

Opinion

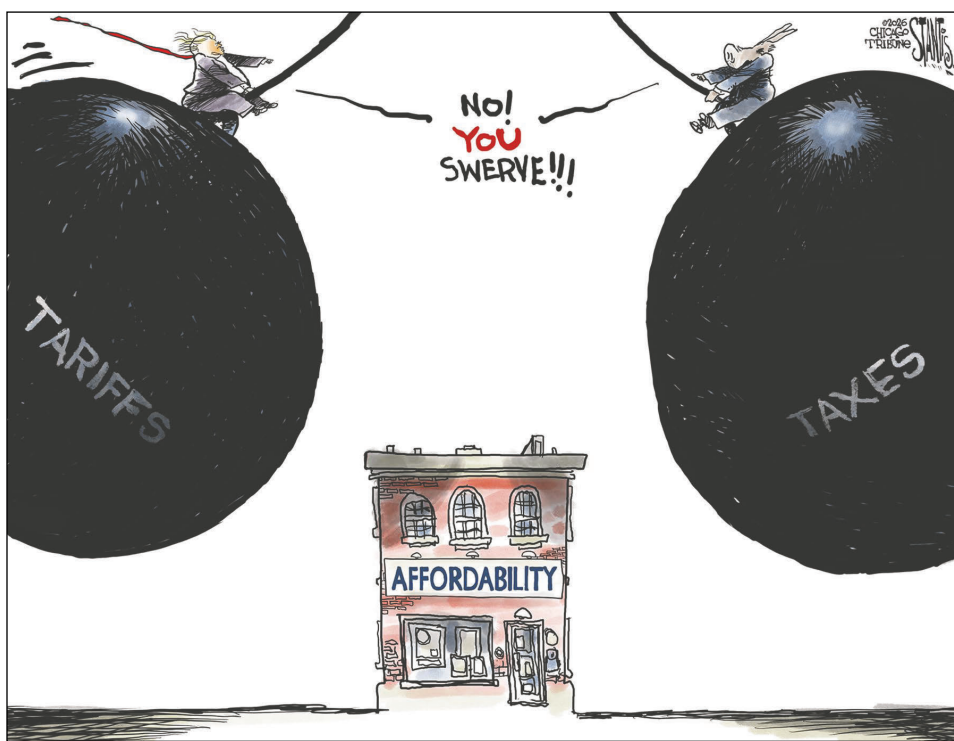
FIRST AMENDMENT

"Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances."

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Let us know in a letter to the editor! Letters must include first and last name and phone number.

Email letters to reporter@cknj.com



Controversial state bill reaffirms true meaning of American creed

Kentucky's 2026 legislative session began earlier this month and several bills already are drawing controversy. One of them is Senate Bill 26, filed by Sen. Lindsey Tichenor, a Republican from Smithfield.

SB26 targets Diversity, Equity and Inclusion programs in Kentucky's K-12 public schools. If enacted, the bill would eliminate DEI initiatives in elementary and secondary education.

Supporters of the bill argue that it simply ensures students are treated equally, regardless of race, religion or sex. Critics, however, contend that eliminating DEI programs risks marginalizing minority students and ignoring longstanding racial disparities.

Proponents of DEI maintain that because people of color have faced historical oppression in the United States, public institutions have a duty to account for those disparities in policy. From this perspective, opposition to DEI often is framed as inherently racist, and equal treatment under the law is dismissed as insufficient or even harmful.

Under this view, SB26, which seeks to eliminate DEI and treat all students equally in the classroom, simply plays into a generations-long attempt to oppress students of color. Because black students are historically — and many argue, currently — oppressed, equal treatment alone is viewed as inadequate.

These ideas are not merely confined academic debate. Dr. John

Marshall, chief equity officer in Jefferson County Public Schools, following the election of President Trump, posted on social media that "the majority of whites could care less" about black people and "have no issues harming you or yours."



JACOB OGAN

Marshall still is employed by JCPS with a salary of \$199,899.90 — the second-highest salary in the district.

However, Marshall's salary is just a small part of a much larger DEI infrastructure within JCPS. In the 2024 fiscal year alone, JCPS had a nearly \$2 billion budget. Of that, JCPS designated \$30.02 million for their Diversity, Equity and Poverty department. Another \$38.57 million went to "Racial Equity Funds," most of which was devoted to salaries. But not only is DEI a huge line in the budget, critics say it is also harmful to students.

