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# OTHER VIEWS

MORE LETTERS ONLINE "Rep. Jim Lemke has it wrong in his plan to reinvent Missouri's judicial system," writes John P. Messner of Lakeshire. "The problem is not that the current 'Missouri Plan' exists or for its highest courts and for St. Louis and Kansas City circuits; the problem is that outstate Missouri still relies on the corruptible partisan judicial election system." Read and talk about this letter and more letters online at [STToday.com/letters](http://STToday.com/letters).

Monday • Josh Goldberg, Bob Herbert  
Tuesday • David Brooks, Maureen Dowd  
Wednesday • Paul Krugman, David Graeber  
Thursday • Karen Valby  
Saturday • Ellen Goodwin  
Sunday • Charles Krauthammer, Leonard Pitts

## POINT OF VIEW

# "American Idol"-style debates leave much to be desired

The most revealing comment in last week's Democratic presidential debate came from Chris Riech. Riech, a Democratic strategist, asked to explain his lackluster political showing. Riech lamented the superficial style of modern day presidential races. "This isn't American Idol," Riech complained. "We're choosing a president."

Viewers could be forgiven for thinking otherwise. NBC's debate had all the elements of a prime-time talent show: front-runners trying to retain momentum, also-rans jockeying for second place, real-time viewer participation and even a crane to offer comic relief. Moderators enforced a 60-second time limit on the eight contenders and held lightning rounds to elicit one-word replies.

The result was the sort of unbridled, depthless debate that has become commonplace in presidential politics. Candidates went unchallenged as they offered

convincing yet answers to rapid-fire questions. Asked what he would do on his first day as president, New Mexico Gov. Bill Richardson said he would "get us out of Iraq with diplomacy" before reforming energy policy on day two. Former North Carolina Sen. John Edwards responded to a question about his use of campaign funds to cover a \$400 haircut by telling a childhood story about leaving a restaurant his father could not afford.

Yet even Edwards, the smooth-talking trial attorney, seemed frustrated with the debate's superficiality. He pointed out at one point that the discussion had not touched on specific policy proposals. "And I think we have a responsibility if you're going to do this," Riech's not enough."

Actually, rhetoric is enough for today's debates, particularly when paired to carefully choreographed gestures and postured personal anecdotes. As candidates rely more on image consultants to determine everything from when they remove their jackets to how they use their hands at the podium, they begin to look and sound eerily alike.

There are occasional flashes of humanity and levity. Last week's came mostly from inane former Alaska Sen. Mike Gravel, who wondered aloud how the rest of his opponents got there and soiled moderator Brian Williams for treating him "like a potted plant." Gravel was hardly presidential, but his campaign reported a surge of support afterward, perhaps from voters weary of stage-

managed performances by mainstream candidates.

These candidates are learning that slick packaging can backfire. Yearning to see the man behind the political machines, we now invest a candidate's personal quirks and idiosyncrasy cracks with more significance than ever before. So Edwards' primping makes national headlines and Arizona Sen. John McCain's "Buckle Up" quip inflames the blogs.

Such faces capture our interest briefly, but even they cannot stem our yearning with presidential races. A Pew poll released last week found that more than half of voters consider the campaign dull, and nearly two-thirds say it's too long. An earlier Pew poll found Americans losing confidence in our collective ability to make political decisions.

Yet there are countervailing trends. CBS' "Road to the White House" series offers a less scripted look at candidates

COLLEEN CARROLL CAMPBELL



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## THE JOSH HANCOCK TRAGEDY

# Employers can save employees' lives

By Howard Weissman

As a Cardinals fan, a father, an employer and a human being, I was deeply saddened by the tragic death of Josh Hancock. But as Cardinals manager Tony La Russa noted on Monday, "Doesn't this happen to people every day all over? Everybody loses family and friends."

I assume that Josh Hancock did not want to die. I assume that Josh Hancock did not enjoy being sick or in pain. And based on what already has been reported, I assume there were warning signs that Josh Hancock may have had a drinking problem, and according to the latest news reports, team captains and coaches may have tried to help him.

This is as it should be. But what companies help? Expressing concern to a problem drinker is a start, but co-workers who become worried about the impact of drinking on a person's job performance or health and well-being need to go further. That includes conveying their concerns to supervisors who take them seriously. What is not helpful — to the person or the organization — is covering up for or lying about a co-worker who

has problems. It's vitally important to understand that incidents such as these can be avoided if employers will step in and intervene. Lives can be saved when employees do not tolerate impaired performance, when they vigorously confront such warning signs such as tardiness and the visible indications of hangover, when they offer help when a problem first appears and when the standard-bearer does not have his own issues with alcohol.

Maybe people in the Cardinals organization had tried to intervene, and Josh wasn't ready to change. But maybe they just missed it, thought that he was just a young, single guy who liked to have a good time and that what he did on his own time was none of their business. Or maybe they looked the other way and let it slide.

In my work with area companies, I know that when similar tragedies occur — particularly in the case of alcohol-related deaths — nearly all of the victims' co-workers and super-

visors feel a certain amount of guilt: "I should have said or done something. I should have pushed him to get help. What could I have done differently?"

It's not Tony La Russa's or the Cardinals' fault that Josh Hancock may have had an alcohol problem. Even so, the manager, clubhouse leaders and team executives almost surely are being asked asking themselves what they might do differently the next time they see a player showing signs of alcohol abuse.

