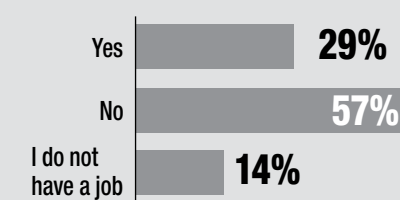


Opinion

HERALD POLL RESULTS

Do you work typical business hours (8 a.m. to 5 p.m. or 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.)?



Herald Poll conducted Oct. 13-19 online at www.ottawaherald.com.

Editorial

Race relations

Otto's 'redneck' humor video shows insensitivity

Racism was at the heart of a trial featured in a play at the Franklin County Courthouse this weekend, when ACT Ottawa performed a stage version of Harper Lee's "To Kill a Mockingbird."

Racism also was proffered by some as the reason behind Franklin County's state Rep. Bill Otto's recent "Redneck Rap" on YouTube. Otto's video spends a good deal of time skewering President Obama before he turns to talking of possum, the other dark meat. He says he was making fun of his own redneck heritage.

Otto's intentions may have been innocent enough, but wouldn't it make sense for him to think a little harder before he leaps into such endeavors?

Not only does he look like a goof, it reflects on other Kansans and Franklin County residents, too.

Blacks make up about 2.5 percent of the county's population, according to the latest census. But blacks have lived in the area for more 150 years.

And significant contributions to our society and history have been made.

In the late 1860s, a huge upsurge in the black population occurred in Kansas, near the end of the post-Civil War reconstruction era, in a migration known as the "Exoduster" movement, in which freed southern blacks came to Kansas seeking deliverance from southern racism. Separate but equal churches, schools and more were evident and accepted.

Locally, Elijah Tinnon is one of the best known black men who came to Kansas in this time. He fought, with some success, to integrate Ottawa schools in 1881, more than 75 years before the noted Brown v. Topeka Board of Education case that changed American education.

Eventually, though, "Jim Crow" attitudes prevailed.

The Franklin County Historical Society has information on the immigration efforts in its "People — African American" files.

One would think that, despite the complications of predominantly racist attitudes for so many decades, that with such a progressive background as we have in our area — and the more enlightened attitudes of today — that those elected to represent us would be express themselves with more sensitivity and a little less "Redneck" humor.

If Otto feels the need to express himself so flamboyantly on video, perhaps he could produce a positive one encouraging positive race relations, too.

— Jeanny Sharp, editor and publisher



ONLINE EXCLUSIVE: More editorial cartoons at http://www.ottawaherald.com/news_opEdToons/

Reach for the stars with Star Guides

This is the third year of Reach for the Stars, our local after-school program. Becky Nevergold is the director and is continually thinking ahead, researching and searching for ways to improve an already excellent program.

There are several ways to be eligible for this program. Each night it offers a healthy snack, play time (after all, most of the participants — children and adults — already have had a long six-hour day in school), homework time and Thinker Tinkers (academic games) and other activities.

This year, the 19 fifth-graders had an opportunity to apply for a job within the program helping the kindergarteners or first-graders. They had to obtain permission from their parents, were interviewed and then have to work an internship to see how they perform. They can fill several job vacancies, if they qualify. Currently, 12 of the 19 have qualified and are now doing their internships in Star Guides.

One job is being a greeter. The Reach for the Stars staff wants each child to have positive contact when arriving at the school. Some of the fifth-graders make sure each child is greeted warmly, which has to make each of the students feel wanted and important.

Another job is helping with snacks.

MARGE STEVENS



Positives in Education

Some days, the snacks are bowls of fruit or applesauce or bags of snacks in some form, and the younger students need an extra hand.

If the students have their homework finished, they can play educational games and often these Star Guides are needed to help with the games.

Reach for the Stars has an automated scanning system to make sure everyone is safe and accounted for. This system needs someone to help the younger students to scan their name tags and to place them in the right bucket for the next day.

Recently I visited the after-school program and met three Star Guides. Lyndsey Williams was absolutely bubbly when she shared her job with me.

"I love it when I can help the younger kids," she said. "I have lots

of fun doing it. I take care of the scanning if they can't reach it, and then I have to make sure each name tag gets where it needs to be."