DEI proponents argue that because white students are possessors of "white privilege," it is the duty of institutions to counteract that privilege through policy.

While it is true that black people have historically been oppressed in America through chattel slavery and Jim Crow, remedying those injustices should not involve new forms of racial preference. Rather, the solution is to seek in the present to live up to our profession of the equality of every man, woman, and child before God and before the law — in this way, living out what Martin Luther King Jr. called

the "true meaning" of the American creed.

SB26 seeks to do exactly that. Whereas DEI views the world through the lens of oppressor and oppressed, SB26 seeks to reinstate the historic American creed: that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights.

Such a creed demands that students of all races be treated equally and taught their worth as human beings. And this is exactly what SB26 seeks to do by demanding that schools' disciplinary policies not "consider religion, race, sex, color or national origin or otherwise establish student disciplinary caps or quotas on the basis of religion, race, sex, color or national origin." The bill makes similar demands on "employment, employee recruitment, employee hiring, employee promotion, contracts, contract renewal, student enrollment and student services."

An executive order by President Trump last January called DEI "wasteful" and "preferencing." The President is right. DEI eats up countless millions of taxpayer dollars and delivers racial division in return — a poor return on investment by any measure.

By moving away from grievance-based frameworks and racial division, SB26 allows educators to refocus on core academic subjects and the essential character formation that equips students for life in the real world.

Jacob Ogan is a staff member with the Commonwealth Policy Center.

Seeing what dogs can't: We have a wonderful life

If we aren't intentional, we'll let the fear of the destination ruin the joy of the journey. We miss out on the wonderful life stretching before us.

I was taking Max, our Schnauzer, to Judy, a friend who keeps him when we are gone. Max is old now. His twin brother, Baylor, died several years ago, but Max is hanging on. He shakes uncontrollably when I put him in our car.

When he was younger, he and Baylor would climb all over the back seat when I took them to Judy or the groomer. They couldn't understand that our friend, Judy, loves them as much as we do or that the groomer would take care of them.

Pulling the rear-view mirror down, I would watch them as they nervously hopped from seat to floorboard, anxiously glancing out the back window, then back down at the floorboard, then at me, then at each other, then back to the window. Even when they managed to sit in one place, they would hover, like prisoners in a transport bus on their way to an undisclosed facility, shifting from hip to haunch.

Of course, their destination was no mystery to Lori or me. I even would tell them where I was taking them and what was going to happen: "You're going to the groomer today. It's your 'spa day.'" Or, "You get to see Judy

today. She'll spoil you rotten. You are in for a treat."

Of course, my words fell on deaf ears. You see, we weren't speaking the same language. For them, the routine was new every time we took it. Once they were at Judy's, they would settle down and relax. All was well.

Here's where the dogs' lives and mine intersect: We both get nervous about events we could otherwise enjoy. Like me, they forget what a wonderful life they have.

The Lord is taking me on a journey. I don't know all the details: Will everything be OK? How will people there perceive me? Will they love and accept me as people do at home? Will I be safe? What if I forgot something?

I shake, at least emotionally, glancing out the window for familiar terrain, mentally hopping from the familiar to the unfamiliar in a skittish twitter. I may try listening to soothing songs or reading the Psalms that reassure.

But if the way is too mysterious and frightful, I can't hear for all my inner chatter: "Where is this going? Who will be there? How will I know it's going to be okay?"

Finally, somewhere along the way, I hear the Lord's calm but powerful voice, "David, be still, and know that I AM God."



DAVID B. WHITLOCK

The Lord gently nudges me: "Stop worrying, you silly. Can't you see I've got this?"

God expects me to do something my dogs can't: Walk by faith.

I think of God calling the biblical figure Abraham to leave. Where? Just go, Abraham. And Abraham went, "not knowing where he was going" (Hebrews 11:8).

It might be a new school, another job, a relationship or another phase of life, and even the final step into the ultimate mystery: Death.

"I'm taking you to someone and someplace only I know, but one you will absolutely love. So, relax and enjoy the journey."

"Look there," I would tell Max and Baylor, "you're at 'Aunt' Judy's." Once in her arms, they would relax, then jump up and down and hop all around in joy.

