

# OPINION

**THE HUTCHINSON NEWS**

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**EDITORIALS**

## Real science

State board's approval of standards good news for students

It shouldn't be news when a state agrees to allow science teachers to use established scientific theory in their classrooms. But this is Kansas, a state unfortunately known for its repeated fits about whether what the rest of the educated world calls science is fact or fiction.

Last week the Kansas Board of Education voted 8-2 to adopt guidelines that accept both evolution and climate change as central scientific concepts to be taught from kindergarten through high school.

Previous debates about classroom science standards in Kansas included sparring about how to teach evolution – with five different science standards during a 10-year period from 1997 to 2007.

The Board of Education approved last week adopting standards developed and used by 25 other states and the National Research Council. They also will bring a shift to more hands-on learning and incorporate engineering and technology information into classrooms.

The vote is good news for Kansas students, who should be taught what is accepted as central concepts in the world's scientific community. Evolution is treated as such, as is climate change. The sci-

entific evidence to support both is overwhelming and helps shape the basis of modern scientific understanding.

But not everyone on the board agrees on the definition of science.

BOE member Ken Willard of Hutchinson was one of two votes against the standards, ironically saying that the teaching of evolution and climate change is done "dogmatically" and that such scientific standards amount to "little more than indoctrination in political correctness." This from a man who seemingly would include Sunday school lessons in classroom science classes. Yet, students should be taught science in science class and religion in religion class.

Likewise, the evidence that the earth's overall temperature has warmed since the industrial revolution is indisputable. There might be disagreement about the root cause, but the fact remains that the earth is warmer today than it was a century ago and that it is affecting the world's weather patterns.

Kansas students deserve a complete understanding of science, taught in the way that is accepted throughout the world's scientific community. To ignore prevailing scientific knowledge because it doesn't agree with a certain belief or ideology is both morally wrong and potentially dangerous.

## Farm bill

Senate legislation not perfect, but it improves federal policy

U.S. Sen. Pat Roberts of Kansas was right when he criticized the new farm bill that passed his chamber for price supports that benefit primarily Southern crops such as peanuts and rice. He voted against the bill.

But his Kansas colleague, Sen. Jerry Moran, was right to vote for the bill. While it has its warts, it does bolster crop insurance, disaster aid and conservation programs. Those are the ways federal farm policy ought to support the nation's farmers and ranchers.

"Among my concerns, I am disappointed the farm bill includes target prices," Roberts said. "We had an opportunity to build upon the reforms of last year's Senate-passed bill. Instead, this bill looks in the rear-view mirror for outdated policies that cause the farmer to plant for the government and not the market."

The Senate-passed bill still has vestiges of anti-market policy-making, to be sure. But it does eliminate one of the most unpalatable compo-

nents of the current farm bill – direct payments that favor large farmers over small operators.

Moran was right that the farm bill the Senate passed last year – but wasn't supported in the House – was better. But this one still moves agriculture policy in the right direction.

The efforts of the Senate may be improved upon over in the House, where lawmakers will want to cut spending on farm programs more aggressively, especially food stamps. While the Senate bill carved \$2.4 billion a year in spending, a bill that has emerged from the House Agriculture Committee slashes \$4 billion.

The cost of food stamps has more than doubled in the past five years. While eligibility may need to be restricted, the cost of fraud seems a far bigger problem.

The House bill also eliminates a \$5 billion-a-year support that pays farmers whether they farm or not.

House Speaker John Boehner said he would vote for the bill to advance it to a House-Senate conference committee. That's what is needed to get new farm legislation that represents progress from current policy.



THE MONSTER UNDER THE BED

**COLUMNISTS**

## The difficulty in explaining fatherhood

No one really tells you what it's like to be a father.

For the most part, posters, greeting cards and book covers about fatherhood show a man smiling and playing with an eager toddler who is full of laughter and excitement.

Those images, however, don't show the anxiety or fear, the worry or the weight that comes with bearing responsibility for a life other than your own. They don't show the sleepless nights filled with concern about whether you're teaching your children well, showing them how to love, have compassion, share, make sound decisions and consider the world around them. In those mass-produced images, there's no hint that the father is worried about whether he's exercised too much, or too little, discipline in his children. Those joyful photographs don't show the heartbreak a father feels when his children are hurt, sick or struggling on the often-confusing path to adulthood.

I remember well the day I became a father. I was a 20-year-old kid who was horribly unprepared to care for a child, to be charged with her protection and tasked with moving a soul from infancy to adulthood.

And I was scared beyond words.

That changed the instant I saw my newborn daughter, and I could see, hear and touch my child for the first time. My fear was replaced with love, and my anxiety washed away with a resolve to be a good father – or at least as good a father as I was capable of becoming.

Nearly four years later, I became a father again with the birth of my son. With the experience gained from my daughter, I had built a solid record of not dropping, misplacing, accidentally crushing or otherwise losing or damaging a baby, so I felt less fearful about caring for an infant.

Again, I felt the love and determination to care and provide for my child, to help him grow, learn and become a good man.

Yet, the weight of fatherhood has been unceasing. I worry about the many mistakes I've made along the way, and the times I've been too preoccupied with work, money or another of life's problems. I worry about the examples I've set, and whether my actions



Jason Probst

and words will serve to make my children the strong, self-reliant, thoughtful and compassionate people I want them to become.

I like to think I'm not alone in this. As the self-perceived strongest member of the family, a father carries the burden of protecting and providing for the weakest member of the family and all those in between.

