

COMMENTARY

Cheers & Jeers

Jeers: To all who supported the Bedford tax rate rollback. You have no idea (but soon will) of the devastation that this will cause your city. Jeers also to those who were against the rollback but chose not to vote.

Laura Lopez, North Richland Hills

Jeers: To Ron Arendt for his March 1 letter in which he berated senior citizens, and particularly for his remark: "Maybe they could stop taking so many expensive prescription drugs." Arendt owes an apology to all readers, not just seniors, for his sarcastic letter.

Ginger Daniel, Bedford

Cheers: To Rosie and Katie Flores for buying our lunch at Pulido's Mexican Restaurant on July 15, the birthday of our son, Tom. Our belated thanks for being the nice, generous and smiling people that you are.

Avin and Catherine Fenoglio, Fort Worth

Cheers: To Ron Jackson of Fox 4 (KDFW/Channel 4) and Dominica of KSCS/96.3 FM for graciously donating their time and talent to emcee our annual talent show. They did an amazing job, and we loved how they took time to conduct individual interviews with the kids! Cheers also to our students, staff and fabulous parents and volunteers!

Maria Smith,

Deer Creek Elementary School, Crowley

Cheers: To the following Fort Worth schools for receiving Investment Capital Fund grants of \$50,000: Bruce Shulkey, Manuel Jara, D. McRae and Sagamore Hill elementary schools; Wedgwood Middle School; and Diamond Hill-Jarvis High School. Your hard work is benefiting children.

Catherine Dikes,

Fort Worth school district Grants and Development Department

Cheers: To good Samaritans Simon Gabriel, Nora and Rod and to paramedics Ron Morin and Brian Pope for helping me at the scene of my Feb. 26 wreck. Your kindness was greatly appreciated.

Nancy Burks Worcester, Granbury

Cheers: To Bill Fairley for his informative and interesting columns on local history, Fairley's Chronicles? Seems to me a more fetching title would be "Fairley Tales."

Don Woodard, Fort Worth

Jeers: To the supermarket that wouldn't allow the purchase of 30 grocery sacks in support of a middle school field trip. Cheers to the Kroger store that, with a better understanding of community support, donated the needed bags.

Scott Suhr, Fort Worth

Cheers: To Vicki at the Fiesta restaurant on Hemphill Street. She greets you with a bright smile and a friendly personality and makes customers feel like family.

Rex Williams, Fort Worth

Cheers: To firefighter Perkins of Station No. 19 for going the extra mile on his day off. Many thanks for helping me retrieve my keys from our locked vehicle. It's nice to know that chivalry isn't dead.

Maria Torres, River Oaks

Cheers: To a very thoughtful person for finding my gloves and putting them under the windshield wiper of our truck on Feb. 11 as we were having dinner at Colter's in Hurst. Your thoughtfulness is greatly appreciated!

Anne Nichols, Fort Worth

Cheers: To Dance Invasion's Elite Team for its performances at a recent weekend dance competition. You all did a great job! Cheers also to the teachers who work so hard and believe in them every day.

Renae B. Kindle, Arlington

Cheers: To Emily Lewis for the wonderful hot dog supper, Ridglea Rembrandts and silent auction at our school. Cheers also to Emily's many volunteers from the Ridglea Hills PTA and Mustang Muscle who made the evening such a success. It was a great family/school/community affair.

Principal *Jonna R. Murray*,

Ridglea Hills Elementary School, Fort Worth

Cheers: To Oakhurst Presbyterian Church, the Rev. David Fletcher and the helpful staff and members who hosted our fourth-grade writing conference. Cheers also to our staff for organizing the event and leading the various sessions: Angela Cervantez, Bill Welge, Therese Squires, Chip Haro, Mendi White and Kathy Hall. And cheers to our PTA for providing the funds for this meaningful event.

Principal *Marsha R. West*

and Assistant Principal *Paula Carter Taylor*,

Riverside Applied Learning Center, Fort Worth

Cheers: To Rhea Albano in the ladies' shoe department at the Dillard's store in Hulen Mall in Fort Worth for providing exceptional customer service. Thanks for providing the first-class service so rarely seen these days.

Gayle Dalton, Arlington

Cheers: To Dr. Turner and the staff at Ferrell Animal Hospital for your excellent care of our dog during his long illness to the end. Your care and compassion will always be remembered.

Lynda and Jack Egbers, Arlington

Cheers: To Betty Davies and the South Hills Neighborhood Association for donating spiral notebooks – just what our fifth-grade students needed for their science journals. We appreciate your continued support of our educational programs.

Principal *Linda Adrian*,

South Hills Elementary School, Fort Worth

Cheers: To the kind stranger at Kountry Kitchen for paying our meal tab for eight people on Feb. 20. We were parents, Sunday school teachers and young adults of the special-ed Sunday school class at Aldersgate Methodist Church. It was very refreshing to be recipients of such a thoughtful, kind act.

