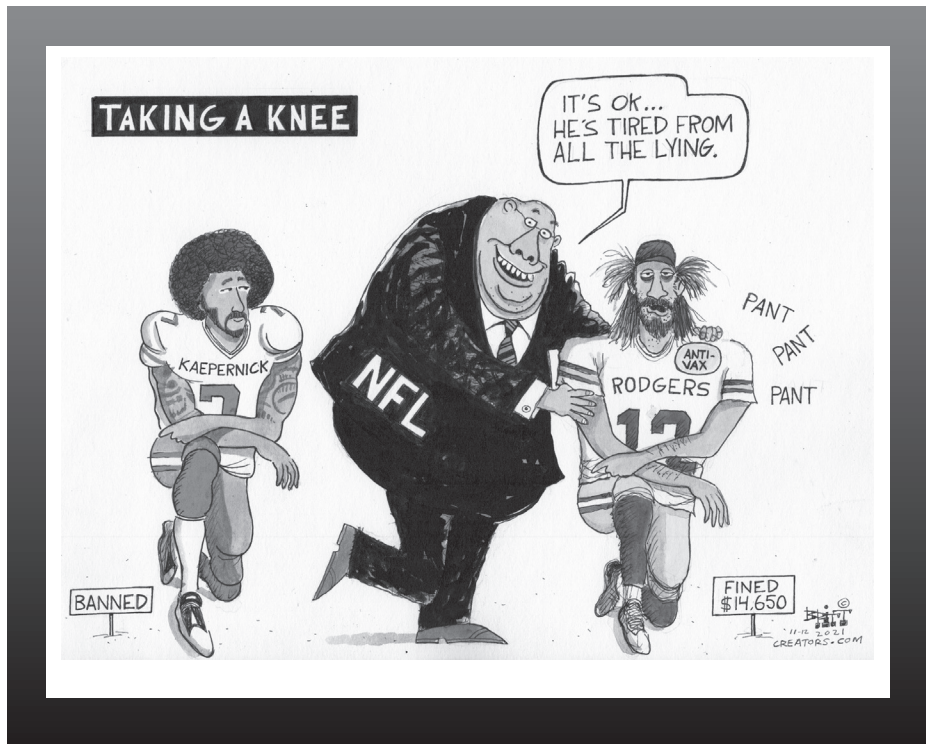


K PUBLIC SQUARE

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The 'haves' should help the 'have less' this season

We are in the season of giving. But what are we to do when many households are in some degree of need?

The COVID pandemic and its ensuing economic challenges have forced many families to face shortages in earnings, food and necessities. The local households in need are not someone else's problem, but a community issue.

If each of the nation's billionaires gave five or 10 percent of their wealth to address problems of houselessness, hunger and health, our society would be much different and stronger. But those in a position to give should not expect to see a billionaire arrive on a white horse. Society's ills begin and end with society collectively.

Programs that provide for the food insecure, the shelterless and the addicted will not rid the nation of those ills. Those programs are a hand up when a hand is needed the most.

Some say the world is divided between the haves and the have-nots. A glance at any story about the wealth of the contemporary rich would prove that.

There are the have-nots, but there are a lot more have-less. 'Tis the season to keep those in our minds as we plan our holidays. We can each ask ourselves: How much do I need? Especially at grocery stores that offer the opportunity to buy extra items for the

Editorial

food bank, or to contribute cash.

When shopping at a brick-and-mortar store, or online, we can ask ourselves how would we be hurt if we bought a few extra pairs of socks or underwear for those who desperate need them, or a pair of pajamas or a warm winter coat for a child who has none.

There is no shortage of organizations this time of year who are holding drives to collect clothes, food, toys and cash for the have-nots and the have-less, starting with the Keizer Network of Women's Giving Basket program aiding families in need.

The Keizer Community Food Bank at Faith Lutheran Church will always accept non-perishable food items; the bank can make a \$1 cash donation stretch further than the average consumer.

If you are one of the haves, reach out to help your brethren, many of whom never thought they would ever need a donation. There but for the grace of God go many of us.