There's a good chance they will, along with every other area employer. Alcohol is the most abused drug in the country. It leads to more premature deaths and accidents than any other drug. One out of 10 people who drink are going to develop a problem with alcohol. Some of them will die.

Alcoholism is a disease. It's a chronic disease. Untreated, it can become a terminal disease.

Researcher William A. Flanagan of the National Center for Alcoholism and Drug Abuse, the highest disability available in civil social workers from the National Association of Social Workers, notes that as programs, an employee assistance program based in health, and a provision of the St. Louis area chapter of the National Center on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse.



It's essential to react quickly to the warning signs.

## OUR LOCAL CONTRIBUTORS

# Banning teens from malls is no solution

By Terrence Freeman

The echo boomers of Generation Y, born after 1982, rival their parents' generation in size and spend almost \$200 billion per year. They are the next dominant generation, and they are not going to disappear.

Millions of dollars are invested in shopping malls — America's modern town squares — where thousands of area residents work (including teens) and tens of thousands shop (including teens) every weekend. Indeed, suburban malls increasingly have established themselves as more than merely accessible centers of commerce. Depending on the season, they attract people with events as varied as chairs and art exhibits to the Easter Bunny — all in air-conditioned (or heated) environments.

With legitimate revenue concerns, Jamestown Mall has joined the Galleria, St. Louis Mills and many malls throughout the country in restricting unaccompanied teens on the weekend. For them, the mall's "Welcome" sign has become a little bit smaller.

I don't enjoy the ban, but I do understand the rationale and the dangers that one sometimes encounters. But Sunday's fatal shooting at Ward Parkway Center in Kansas City — by a 19-year-old man — should serve as a reminder that teens are not the only concern.

I work with young people who are stellar citizens. They participate in programs at community centers, schools and museums. They are scholars, agents for positive change, mentors, disciplined athletes, artists, writers and musicians. They are active in church, temples, synagogues and community services.

When I think of teenagers, I think of Brittany Shaghtee, the Francis Howell High School teen who composed a symphony performed by Missouri State University, and Nathan Quinn, the Affton middle-school state vocabulary bee champion. I am impressed by the rehearsal work ethic of the members of the Intrepid Percussion Ensemble in the Ferguson-Florentine School District, and I am excited by the diverse group of area teens who will participate in the Missouri Scholars Academy program this summer.

These and thousands of others deserve consideration beyond a blanket policy. The large majority of teens who respectfully visit malls without incident are right to be concerned about paying for the actions of a relatively small group. Of course I would be delighted if more teens were spending time with their parents or in well-supervised, weekend enrichment programs, but they also need relatively safe spaces in which to refine their social negotiating skills and polish their ability to make decisions.

To be sure, malls are not playgrounds or hangouts. Analytically and functionally, however, they are centers of community with elements and activities as varied as mall-walkers, networking, casual conversations, reunions, window shopping and food courts. I enjoy seeing some of the diverse friendships on display for the mall's multigenerational weekend occasions.

We can discourage all teens in order to reach the troublesome few, but the disruptive youths who leave the mall will not cease being disruptive. The restrictions on teens by malls merely transfer problems to other venues. Is this the best solution our collective imaginations can come up with?

There already is too much generational distance in our country. We can make teenagers our partners in seeking creative solutions. We can ask them for their ideas about addressing the concerns of adult parents or mentors. If we are willing to listen, they are sure to offer refreshing perspectives.

Our children need protection, direction and confidence in their transition to adulthood, not expedience. Our modern town square must be a place where we all can gather in mutual respect and safety. These are our youth, and we must do better.

Terrence Freeman of Spanish Lake has a graduate-level education from St. Louis Community College. An additional program director for 100 Black Men of America, Freeman has served as a consultant and volunteer for churches, community organizations, schools, industry and law enforcement agencies.

## POLITICS

# What you see is not all you can get

Howard Dean, chairman of the Democratic National Committee, feels that the world would be better off without the press. He suggested recently to a group of bankers. He was responding to a banker's complaint that candidates spend only in sound bites. His solution: "Have candidates in a meeting like this and bar the press."

"Bar the press," said, would require human restriction. Dean of all people should also know that citizen journalists are everywhere, even at banking conventions, and that nearly everybody has a video phone and access to YouTube.

But Dean has a point, which is that the omnipresent omniscient media distort the truth more often than they reveal it. Driven by corporate profit motives, media conglomerates pander to the least noble of man's appetites and become "tabloid" as Dean put it.

Indeed, Dean was making a case for the written word. In a world where television, YouTube and the Internet dominate the media, visual imagery necessarily dominates discourse. If one were to

play word association with top presidential candidates, the words probably would be visual, more auditory.

Admit it: John Edwards, Mitt Romney, Barack Obama, a smile (too far), Mike Romney, star-bell shirts and sunny John McCain, forever a POW, Rudy Giuliani, the man from Grand Zeno.

Superficial? Yes, but images matter. They evoke a visceral response precisely because they're processed by the brain's right hemisphere where our emotions hang out. Written language, on the other hand, is processed by the left hemisphere, home to reason and logic.

It's no mystery why the Democratic Party, identified as the more-feeling party, is also home to more artists and actors, while the Republican Party tends to attract more business-minded folk.

This is an oversimplification, clearly; we're all a little bit this and little bit that.

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