Louise Meaders, Arlington

Cheers: To Ron Chapman for many years of playing the best rock 'n' roll in Texas. I really enjoyed the days when you switched from the format and played songs that are seldom played. To use a Texas phrase, "Your boots will forever remain empty."

Garrett Anderson, Fort Worth

Jeers: To Will Rogers Coliseum for not having handrails installed in the upper-seat areas. The steep concrete steps aren't safe for older people. A single rail could easily be installed down the center of the staircase.

Eldon Phillips, Hurst

Cheers: To Poncho's Flower Villa in Fort Worth for donating 175 carnations to our school for our "Valentine Package" sales. All the profits we made will go directly to our prom. Thanks for supporting our community!

Brian Lott and the Student Leadership Class, Success High School, Fort Worth

Cheers: To Rosemary, assistant manager at the Staples store on University Drive, for keeping safe and returning a wallet that I had left at the store.

Marianne Leal, Crowley

Cheers: To Ginger Head and Bruce Williams of Imagination Celebration for sending Melissa Tibado and the New Art 6 Choir to North Hi Mount Elementary School. Their performances were great. The students and faculty really enjoyed them. You helped make our month of celebrations memorable.

Charlotte Bracey, Fort Worth

Cheers: To Fort Worth Stockyards employees for bringing happiness into people's lives and showing pride in your shows. Thanks for giving to the community and being a Texas landmark. Keep up the good work.

Jerreth Cumberledge, Fort Worth

Cheers: To all the smiling and encouraging volunteers and officers at the Cowtown Marathon on Feb. 26. Volunteers of all ages staffed the fluid stations and did an outstanding job! As a first-time marathoner and Fort Worth native, I was reminded of why I love Fort Worth. We have outstanding residents.

Kelle Tillman, Aledo

Jeers: To Sharyn Peterson for her jeer of a police officer who advised a young driver not to yield to animals. I observed a fatal accident involving a young lady who stopped to avoid hitting a cat. She was killed by a tractor-trailer that broadsided her when she stopped.

Dale Loyd, Roanoke

Jeers: To reviewer Punch

Shaw for not "getting" the standup comic Larry The Cable Guy. (See March 5 review.) I'm not a NASCAR fan and don't engage in any other "redneck" activities, but I do enjoy the humor because it points out the absurdity of people's prejudice.

George Logue, Hurst

Jeers: To the U.S. Postal Service. After I and many others were laid off four days before Christmas, the speed of delivery of first-class mail has steadily declined.

Tracey Wycoff, Lake Worth

Cheers: To Southlake police officer R. Page for rescuing our Micky-cat from a storm drain. Daphne, Elisabeth, Katrina, Margaret, Amanda and Daniel say: God bless you.

Daphne Will, Southlake

Cheers: To the Arlington school district and everyone who camped out at the administration building for the student open-transfer opportunity. Special cheers to John and Rusty (who arrived early) and did an excellent job of organizing this group. Thanks to everyone for turning this into to an enjoyable few days – tir-

Steve and Anne Ansley, Arlington

ing, but enjoyable.

Cheers: To our area educators for the exemplary job that they do in the monumental task of teaching to our future. You do heroic work for little reward. Teachers like Ann Brock have left footprints in the sand the size of dinosaur tracks. Job well done and godspeed to you.

Hank F. Hoaldrige II, Burleson

Cheers: To everyone responsible for Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary's Gala Concert at the Meyerson Symphony Center in Dallas. We were guests of our daughter-in-law, Terri Stovall, and our son, Jay Stovall, who were in turn guests of Paige Patterson and his wife. The program was tastefully and thoughtfully arranged, inspiring and incredibly beautiful!

Linda and Jack Stovall, Arlington

Cheers: To my friends Cathy Gordon, Karin Newell and Jennifer Parks, Kelley Pledger of the *Star-Telegram*, Localnewsonly.com, MyHOA.com, Michele Benton of Colleyville animal control and all my other friends who worked diligently and prayed for a safe return for my lost cocker spaniel, Chester. He's home! Thank you.

Bonnie Carroll, Colleyville

Cheers: To Elsa, an employee at JoAnn's Fabrics Superstore, for her patience and professionalism in tolerating inappropriate behavior from a rude customer on March 2. Cheers to the customer, who obnoxiously identified herself as a "designer" and then ridiculed the courteous employees.

Michelle Savage, Fort Worth

Cheers: To Steve and Lerii Smith for planning, arranging and facilitating our Amazing Race of Knowledge. What a fabulous treat for our fifth-graders! It was educational, but more than that, it was fun! Cheers also to the teachers, parents and friends of Tanglewood who assisted in this Tigerific event.

Joe and Cheryl Mireles and the fifth-grade parents

of Tanglewood Elementary School, Fort Worth

Cheers: To the students, parents, teachers and staff for all that you do to make our school a great place to be. You give me a positive reason to get up and go to work every day. I appreciate you.

Principal *Rhonda Fields*,

E.M. Daggett Middle School, Fort Worth

Jeers: To members of the Texas Legislature who again have focused on legislation on things that really don't matter (like making it illegal for new mothers to receive infant formula at a hospital) instead of focusing on things that are vital to the state's future (like realistic school finance reform).