'Tis the season for giving, after all.

—LAZ

'Parental choice' is heading in disturbing directions

By MICHAEL GERSON

The destructive right-wing march through our institutions continues apace.

There is considerable debate on the causes of the GOP victory in Virginia's gubernatorial election: President Joe Biden's dismal approval ratings? Glenn Youngkin's talent as an ideological shapeshifter? But Republican activists believe their assault on critical race theory (CRT) in public schools struck a chord—and it now has national momentum.

The evidence that CRT is actually influencing history instruction in classrooms remains sparse. Anti-CRT activists have mainly revealed a growing industry of expensive, hyper-woke diversity instructors hired by school districts to coach administrators and teachers. This issue is worth putting on the agenda of a civil, orderly school board meeting.

But this is decidedly not the point, which becomes ever clearer as emboldened Republican state legislators unvarnish their intentions. North Dakota's new law banning CRT in K-12 education provides this definition: "For purposes of this section, 'critical race theory' means the theory that racism is not merely the product of learned individual bias or prejudice, but that racism is systemically embedded in American society and the American legal system to facilitate racial inequality."

Imagine being a history teacher trying to tell the American story under such constraints. The inequities in wealth accumulation due to centuries of stolen labor? The zoning and lending practices that have maintained White neighborhoods? The systems of policing and incarceration that regularly produce indignities and injustice for Black people? Tearing these topics out of high school curriculums would, at least, leave plenty of time for field trips. North Dakota's definition of racism is so narrow that it is, in effect, racist.

This activism might appear aggressive. From a historical perspective, however, right-wing activists are taking their fallback position. Cultural conservatives once controlled the ethos of public education, which often included daily prayer and Bible reading. This type of civic Protestantism lost its dominance decades ago. Now Christian activists are turning to a parental veto instead. A veto over sex education they find disturbing. A veto over controversial books in the school library. A veto over the teaching of unsettling historical facts about racism. With this veto power, a relatively small group of angry parents can intimidate an entire school system, resulting in the reign of self-censorship.

This is defended as an expansion of parental control. In reality, it can produce a least-common-denominator educational system, dedicated to blandness and selective ignorance.

Most institutions in a liberal democracy



are purely procedural in purpose. An electoral system should be neutral. The application of traffic laws should be equal for everyone. Public education, in contrast, is unavoidably rich in content. And that richness brings the risk of controversy. In any system of learning fit for a liberal democracy, children are introduced to basic questions about life and history that might bring them beyond the views of parents. This is not indoctrination. It is education.

I am not arguing that most public schools do these things well. But I would contend (on purely anecdotal evidence) that most public schools have someone who does these things well. And that kind of teacher should not be shackled by absurd legal restrictions. Of course, parents should have an active role in the education of their children. But the role of public schools is not merely derivative of parental authority. Teachers are charged with helping children to gain the critical core of knowledge and conviction that allows them to become informed, independent-minded citizens. And parents who do not accept this division of labor have the option of private or home schooling.

This assertion of parental control seems headed in even more disturbing directions. There is scattered, bubbling discontent with the presence of mental health professionals in schools, on the theory that they engage in confidential conversations with children and assume roles that should be played by parents.

Of all the targets of right-wing activism, this is the most reckless. Most teens with mental health challenges such as clinical anxiety and depression are not likely, I expect, to get useful help from the kind of parent who views psychiatry as progressive mind control. The same would be true of bullying or sexual identity issues. In a significant number of cases, parental abandonment, anger or cruelty is one of the main problems.

In a nation where suicide is the second-leading cause of death between ages 10 and 34, the choice of mental health resources as an ideological target is morally monstrous. It is like a partisan attack on the provision of insulin for diabetic children. Or like insisting that eye surgery is really a parental responsibility. It is rare to find such a potent mix between ignorance and cruelty.

Schools and responsible parents have yet to hit on a strong public response to the new language of parental rights. But surely we can't grant a veto to the vicious.

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