

Standard online reader survey



Q: Do you like the decision by the Boy Scouts to change the organization's name to Scouts BSA and allow girls?

YES or NO

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GUEST EDITORIAL

Let 5,000-year-old tree live in secret

The oldest known living tree in the world is a bristlecone pine in California. Scientists say it's been growing for more than 5,000 years. That is about 200 human generations it has survived violent storms, extended dry spells and wildfires. It's amazing to think about something living that long.

The exact location of the tree is a secret known only to a few scientific types and a few members of the U.S. Forest Service. Its location is kept secret for its protection because if the general public knew where it was it probably would not last long. For 5,000 years it has taken the worst nature could throw at it, but it wouldn't stand a chance against human threats.

It's possible vandals would damage or destroy the tree, since that happens too often with many things. What is more likely is it would be killed by people who had no intention of harming it. Mostly, it would be folks who wanted to slice of a tiny sliver of it for a souvenir. They are not the kind of people who would want to see the tree destroyed. They just don't see any harm in taking a bit of it for a keepsake.

The tree could suffer the same fate as the famous Plymouth Rock in Massachusetts. Plymouth Rock is where the pilgrims landed in 1620. It's a landmark that draws more than

**Morristown
Citizen Tribune**

a million visitors a year. It is well protected now, although it was not always that way. For years visitors chipped off pieces of it to have a token of American history they could admire.

No one intended to seriously damage the historic rock. It just happened. After all, most souvenir collectors thought, one little piece of such a big rock would not be missed. As is often the case, they failed to consider how many others thought the same way.

Humans are destructive, sometimes willingly and more often with no intent, only a lack of thoughtfulness. The world would be a much better place if we all stopped to consider what we are doing before we collect a bit of something or simply harm it without even noticing we are. It is always good to remember if we want a souvenir of some special object, chances are many others do too. When it happens, it's only a matter of time before the object is gone.

Let's hope the ancient bristlecone pine can continue for at least a few more centuries without its location being revealed. If it becomes known, chances are the tree will be doomed because too many people fail to think before they act.



The perils of complacency

A young friend of ours who worked for Hillary Clinton in 2016 waved a big caution flag recently about the fall elections. The same complacency that doomed Clinton is starting to afflict Democrats again, she warns. Too many party operatives are convinced a "blue wave" will sweep the Democrats to a majority in the House; the only outstanding question in their minds is whether they will win the Senate, as well.

However, Democrats are fully capable of repeating the same willful self-delusion that sank them last time out. Is a "blue wave" possible? Absolutely. Is it inevitable? Absolutely not.

President Trump's approval ratings have edged slowly but steadily upward and stand at 43.2 percent in the latest average compiled by the website RealClearPolitics. That's still low by historical standards, but he's going up, not down.

One big reason is the economy. Unemployment has dipped to 3.9 percent, the lowest rate in more than 17 years, and a tax cut has bolstered paychecks for many workers. In the latest CBS poll, nearly two-thirds of voters rated the economy as good or fairly good, and a CNN survey found 52 percent view Trump's handling of the economy favorably.

At the same time, popular support has waned a bit for special counsel Robert Mueller's investigation into possible ties between the Trump campaign and Moscow. The president has loudly and persistently denounced the probe as a "witch hunt," and he's having some effect. A Monmouth poll found 54 percent of voters still feel Mueller is conducting a fair investiga-

tion, but that's down from 60 percent just two months ago.

Trump's core base of support shows no signs of cracking. Republican pollster Jim McLaughlin told *The Washington Post*: "That dynamic that elected Donald Trump that I thought was going to dissipate after 2016 elections is still there."

Of course, there's plenty of evidence in favor of a blue wave, starting with history. The party of an incumbent president almost always loses Congressional seats in off-year elections, mainly because marginal voters who were excited by a popular candi-

date at the top of the ticket stay home two years later.

Without a doubt, Trump has galvanized the Democratic opposition, with new candidates and new contributors flooding into the political arena. The party has won critical elections in Virginia, Alabama and Pennsylvania, and a record number of Republican lawmakers are retiring instead of risking defeat.

Democrats are focused primarily on suburban districts where college-educated women are increasingly disenchanted with the president. They are expanding their target list to include some rural districts where President Trump's trade policies, which threaten to trigger retaliation from China against U.S. farm products, could really hurt Republican candidates.

History gives the Democrats a big advantage in November, but if they repeat the same mistakes they made in 2016 and take victory for granted, they could get blindsided again.

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COLUMNISTS

**STEVE & COKIE
ROBERTS**



Preachers and divorce

It's a fact of life for clergy: They never know when ordinary conversations will turn into potentially tense encounters that some believers consider "counseling."

Many pastors have been trained, to some degree, in "pastoral counseling." Some may even have professional credentials. All of them face the challenge of handling tricky, dangerous moments when discussions of sin, forgiveness, prayer and healing turn into issues of safety and law.

Domestic violence is, of course, a bright red line. That often means there are complex faith issues linked to divorce looming in the background.

"Evangelical awareness has increased when it comes to mandatory reporting of domestic violence cases. I'm not sure many people were talking about that 20 years ago," said Denny Burk, leader of the Center for Gospel and Culture at Boyce College in Louisville, Ky. "At a seminary, we talk about these issues all the time."

There are cries for more change, as waves of #MeToo news have led to #ChurchToo debates. Then an anonymous source gave *The Washington Post* an audiotape from 2000 in which a revered Southern Baptist leader claimed Christians must do everything they can to stop divorce, even if that means strategic silence about domestic violence. This recording had already caused debates in the past.

