION

THE HUTCHINSON NEWS

Editorial Board

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EDITORIAL

Agent Brownback

Governor apologizes but snooping is troubling

Two things every Kansan needs to know about Gov. Sam Brownback: One, his office is actively monitoring what you say about him online, and two, he will rat you out if he finds your online opining less than flattering.

Emma Sullivan, a senior at Shawnee Mission East High School in Prairie Village, found herself in the principal's office last week after she jokingly posted comments about Brownback during his appearance at a Kansas Youth in Government gathering.

"Just made mean comments at gov brownback and told him he sucked, in person #heblowsalot," Sullivan's tweet read.

Brownback's spokeswoman, Sherriene Jones-Sontag, said her office routinely monitors social media to see what Kansans are thinking and saying. When they found Sullivan's tweet, the office forwarded a copy to school officials to make them aware of what students were saying about the governor.

The school's principal chastised Sullivan for creating such a problem and ordered her to write an apology letter to the governor. Sullivan said she only had about 60 Twitter followers and viewed the post as largely anonymous.

The teenage girl's tweet, her Twitter account and Brownback's reaction to the situation didn't remain anonymous for long. Sullivan now has more than 9,000 Twitter followers, and the story of a thin-skinned governor tattling on a high school student made national headlines.

On Monday the governor apologized for his staff's over-reaction.

The concern about this issue is twofold. The first is that Brownback's office is actively building a dossier of Kansans' comments about him. That his office uncovered a one-time tweet from a high school student with few followers indicates that such efforts aren't casual in nature. The second concern is that when Brownback's office finds a comment offensive or disagreeable, it is willing to take steps to create problems for the person who posted the comment.

Whatever one's view on Brownback or his policies, there can be no dispute that Kansans of all ages have the right to say how they feel without fear of retaliation or retribution. Even a high school student has the constitutional right to say what she wants about the governor - and should be free from any fear that the government will take steps to silence her.

By the end of the weekend, Sullivan announced that she had no plans to offer an insincere apology to the governor. Brownback's apology followed soon after.



COLUMNISTS

The best Christmas present of all

From what I could see we had a golden "Black Friday;" that annual frenzy after Thanksgiving Day when the shopping season officially begins and when merchants measure their hopes and expectations for a solid bottom-line in bold black profits for the year: There sure were a lot of shoppers at the store I visited; business was brisk, there were lines at the check-out counters, and the staff was smiling and cheerful; and I was at a hardware store. Probably on Saturday the vendors of America sang their favorite carol: "What a friend we have in Jesus!" With America's struggling economy an exciting and energetic commerce across the counter bodes well for the future. Now it is on toward the climax of Christmas morning and the shared joy of folks around the country getting all the stuff purchased during the shopping season. It should be a frolicking four weeks of sales.

Community columnist



Father Bob Layne

magical electronic gadgets, the promises of continuing joy and happiness will be shouted if we but "buy!" Of course most of us know deep down that this promise simply isn't true. After years of believing and buying and trying we must face the truth that there aren't enough of the things of this world to make us truly happy! Whatever the world offers, it eventually rusts, breaks, wears out, goes out of style, becomes obsolete or loses its attractiveness. We humans have never been able to master our boredom. Always there must be that which is "new, improved, the latest, the greatest, or just plain 'in' that relieves our boredom." We can "shop 'till we drop," but eventually all that effort is in vain, and we must begin again.

For the truth is there really isn't enough "stuff" in all the world to completely satisfy our emptiness, calm our restlessness and lift our constant anxiety. With each passing year we're always disappointed and endlessly longing for more. Even if we do receive "THE gift" for Christmas, or even get all the desires on our "WISH list," boredom inevitable seeps in! What's new and exciting for a moment swiftly becomes "used," drab, dated and dull. We find ourselves again empty and unsatisfied! With a sigh of resignation, we mutter the world's empty

hope, "Maybe next year?" So many of us truly do chase our tails.