Sounds like great leadership skills to me. I couldn't get over her enthusiasm.

Meghan Cubbison spends her time helping the younger students with their games.

Candies Van Horn has applied to be a Star Guide but has not been told if she was accepted. She is really hopeful since she loves the younger students.

What do these students get from all of their hard work? It clearly adds to their self-esteem and leadership skills.

This program fits into the absolutes that all the children have as a goal for character building. The components: respect improves safety, cooperation leads to sportsmanship, responsibility encourages leadership and empathy helps understanding. What better skills can anyone learn as a member of society or any other relationships they may enter?

What a great opportunity for these students. Thank you, Mrs. Nevergold for always thinking of ways to improve our student's skills — academic and social.

Marge Stevens is an Ottawa School Board member.

Reader Forum

No legitimate argument against amendment

I'm a political junkie. It's kind of my hobby. So, I follow politicians' statistics like fantasy football players. Who introduced what, who voted how. It's sad, I know, but, a hobby is a hobby. I came across a story the other day that tells about a lot more than just politics. Corporate corruption, cruelty, the strength individuals can show, how public servants respond and what it says about them.

In 2005, a 19-year-old woman working for KBR, a Halliburton subsidiary, in Baghdad was gang raped by her co-workers. Then in an attempt to cover up the crime, her supervisors put her under armed guard in a shipping container and she was locked up for 24 hours without food or water. She was threatened that if she sought medical assistance outside of Iraq she would not have a job in either Iraq or Houston. A rape kit was taken by local Army officials. It was handed to KBR security officers, who promptly "lost" it. Because of the lack of evidence, the Department of Justice declined to investigate.

The young woman who suffered this attack and was denied any opportunity for justice, tried to sue the company. Here is the kicker. Halliburton has a clause in its contract with its employees that states any dispute between the company and the employee must be settled through

binding arbitration. By the way, the arbiter is a private contractor paid for by Halliburton and he agrees with the company.

OK, here is the political part. I always have been a fan of Al Franken. He wrote some of the best classic "Saturday Night Live" skits. He wrote a couple of the best and biting political satire books I've ever read. And his radio show on Air America was hilarious and informative. So when Mr. Franken ran for the Senate in Minnesota, I was pleased and watched the race with great interest.

Well, Sen. Franken offered his first amendment to a bill on the floor of the Senate recently. He introduced an amendment to the 2010 Defense Appropriations Bill that would withhold defense contracts from companies like KBR "if they restrict their employees from taking workplace sexual assault, battery and discrimination cases to court." The young woman who was the victim in this crime was on the floor of the Senate with Franken and told him how much this meant to her. The measure was passed, 68-30.

Nice story, isn't it? A U.S. senator seeing an injustice and taking action to correct a wrong. A decisive measure that received broad bi-partisan support. Yet, there is something in this that leaves a bad taste in my mouth. Thirty senators voted against this amendment, including the two senators that represent me. Yes, Sam Brownback and Pat Roberts from the great state of Kansas voted to protect corporate profits and rapists rather than hold criminals re-

sponsible for their actions.

Roberts and Brownback have not issued any public statement about the vote. I e-mailed both senators' offices asking for their positions on this but have not been given a reply, so, I am left to draw my own conclusions. I've always known that the Bush/Cheney administration was a wholly-owned subsidiary of the Halliburton Corp. I guess that extends to most of the Republican Party. Did I mention that all 30 senators voting against the amendment were Republicans?

I always try to give the benefit of the doubt to people, and I try to not question their motives. In this case, I can see no legitimate argument for my senators to vote against this amendment. There is no principle of free market or family values that can explain supporting the injustice of what happened to this young woman and what continues to happen. This was not an isolated case. At least four other women have attempted to file charges in similar cases, and there is no telling how many did not come forward given the threats the company made against the victims.

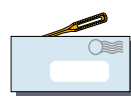
When I started this letter I said that this story is about more than just politics, and that it says something about the public servants by how they responded. What this says about Al Franken is that he is concerned about injustice. What it says about our senators, well, I'll let you draw your own opinion.

— Dan Shannon, Ottawa

Share your views with The Ottawa Herald

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