"It depends on the level of abuse, to some degree," said the Rev. Paige Patterson, a leader in the Southern Baptist Convention's conservative revolution in the 1980s. He is president of Southwest Baptist Theological

Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas.

"I have never in my ministry counseled anyone to seek a divorce, and that's always wrong counsel," he said. "There have been, however, an occasion or two when the level of the abuse was serious enough, dangerous enough, immoral enough I have counseled temporary separation and the seeking of help."

During this media storm, many Southern Baptist leaders have released statements stressing that domestic violence is a crime and churches must always act to protect the abused and report the crime to civil authorities.

The odds are high this controversy will linger, causing sparks during the SBC's annual meeting, this year June 12-13 in Dallas. Patterson is slated to give the main sermon.

In March, before the Patterson recording resurfaced, the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood released a statement stressing domestic abuse is both a sin and a crime.

Debates about the Bible and divorce further complicate these tragedies. These debates will continue, said Burk. But there is no need to disagree about how religious leaders should respond to domestic violence.

There are many evangelicals, he said, who "oppose divorce under any circumstances, but who also know the protection of a woman who is being abused is an absolute necessity. ... We all want to see marriages saved, if there is any way for reconciliation to take place. But first, you have to protect the abused — period."

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

THE SCOOP

**JAMES
CLARK**



Standardized tests getting poor marks

The school calendar lists the last day of school in Warren County as two weeks away on the glorious day of May 25.

That may be the last official day, but for most purposes, the academic portion of the 2017-18 school year is in the books. Meaningful instruction is a thing of the past.

We have standardized testing to thank. In what's a poorly kept secret, it's become accepted practice for our schools to stop teaching as soon as testing is done. If we're going to teach to the test, then there's nothing left to teach once the test has been given.

Compounding problems is the Tennessee Department of Education can't seem to learn from its mistakes. The state expects students to learn, but state leaders are determined to keep making the same blunders when it comes to standardized tests. Pay no attention to the fact it's failed three years straight.

I was surprised by voting in a *Southern Standard* online survey given last month. A full 63 percent of respondents said the state should end standardized testing completely.

I'm not arguing against that stance, however I'm sorry to report it's not possible due to requirements from the U.S. Department of Education. I think standardized tests do serve a purpose in measuring achievement, but we need to take a giant chill pill and not put so much emphasis on these results.

When I was in school, I remember we took our standardized test, had field day when testing was over, then school was out. There wasn't nearly a month between the test and the end of the year.

The idea of counting a portion of the standardized tests toward a student's final grade is a poorly constructed concept. Counting a portion of the standardized tests toward teacher evaluations is even worse. And the notion we can judge our schools based on standardized test results is clearly created by legislators who have never stepped foot in a classroom.

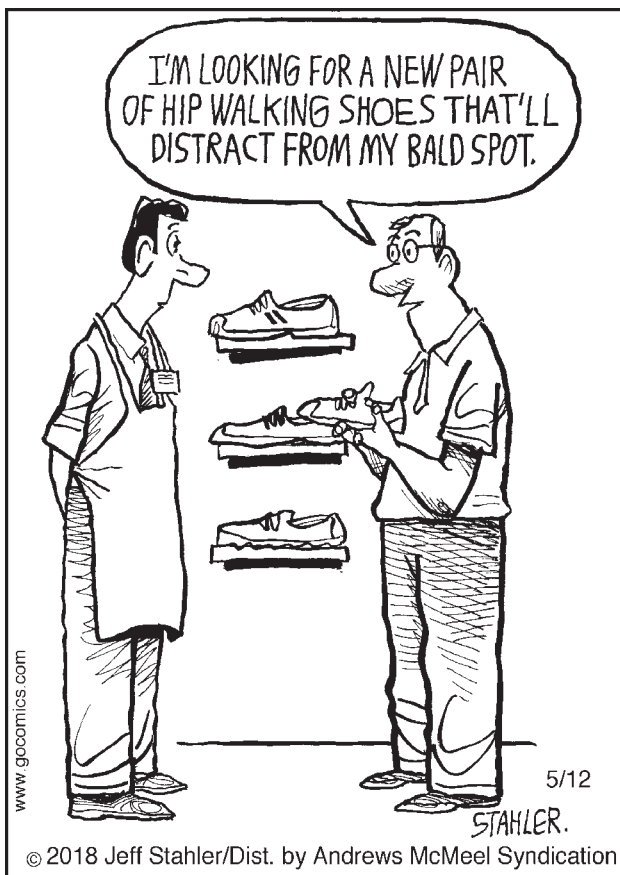
I talked to Director of Schools Bobby Cox about standardized testing on Thursday and he told me he wants local schools to be accountable, but he admits there's much room for testing improvement. Bobby said he'd like for the tests to be taken later in the school year and he agrees with the push to scale back testing, especially the number of days which are devoted to the tests.

Bobby pointed to the ACT as a long-standing standardized test that has a reputation for delivering accurate results in a timely fashion. The ACT has been used as a gauge of student progress for decades and Bobby believes the state should ask ACT officials about ways to improve standardized tests for K-12 schools.


The underlying problem when it comes to education decisions is they mostly come from the state and federal lawmakers who are professional lawyers or doctors, not professional educators.

I don't need a test to tell me that doesn't work in the best interest of our students.

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