

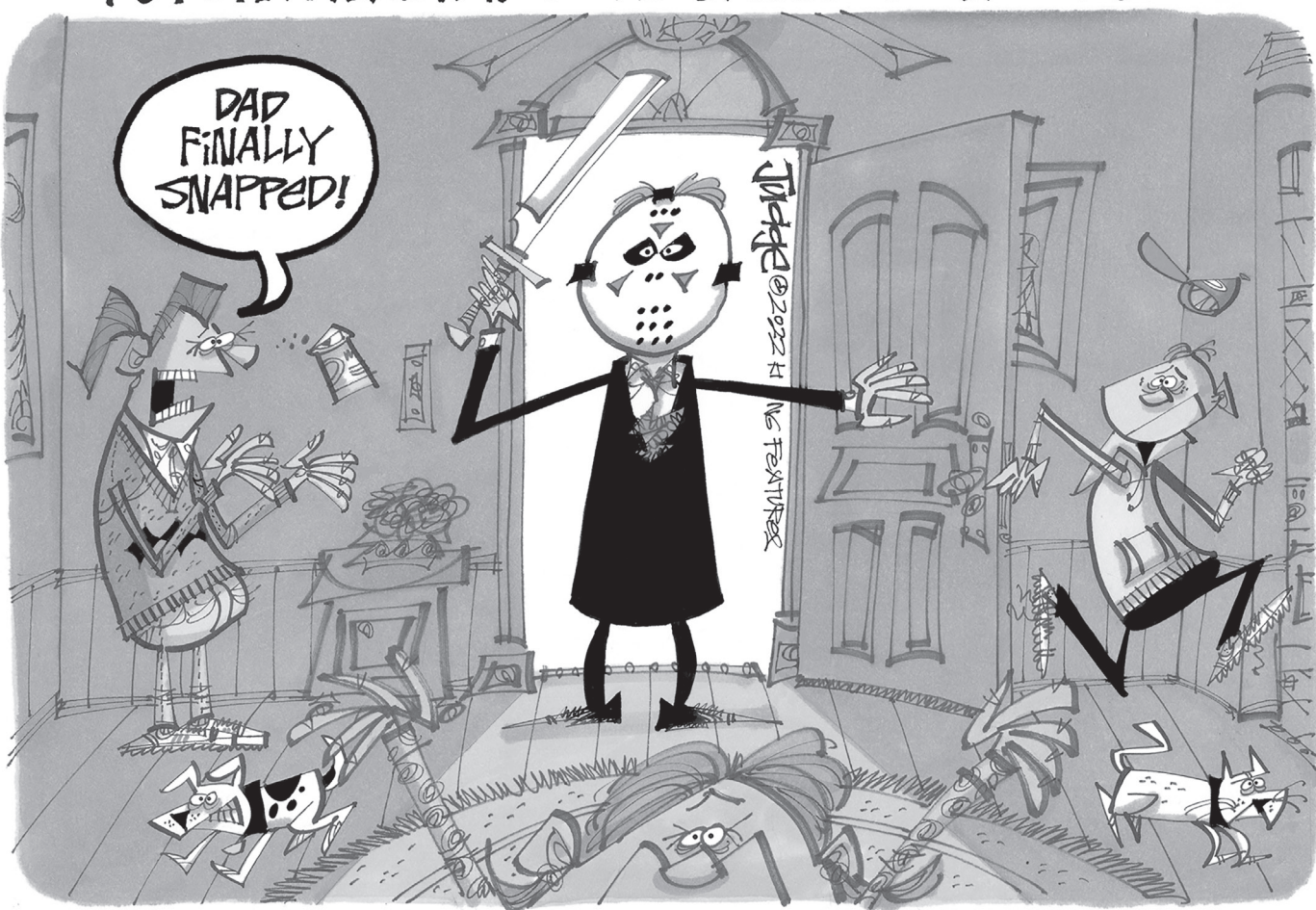
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The Times Journal

OPINION

March 31, 2022

NEWS ITEM: THE MAJORITY OF AMERICANS SAY THEY'LL PUT ON A MASK IF COVID CASES GO BACK UP.



#KYGA22 Update

By Sarah Durand

This week, the legislature made education a priority. Several Bluegrass Institute education policies moved forward, including a charter school pilot program that means Kentucky will have its first ever public charter schools - one in Louisville and the other in Northern Kentucky.

Several education polices move

Five years ago, Kentucky legislators passed a law allowing charter schools to open in the commonwealth but failed to provide a funding mechanism for these innovative public schools. House Bill 9, which narrowly made its way through the House this week by a vote of 51-46, finally addresses this issue by requiring SEEK funds - tax dollars the state provides to local school districts - to follow the child to the public charter school. The bill now moves on to the Senate.

Shortening unemployment benefits

Lawmakers overrode Gov. Andy Beshear's veto of a bill terminating the automatic 26-week duration of unemployment benefits. The new policy uses current unemployment numbers at the time of application for benefits as the indicator for the duration of payments up to 24 weeks. For example, an applicant who applies for unemployment benefits while the unemployment rate is 4.5% or less would be approved for 12 weeks of benefits. However, if that same person applies when the unemployment rate is between 9.5% and 10%, the applicant is eligible for up to 24 weeks of unemployment benefits. 'State of emergency' no more

Voting machine restrictions approved

House Bill 216, which ensures election voting machines cannot be hooked up to any network or communicate with any other device, has passed both chambers. It also increase the amount of time machines have to be locked from voting after an election from 10 days to 30 and requires the machines to be held under video surveillance for that period of time.

