

Standard online reader survey



Q: Do you think "Roseanne" should have been canceled because of a tweet?

YES 47 percent
NO 53 percent

GUEST EDITORIAL

Smoking, children and vehicles don't mix

We believe the question of whether to allow smoking in a vehicle in which a child is present is one of personal liberty — the child's liberty to enjoy pollutant-free air and a life free of negative health effects.

Unfortunately, Tennessee's representatives in the House did not feel the same way this year. After being snuffed out, re-erected, then passed by senators, a bill that would have banned smoking in cars and trucks in the presence of children younger than 14 was unceremoniously gutted, then extinguished for good when House lawmakers referred it to the Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee on the last day of the legislative session.

The proposed punishments for violating the ban weren't very harsh — less than a slap on the wrist, even.

A first offense, which couldn't have been the primary reason for a law enforcement officer to pull someone over, would have brought the smoker a warning citation. A second offense would have come with a Class D misdemeanor or charge punishable by a \$20 fine. Third and subsequent offenses would be Class C misdemeanors with \$50 fines.

For about the cost of a carton of Marlboro Reds, you could pay off a third conviction for what some

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health experts say equates to child abuse.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, children exposed to secondhand smoke get sick more often. Their lungs grow less than children who breathe clean air, and they suffer more frequently from bronchitis, pneumonia, wheezing and coughing.

Secondhand smoke can trigger asthma attacks in children, and it can cause them to have more frequent and more severe attacks, potentially threatening their lives with each attack.

But our state representatives, who so often express the need to defend the rights of unborn children, were unconcerned with the rights of thousands of children in the state who have no choice but to inhale daily hundreds of toxic chemicals and carcinogens in a single cigarette and burned in a confined vehicle.

Preventing a lifetime of health problems for unsuspecting children isn't an attack on personal freedoms or parental authority. It's a commonsense solution to a problem that has plagued the state for decades.

We urge our lawmakers to take the lead in the next General Assembly to enact a ban on smoking in vehicles with minors present.



Silence is the real scandal

President Trump has declared war on those institutions specifically designed to hold him accountable, legally and politically. The result is a deeply dangerous time for American democracy.

The genius of that democracy can be summed up in three words: checks and balances. The founders feared an unfettered president, and designed a complex system of obstacles to limit executive power. Vetoes can be over-ridden by Congress; regulations can be blocked by federal courts. Presidential actions of all kinds can be investigated by legislative committees, independent journalists and law enforcement agents.

That enforcement, however, depends on vital and vigorous institutions capable of standing up to a power-hungry president. And that's exactly why this president has made such a determined effort to undermine the credibility of those institutions.

His target list ranges from his own intelligence agencies to his vanquished opponent in that election, Hillary Clinton. But Trump focuses mainly on discrediting the two institutions that pose the greatest threat to his untrammelled power: law enforcement agencies, including the FBI and the special counsel, Robert Mueller; and a free and fearless press. He's aided and abetted by spineless GOP leaders who refuse to criticize his assaults.

Sen. Jeff Flake of Arizona, liberated by his decision to leave Congress, harshly denounced his fellow Republicans on NBC's "Meet the Press": "When the president says things that are just totally wrong, it's the responsibility of members of Congress, particularly those in the president's party, to stand up and say,

"That is not right. Truth is not relative. And there are no alternative facts here.' ... I have seen instances where we haven't done that well. And we've got to do it better."

The president's Operation Obfuscation begins with the media. He's repeatedly called reporters "dishonest," "corrupt" and "the enemy of the American people," precisely because they refuse to buckle under his pressure. Just one example: The *Washington Post* documented that in his first 466 days in office, Trump made 3,001 "false or misleading claims" — an average of 6.5 per day.

Lesley Stahl, the veteran CBS reporter, recently recounted a conversation in which she asked Trump why he incessantly attacked the press. His revealing answer: "You know why I do it? I do it to discredit you all and demean you all, so when you write negative stories about me, no one will believe you."

Trump's attacks on law enforcement agencies have the same strategic purpose, to discredit and demean investigators and prosecutors and erode their ability to curb his abuses.

Barbara McQuade, a career federal prosecutor, told *The New York Times*, "To turn on the FBI using this loaded language like 'spy' and 'infiltrate,' President Trump is trying to poison public opinion against the FBI for his own reasons."

In defending himself and deceiving the public, the president is damaging our most basic democratic institutions. And yet, as Flake says, most Republicans bite their tongues even when the president "says things that are just totally wrong."

Their silence is the real scandal. Steve and Cokie Roberts can be contacted by email at stevecokie@gmail.com.



STEVE & COKIE ROBERTS

THE SCOOP

JAMES CLARK



This column not written on Ambien

I guess the real side effect of taking Ambien is sudden termination.