But there is, of course, an alternative to all this "running in circles." So I offer this commercial for the only reality that lasts a lifetime and is never boring. Some two thousand years ago a child was born who, when He became a man, promised to give all humankind "living water" and "the bread of life:" water that would quench our arid lives and bread that would enliven our empty hearts. I once was captured by a sign outside a little country church that read, "Jesus saves and satisfies." I've learned the message on the sign was profoundly true. Jesus does satiate our insatiable longings, and with His forgiveness, His presence and His hope, He is the one who can truly bring that longed for "Peace on earth, and good will to men!" And amazingly, such real "stuff" is totally free and available for the asking. It is Jesus who brings "mirth out of the world's madness," and brings "light into our hearts" even in the world's darkness. And that's really worth celebrating. Only if we seek Him can Christ-mass truly be "joyful and blessed." The world wishes us to be merry, the Lord Jesus promises us blessedness. "Merriment wanes and dies" but "blessedness last for eternity." I hope that this year Jesus is your "must have gift," and with Him I pray that you have a very "Blessed Christ-mass." Jesus does "save and satisfy!"

Bob Layne, the slightly reverend (I was never known for my piety), is a retired Episcopal priest living in McPherson, supplying on Sundays in parishes with no resident clergy. I still love to talk about Jesus. Email: fatherbob33@cox.net.

READER OPINIONS FROM HUTCHNEWS.COM

•... I'll cut Brownback's staff a little slack. It is not terribly out-of-line to scan the Internet for legitimate threats. However, this was no threat and the over-reaction was monumental. ...

•... You didn't mention Principal Karl R. Krawitz by name. His cowardly actions deserve criticism as well.

•Reminds me of Richard Nixon. He was paranoid, too.

•... The school principal should be standing up for his student's rights. ...

•(Brownback's staff don't) deserve any slack and neither does the spineless principal. The principal should have blown off the call entirely. ... Brownback needs a good high school course in the Constitution. He is a poor excuse for a public servant.

•... My son is recovering from near-fatal wounds he received in Afghanistan, protecting, among other things, this young lady's right to free speech. (Brownback is) not worthy of the office you hold. ...

•Brownback is a disgrace to the people and great state of Kansas while Emma Sullivan is a heroine of her generation. His tactics look like totalitarianism, and she represents democracy. ...

•The tweet, while disrespectful, came from an immature high school student. The response was

classic over-reaction and representative of an insecure, petty and vindictive public official. ...

•... I shake my head in shame (at) Gov. Brownback, Principal Krawitz and members of the elite Kansas Secret Social Media Police.

•... Brownback should put away the Nixon playbook and apologize to all Kansans.

•Brownback has the right to monitor, but reporting to the principal is a clear violation of the First Amendment. ...

•The fun will really begin when "The View," Bill Maher and other comedians blast Brownback on this one, and he can do nothing about it. ...

•What else can you expect from our fearless leader and his goons. As an educator and former administrator what I find appalling is the actions of the school principal. He should be defending his students, not carrying out the orders of the governor. ...

•Apparently the governor also monitors public opinion. His somewhat insincere apology turned up today. He apologized for his staff over-reacting, but nothing about monitoring which he has to be spending heavily on since there were not hash tags in the message the student sent with his name in it. Also, nothing yet from the overly reactive principal. The school district and outraged parents should be all over that. ...

WESTERN FRONT

Real issue with tweet

I believe that we have lost sight of the real issues regarding Emma Sullivan's tweet while at the Youth in Government Conference. The issue is not whether Ms. Sullivan had the "right" to tweet her defamatory remarks. Of course she had the "right" to do so. Thank God for free speech. Thank God we have the right to speak up when we feel that our politicians are making poor decisions. Speaking up is not only our

right, but our responsibility. However, Ms. Sullivan was invited to be a participant in this conference. She was a guest. The real issue is not about "rights." The real issue is about expressing ourselves effectively and appropriately when we disagree. The real issue is about good manners and respect - something we see too little of, not only in teens, but in all of us.