Places of worship officially 'essential'

A religious freedom bill also passed both chambers this week. The legislation includes places of worship as an "essential service," excluding religious organizations from lockdown during a state of emergency when other "essential services" are open. The bill was filed in response to Beshear ordering state troopers to write down license plate numbers and removing people from churches following the governor's executive order closing places of worship during the height of the COVID pandemic.

Prescription for rural hospitals approved

A loan forgiveness bill seeking to alleviate fiscal burdens faced by rural hospitals has passed through the full House and is on the Senate Consent Calendar. Rural hospitals took a hit when then-Governor Steve Beshear unilaterally expanded Medicaid eligibility, increasing the number of people enrolled. The fact that Medicaid doesn't reimburse at the rates as generous as private insurance for the same procedures places a financial strain on hospitals, which took another hit when Gov. Andy Beshear shut down elective procedures due to COVID concerns, eliminating a large source of their revenues.

BIPPS was critical of a \$35 million mostly forgivable loan granted to the University of Louisville for the purchase of the failing Jewish Hospital, especially at a time when rural hospitals were struggling. This loan program will give much-needed relief to keep our rural hospitals afloat.

The legislative update is comprised by Sarah May Durand, director of government affairs for the Bluegrass Institute for Public Policy Solutions. She can be reached at sarahmaydurand@freedomkentucky.com.

Kentucky 'Paralyzed' By Lack Of Parental Choice

By Jim Waters



Opponents of charter schools coming to Kentucky are pro-choice after all.

At least that's how it would have appeared to a casual observer during the recent hours-long debate in the Kentucky House of Representatives over legislation funding these public schools in the commonwealth.

Charters can innovate because they're not constrained by regulations hobbling teachers and administrators in traditional public schools.

Along with funding charters - enabled but not funded during the 2017 legislative session - the new bill requires opening at least one charter in both Louisville and Northern Kentucky.

"Progressive" politicians from those areas protested during the debate, employing - ironically - arguments about how they support school choice.

Newport Democratic Rep. Rachel Roberts noted that people in her legislative district can choose from 150 public schools in six different districts, "and children who live in

my area can go to schools in downtown Cincinnati if their parents want to pay a very reasonable tuition to send them there."

Rep. Josie Raymond, D-Louisville, claimed parents have plenty of options in her district, including magnet schools "open to any kid in the district."

Raymond also pointed to academies serving primarily minorities and "two Catholic schools and a private school for students with learning differences; all of these offer substantial scholarship support."

"Parents in Jefferson County are already paralyzed by choice," she claimed.

It turns out these "progressives" are selectively pro-choice with the defining factor being who ultimately chooses where and how children are educated.

In public school districts, parents can request, but a student-assignment bureaucrat holed away in the central office decides.

Students aren't assigned to charters; parents, not administrators, make that choice.

So, Raymond and Roberts are pro-choice, but only if the choices fit their ideology and bureaucrats, not parents, decide where children enroll when tax dollars are involved.

Both voted last year against legislation offering

parents real choices in the form of open enrollments between districts and education opportunity accounts allowing children from low-income families in Raymond's and Roberts' regions, among others, access to private education.

The open-enrollment portion of that law stipulates that SEEK dollars (the state portion of funding for each public school student in Kentucky) follow students to the schools they attend.

There are no complaints about how allowing SEEK dollars to follow those students "siphons off badly needed resources from public education," such as opponents offer ad infinitum about charters.

It's acceptable for public dollars to follow abused children or those with special needs to schools different from the ones to which they would have otherwise been assigned.

The focus is - rightly - on getting these students into schools which meet their unique educational, physical, emotional and social needs.

It's no different than allowing some public dollars to follow poor Black children in Louisville's West End to a charter school and improving their chances for an education that better fits their needs.

Do these lawmakers really favor empowering only parents of means with options to decide where their children attend school?

Why shouldn't

low-income families in their districts be able to send their child to a Catholic school or a high-performing academy in downtown Cincinnati?

Why should a Black girl from a poor home in West Louisville have a scant chance of attending DuPont Manual, a magnet school in Jefferson County where Raymond was privileged to get her education?

Contrary to Raymond's claims, all kids in Louisville do not have equal access to that magnet school - a fact made clear by the Courier Journal's recent six-part exposé slamming how her city's magnets have racially segregated on behalf of elites who know how to game the system and get their children accepted.

Meanwhile, access is denied to other students who have no elitists advocating for them.

Public charter schools, on the other hand, must accept all students who seek seats - if seats are available.

If seats are limited, a random - random - lottery is held.

Real choice and access don't get much fairer than that.

Jim Waters is president and CEO of the Bluegrass Institute for Public Policy Solutions, Kentucky's free-market think tank. Read previous columns at www.bipps.org. He can be reached at jwaters@freedomkentucky.com and @bipps on Twitter.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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