Or when I would pick them up from the groomer, they would wrap their paws around me, hugging me, their little dog bodies all shiny and clean.

And so it is for us in Jesus Christ: All clean, well and better than brand new. At last, we're ready for a Forever with our Lord. It's all joy.

And so, I can breathe deeply, relax, and think to myself, "What a wonderful life."

Dr. David Whitlock is a retired Baptist minister, author and educator. He can be reached at drdavid@davidwhitlock.org.

Milestone birthday feels like awakening

In a few short weeks, I will turn 70. I say that number out loud without hesitation or apology. For some, age feels like something to soften or sidestep, but for me, it feels like a milestone worth honoring.

Seventy is not a shrinking number. It is a gathering of years, experiences, lessons, love and grace.

There was a time when aging seemed distant, something that belonged to "older people." But life has a way of gently, and sometimes firmly, moving us forward. Each birthday quietly has asked me an important question: What will you do with the years you are given? Turning 70 doesn't feel like an ending, it feels like an awakening.

With age comes perspective. The small things no longer demand my time. What matters rises to the surface — relationships, purpose, faith, kindness and presence.

I have learned that joy is not found in busyness or perfection, but in meaningful moments: Shared laughter, quiet mornings, honest conversations and time spent with those we love. Joy is cultivated, not chased.

Purpose also deepens with time. When we are younger, purpose often looks like striving — building careers, raising families, meeting expectations. At 70, purpose feels more rooted. It is less about proving and more about offering.

Offering wisdom, encouragement, compassion and presence. It is about knowing who you are and using your voice — gently or boldly — to lift others.

I find joy in watching my family grow, in tending flowers and herbs, (currently inside) in preparing a meal to share and in sitting in the kitchen surrounded by loved ones preparing a great meal to share with family and friends. These moments may seem ordinary, but they are sacred. They remind me that a well-lived life is not measured by how fast we move, but by how deeply we love.

Turning 70 also brings gratitude. Gratitude for lessons learned the hard way, for seasons of joy and seasons of growth, for relationships that have endured and even for those that taught me when to let go. Gratitude has a way of softening regret and amplifying peace.

Faith has been my anchor through every decade and it feels especially steady now. Scripture reminds us that aging is not a loss, but a blessing.

Remember Isaiah 46:4, "Even to your old age and gray hairs I am He, I am He who will sustain you." That promise reassures me that purpose does not expire with age. God continues to sustain, guide, and use us — right where we are, exactly as we are.

If you are approaching a milestone birthday, I encourage you to meet it with openness rather than fear. Celebrate the years you have lived and the wisdom you carry. Release the pressure to keep up with the pace of others. Your journey is uniquely yours.

Turning 70, for me, is about choosing joy daily, living with intention, and continuing to grow — not despite my age, but because of it. There is still so much life to live, love to give and hope to share. And that feels like something worth celebrating.

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TRACK THE LEGISLATURE

The 2026 legislative session of the Kentucky General Assembly is in session. To contact lawmakers, residents can use the Legislative Research Commission toll-free message line at 800-372-7181. This platform allows constituents to leave messages for their respective state representatives and senators to express support or opposition to specific legislation.

Residents can find their delegation members using

the Find Your Legislator tool on the LRC website. Click the map to get the legislator and district information for that location. Taylor County is represented in the Senate by Max Wise and in the House by Michael "Sarge" Pollock.

Constituents also can utilize specialized lines for specific inquiries, including:

- Bill Status Line: 866-840-2835
- Meeting Information Line: 800-633-9650
- Hearing and Speech

Impairment Message Line: Kentucky Relay Service 711.

You also can follow legislative activity and access bill status information, meeting details and legislator profiles at Legislature.ky.gov.

Live coverage of legislative proceedings also can be found at KET.org/Legislature or via the LRC YouTube Channel www.youtube.com/@KYLRCCCommitteeMeetings/streams. Archived footage also is available on both platforms.

LINDSEY

FROM PAGE A3

or southcentral Kentucky. She was also a longtime supporter of Lindsey Wilson's

cultural affairs events, which she regularly attended.

In 2016, the Lindsey Wilson National Alumni Association named her an honorary alumna of the school in appreciation of her support of the Lindsey Wilson

mission and the school's cultural affairs events.

LWU, founded in 1903, is a liberal arts university based in Columbia, and affiliated with The United Methodist Church.