Roseanne Barr discovered that this week when ABC showed a person can, in fact, go too far on social media and get fired because of a racist tweet. Roseanne is a comedian and she has a right to make jokes, but comparing a black politician to "Planet of the Apes" didn't quite have the punchline she desired.

Underlying questions swirl around this case of "The Misguided Ambien Tweeter," and I'm eager to address two of them. The first pertains to free speech and, oddly enough, my column last week about kneeling during the national anthem.

If you recall, last week I talked about my disappointment with the NFL in trying to stifle freedom of expression and make all players stand during the anthem. Standing and placing your right hand on your heart is certainly preferred behavior, but I don't think players should be punished for protesting social problems which are being ignored.

Hold that thought as we glide to Roseanne's tweet fiasco. She has the right to tweet what she wants, and far be it for me to be the Tweet Police and determine what's OK, but her message lacks anything positive or constructive.

Roseanne is not disagreeing with a person's stance. She's not commenting on a person's wrongful behavior which should be corrected. She's slamming someone for their appearance in a deliberately hurtful way.

ABC decided the consequences of this action is immediate termination, a punishment I find surprisingly harsh. But it's hard to mount any sort of workable defense for someone who goes out of their way to hurl a racial slur at a person in front of 774,000 Twitter followers.

My second question involves social media and its ever-changing role. At its inception, MySpace and Facebook were touted as a way to make long-distance connections with friends and family members. If grandma can't make that 5th birthday party because she lives out of state, post a couple pics on Facebook and grandma will feel like she was there.

Unfortunately, social media has abandoned much of its wholesome beginnings and morphed into a place where people fling insults, build conspiracy theories, and spread lies. In trying to explain her initial racist tweet, Roseanne returned to Twitter to offer this curious bit of garble.

Roseanne tweeted, "guys I did something unforgivable so do not defend me. It was 2 in the morning and I was ambien tweeting — it was memorial day too — i went 2 far & do not want it defended — it was egregious Indefensible. I made a mistake I wish I hadn't but...don't defend it please."

I'm not going to defend it because I don't understand this new mindset of bashing everyone on social media. In the case of Roseanne and the black politician she deigned, have they ever even met?

This new normal is disturbing. Perhaps the actions of ABC will reinforce the fact we do have free speech, but it's not without consequences.

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Women and Southern Baptists

During her years at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, April C. Armstrong kept a journal of her experiences as one of the few women earning a Master of Arts in Theology.

There were scary moments with a Master of Divinity student who was preparing for ordination as a youth minister. When she rebuffed his advances, he claimed, as part of the security team, he had keys to all doors on the Fort Worth, Texas, campus. He added, "I know where you live."

Armstrong was at Southwestern from 2004-07 and, during that time, saw the last female professor exit the School of Theology. In one class, a male student quipped that "Sophia" — Greek for "wisdom" — shouldn't be a feminine word because "no woman is wise." This was under the leadership of President Paige Patterson.

"I was there to experience three years of unrelenting misogyny that it seemed NO ONE was willing to stop, because speaking out against it would realistically have drawn down the wrath of Paige Patterson, who could make or break your career," she wrote, at her #SBCToo website.

Patterson is a hero on the right because of his leadership in the conservative blitz that took control of the Southern Baptist Convention in the late 1970s and early '80s.

Now, Patterson has been pushed into retirement after news about sermons in which he critiqued a teen-aged girl's body and, on another occasion, knocked female seminary students who weren't striving hard enough to be attractive. An old record-

ing from 2000 led to renewed debate about his advice to an abused wife to stay with her husband, offering prayer and submission rather than seeking legal help.

However, Patterson is scheduled to deliver the keynote sermon at the annual Southern Baptist national meeting, June 12-13 in Dallas.

To this, one of the SBC's most vocal conservatives issued a withering statement entitled, "The Wrath of God Poured Out: The Humiliation of the Southern Baptist Convention."

"The judgment of God has come," wrote the Rev. Albert Mohler, president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky. "Judgment has now

come to the house of the Southern Baptist Convention. The terrible swift sword of public humiliation has come with a vengeance. There can be no doubt that this story is not over."

Southern Baptist leaders, he said, can defend their conservative teachings on sexuality, gender and the "pattern of male leadership in the home and church." However, they must stress there is "no excuse whatsoever for abuse of any form — verbal, emotional, physical, spiritual or sexual. The Bible warns so clearly of those who would abuse power and weaponize authority."

Mohler's conclusion was blunt: "The Southern Baptist Convention is on trial and our public credibility is at stake. May God have mercy on us all."

Terry Mattingly is the editor of *GetReligion.org*. He lives in Oak Ridge.

ON RELIGION

TERRY MATTINGLY