Liska Best, Arlington

R.J. MATSON



"FIRST ONE TO JUMP OUT WITH LEGISLATION LOSES!"

R.J. Matson is an editorial cartoonist for Roll Call.

EDUCATION

It's beginning to look a lot like 100 years ago

■ Actually, the past usually doesn't repeat itself precisely. But when you look at the Texas Legislature, you wonder.

It's March, and two Texas institutions are in full swing. Colleges are nearing the midterm mark of the spring semester, and the Legislature is approaching the halfway point in its biennial session, with public education the principal issue.

As a professor of Texas history, I follow both with more than casual interest.

When the semester started, I posed my usual question for the first class meeting:

"Why study history?" Of course, the question is a set-up; I always know that some eager student will respond, "So we don't repeat the mistakes of the past."

I explain the hazards of that oft-repeated cliché. We must be careful, I warn, about drawing specific lessons from mistakes made in different circumstances. The past never really repeats itself.

Or does it? As I read the accounts of the Legislature's efforts to solve the ongoing education funding crisis, I'm tempted to contradict my own first-day-of-school wisdom. Could it be that when the subject is public education in Texas, the past really is repeating itself?

Prior to 1870, education in Texas rested almost entirely in private hands. True, the 1845 constitution had set aside public lands for the support of schools, but this had never translated into action.

If Texas children got an education, it was because their parents had the money to send them to a private school. For everyone else — blacks, browns and poor whites alike — it was off to the cotton fields.

Then came the Civil War and Reconstruction.

In 1870, with freed slaves now voting and planters disillusioned and disorganized, the Republican Party swept to power in Texas. Under the leadership of Gov. Edmund J. Davis, the Republicans moved to establish a meaningful public school system for children of all races.

The response from the planters? "Big government!" "Oppressive taxation!" "Socialism!"

The Republicans' time in power was shortlived. By 1874, they had been defeated. The resurgent conservative white Democrats, now triumphantly calling themselves "Redeemers," immediately dismantled the Republicans' "radical" public education system in the name of low taxes and limited government.

Abolishing public education and slashing taxes enabled wealthy whites to maintain their social, economic and political dominance for decades to come.

The blacks, browns and poor whites returned to the cotton fields, where

they remained for decades, providing cheap labor for the benefit of the few.

In the 20th century, gushers of oil and a post-World War II economic boom allowed Texas to re-establish its public education system without having to tax its residents much.

The Democratic Party embraced New Deal/Great Society social programs and civil rights. But conservative white Texans eventually would stream into the Republican Party, which had long since given up on its Reconstruction-era social commitments.

By the 1990s, the time was right for a new set of "Redeemers" to work their magic on public education.

This time, the Redeemers were not conservative Democrats but rather conservative Republicans. Their party label might have changed, but their disdain for public education had not.

Today, with the GOP in control of state government, the public school system hasn't quite been abolished, but the trend is moving in that direction.

According to recent National Education Association figures, Texas now ranks 32nd in expenditures per pupil. The situation will almost certainly worsen. The Legislative Budget Board reports that since 1991, the state's share of revenue for public schools has fallen from 47 percent to 36 percent, with the most dramatic decreases coming since the year 2000.

Last year, our neo-Redeemer governor, Rick Perry, jetted off to the Bahamas to discuss school funding with James Leininger, who has

spent millions promoting the privatization of education, and Grover Norquist, the nation's leading anti-tax radical.

As Norquist proudly reported shortly thereafter, "I think we're on track to drop the cost of government in half over the next 25 years."

Never minding that education, like most everything else, has grown more expensive over that time, more than 40 Republican legislators have taken Norquist's vow never to raise taxes.

Meanwhile, a number of children began another school year with no textbooks, decrepit buildings and under-qualified teachers.

Shades of 1905! The Republicans who control Texas education policy probably won't succeed entirely in abolishing public education, even if that's their secret desire.

What they will do is much the same as what their Democratic Redeemer counterparts did in the 1870s: Children with affluent parents will get a quality private education and find good jobs. Everyone else will be off to the cotton fields or their 21st-century equivalents: fast-food counters or the roofing crew.

We would do well to remember the consequences of the actions of the first Redeemers' education policy: decades of poverty and injustice for all but the most privileged Texans.

Perhaps history isn't repeating itself, but it sure begins to look that way. Maybe it's time for me to revise that introductory lecture.

Gregg Cantrell teaches history at Texas Christian University. He is a member of the *Star-Telegram's* community columnist panel.

HOW TO SEND A CHEER OR JEER

Limit your Cheers or Jeers to about 50 words. Full name (signature and printed), address and daytime phone number are required. There are some restrictions on subjects. Items may be edited. Call 390-7753 with questions. **MAIL:** Box 1870, Fort Worth, TX 76101 **E-MAIL:** letters@star-telegram.com **FAX:** (817) 390-7688