Unfortunately, the image of a father in today's popular culture isn't flattering. In some cases, the father is an absent abstraction – a person with a name who rarely makes an appearance and has little involvement in the day-to-day rearing of his children. In other cases, the father is portrayed as a buffoon who can barely manage to avoid injury or death without the interference of his family members.

The truth about modern fatherhood might be even worse. According to the National Fatherhood Initiative, one in three American children doesn't live with his or her father. Additionally, children whose fathers aren't around are more likely to live in poverty, drop out of school, get crosswise with the law, end up in prison or struggle with substance abuse.

That's not to take anything away from the millions of single mothers who day-after-day and year-after-year fill the role of mother and father. Frankly, I admire their endurance and strength, and after passing through the fire of a teenage daughter, I wonder how single parents ever manage to make it out alive.

But America seems to have accepted the idea that men will produce children that they won't care for, and fathers have accepted the idea that they have little value to their children's well-being. That's sad, because fathers play a critical role in shaping their children's futures. And though it is the most

challenging thing a man will ever be asked to do, not a single task he will ever do is more rewarding or fulfilling than investing his life in his children.

I remember people telling me as a young man that "anyone can have children, but it takes a real man to be a father." With one child on the cusp of 19 and another nearing 16, I completely understand the meaning of that phrase. There are a hundred things a man can do that are easier, less demanding and less fearful than being a father. But had I not tried to be a father to my children, I suspect I wouldn't have been much of a man at all.

No, the books, posters and greeting cards have it all wrong. Fatherhood isn't an easy stroll down a tree-lined lane or a bike ride through the park.

Fatherhood is seeing a child's first steps and the feel of your heart racing as your daughter toddles into your arms. It's your son following you around, mimicking your movements and saying he wants to be like "Daddy."

Fatherhood is a living room puppet show performed on a stage built from couch cushions and extra bed sheets. It's the look on your son's face when he realizes he's riding his bicycle on his own for the first time. Being a father is Princess tea parties and making up silly voices for the characters of your child's favorite books.

Fatherhood is your heart breaking as you stand over a sick child, and begging God to take anything from you in exchange for this boy's health.

Fatherhood is watching your children grow and being helpless to stop them from stepping into the pitfalls of life. It's knowing that you might not be doing it all right and accepting that you would've handled some things differently, if given another chance.

Fatherhood is elation and fear, strength and weakness, and joy and pain all forced together into a unique type of enduring love that is difficult to explain and even harder to condense into a few words.

But fathers know it is worth it. Jason Probst is news editor for The Hutchinson News. Email: jprobst@hutchnews.com.



**JOIN THE DISCUSSION**

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

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## The curse of Redskins

See if this makes sense to you:

For years, I've argued with certain African-American people about their insistence upon using the so-called N-word which, to my ears, is, inalterably, a statement of self-loathing. They say I don't understand. They say the word no longer means what it has always meant. They say it's just a friendly fraternal greeting.

I say one cannot arbitrarily decide that a word – especially an old and bloodstained word – suddenly means something other than what it always has. I say that while language does change over time, it doesn't do so because a few of us want it to or tell it to. And I say that if I call you an "idiot," but say that "idiot" now means "genius," you will be no less insulted.

Does that seem logical? If so, then perhaps you can understand my impatience with people who insist on defending the Washington football team whose nickname is a racial slur.

The latest is NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell. Recently, he responded to a letter from members of the Congressional Native American Caucus, questioning the appropriateness of the name "Redskins." That name, wrote Goodell, "is a unifying force that stands for strength, courage, pride and respect." The team took the name in 1933, he noted, to honor then-coach William "Lone Star" Dietz, who was reputedly (it is a matter of historical dispute) an American Indian.

"Neither in intent nor use was



Leonard Pitts

the name ever meant to denigrate Native Americans or offend any group," he wrote. In other words, we have changed the meaning. It no longer means what it has always meant.

As it happens Goodell's letter follows a novel – though ultimately failed – effort earlier this year by the Michigan Department of Civil Rights to ban Indian team names and mascots at primary and secondary schools. The complaint MDCR filed with the Education Department argued that such things are not merely insulting, but damaging. It cited the work of Dr. Stephanie Fryberg, an assistant professor at the University of Arizona who has studied the effects of the team names and imagery on Native American students.

She has found empirical proof that those names and imagery lead to lowered self-esteem and sense of community worth among American Indian kids. They also damage aspirations and heighten anxiety and depression.

In other words, seeing their people reduced to mascots is toxic to Indian children. And if the names and images in general are damag-

ing, how much more harmful is "Redskins"?

That name, after all, was never neutral, but was, rather, a hateful epithet hurled by people who were stealing from and committing genocide against, those they saw as savage and subhuman. So calling a football team the "Washington Redskins" as a way of honoring an Indian makes precisely as much sense as calling a soccer team "The Warsaw K-s" as a way of honoring a Jew.

Fans of franchises bearing Indian names often resist changing them out of sentiment. Owners, meanwhile, are loath to tamper with lucrative trademarks.

That's understandable. But it is also short-sighted.

You can delude yourself all you want. Things are what they are, and as Rick Perry learned in 2011 when he was called to answer for a certain inconveniently named rock, this nation's ugly racial past has a way of poking through the polite lies and evasions we use to prettify history and justify ourselves. So it is with Washington's football team and its nickname.

This is not about honor and even less about "strength, courage, pride and respect." It is rather, about moral integrity, intellectual honesty and the immutable weight of certain words. Whether we choose to acknowledge it, or never do, doesn't change the fact: "Redskins" is a curse word.

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