ROSE ALDERSON Nickerson

JOIN THE DISCUSSION

The News encourages readers to share their opinions on this page and offers a number of ways to do so:

(1) Write a letter to the Western Front on any topic. Send to The News at 300 W. Second Ave., Hutchinson, KS, 67504-0190; fax to (620) 662-4186 or email to westernfront@hutchnews.com.

Letters should be limited to 500 words. Poems, consumer complaints, business testimonials and group-written letters will not be accepted. Please sign your name and provide your address and a phone number so

we may call to verify the letter. We strive to publish letters within one week of verification. There is a 30-day waiting period between submissions. Western Front letters are subject to editing for space considerations and libel concerns.

(2) Respond directly to a newspaper editorial by joining our online opinions blog. Go to www.hutchnews.com/editorialblogs and comment on any of our latest posts. A selection of constructive comments may be excerpted to go with opinions that are published in a later print edition of The News.

Compassionate conservatism: The sequel?

During the presidential campaign of 2000, George W. Bush was criticized by some conservatives for calling himself a "compassionate conservative." Some believed the term to be redundant.

Now we're in the middle of the 2012 presidential campaign and candidate Newt Gingrich has called for a "humane" policy on illegal immigrants. Gingrich wants illegal residents who have been in America for 25 years to stay, so as not to "separate families."

Seeking to clarify comments he made during the Republican debate on national security last week, Gingrich told Fox News, "I am for deporting all recent unattached illegals. I am for a local citizen panel to consider certification of those who have been here 25 years and have family and community (ties) and have been law abiding and taxpaying."

While I salute Gingrich's validation of "family values," there are several problems with his suggestion.

First, why 25 years? Why not 24, or 23? How about 15? What if the children are adults? If a single parent remained because of divorce or death, would that parent be deported?

Second, what is to keep the local citizen panel from being co-opted by liberal interest groups working for the Democratic Party? Gingrich's call to "...be humane in enforcing the law without giving them citizenship..." may sound good to some, but once those here illegally have been "certified," interest groups will surely lobby on their behalf for full citizenship.

Republicans should not have to prove their "compassion" by sup-



Cal Thomas

porting a statute of limitations on lawbreakers. Instead, Republicans should present examples of immigrants who have come to America legally and built a life while obeying the law.

Gingrich is correct when he says we are not about to round up 11 million illegal immigrants, as America rounded up more than 100,000 Japanese at the start of World War II, many of them U.S. citizens. But doing nothing or granting Gingrich's proposed "path to legality" (through certification) will only draw more illegals.

In my ideal world (and some U.S. laws might have to change to accomplish it), this is what I think should be done: Illegal immigrants who have jobs, pay taxes and are law abiding can stay as temporary residents provided they are doing jobs no American citizen wants to do. An employer can prove that by advertising for a position and if no citizen applies, the illegal immigrant may be hired for a fixed period of time, after which the position must be advertised again.

The illegal immigrant should be forbidden any unemployment or welfare benefits. Medical insurance, or the cost of any care, should be provided by the employer. Immigrant children can be educated in public schools (and taught English) provided their parents pay property

taxes. If an illegal immigrant is renting or living with others, he or she should pay a certain amount to defray the cost of education. If a child is born in America to illegal immigrants, that child should not automatically receive U.S. citizenship (a court ruling reinterpreting the Constitution would be required to change the automatic granting of citizenship to children of illegal immigrants born in the U.S.)

After two or three renewals of the illegal's special visa, the person must return to his or her native land for a specified period of time and then apply for re-entry.

Should the illegal immigrant desire citizenship, that person should first learn English and American history. The path ought to be rigorous so that we know the person is coming to America for more than just the goodies the U.S. government provides.

Most importantly, we must protect and secure our country's borders. Gingrich's hero, Ronald Reagan, is credited with saying, "A nation that cannot control its borders is not a nation."

Something else troubles me about this debate. Why is it compassionate to suggest ways for people who have broken our laws to escape the consequences but cruel to require that they obey our laws in not entering the country illegally in the first place?

Everyone wants a better life for themselves and their children. American citizens mostly seek that better life by conforming to the law. Illegal immigrants should do the same.

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Doonesbury

