

Passing Lane

Commentary on Life in Kentucky

Legislative Cover-Up

TECHNICALLY, it could be called Frankfort's first political cover-up to occur during the Ernie Fletcher administration. However, unlike those cover-ups alleged to have happened during Paul Patton's terms as this state's chief executive, this one won't require a pardon from the governor's office.

The newly-designed Kentucky license plates can now have the cornball "smiley face" design – allegedly selected by former Gov. Patton himself – covered up with a decal of the state seal. The Commonwealth will apparently sell the \$1 decals for Kentucky drivers who don't like the license plate's current goofy design.



Gov. Ernie Fletcher



Former Gov. Paul Patton

Oddly enough, the smiley face character is used in commercials by Wal-Mart, this nation's largest retailer. In the Wal-Mart commercials, the smiley face is a cute little being that zooms around its stores, discounting prices.

Perhaps the Fletcher administration should launch an immediate investigation into whether former Gov. Patton owns any Wal-Mart stock, or if he has ties to the retail giant's advertising agency. Putting that company's symbol on hundreds of thousands of motor vehicles throughout the state amounts to a heck of a lot of free publicity.

But then again, what kind of publicity is it, to put a Wal-Mart symbol on the license plate of the state that leads the nation in its percentage of smokers, obese residents and toothless adults? This is not a good thing.

Of course, if the Fletcher administration were to ask Patton to come up with a new license design, we know how the disgraced former governor would respond. Rather than the sun with a smiley face on it, Patton would portray himself, shooting the moon at the Commonwealth's voters. Then – and not just because of the scandals that wracked his administration – we could all say that we had seen the end of Paul Patton.

KEES Needs Its Standards Raised

THE legislative proposal to raise the standards that qualify incoming college students for Kentucky Educational Excellence Scholarships (KEES) is a good idea. When the program, which is financed with revenues from the Kentucky Lottery, was first introduced, the standards to which scholarship awardees were held were way too low.

As it stands now, qualifying students under KEES require a 2.5 grade point average (on the 4.0 scale) and get progressively better scholarship monies if they score a 15 or above on the ACT tests. That's the equivalent of C-plus work.

Rightfully, state Sens. Lindy Casebier, Brett Guthrie and Tim Shaughnessy want to raise the stan-

dards. Our state can't afford to reward mediocrity. We need students dedicated to excellence and initiative appropriately rewarded and kept in the state. The initiative of these senators addresses the ages-old problem of Kentucky's best and brightest students going to out-of-state colleges and eventually settling elsewhere. We need them to stay in the Commonwealth to get a college education, and to help make a brighter future for all residents here.

The proposed new standards for KEES – a 3.0 GPA and additional monies for those scoring 20 or above on the ACT – will go a long way toward keeping students who have displayed hard work and initiative in this state. There is no statistical evidence to

prove that the higher standards would lead to grade inflation in Kentucky's schools. Accountability to KERA requirements and new federal standards go a long way toward preventing this from happening.

Sadly, college scholarship monies do not reward students who have not performed well academically due to a dysfunctional family or a poor socioeconomic situation. But it should be pointed out that a college scholarship does not solve those problems, either.

Kentucky needs to reward and keep its best and brightest near at home. Keeping the standards low would only serve to chase them away to another state and continuing a problem that has plagued this state for decades.

Life in Kentucky

BY BRAD VELEY



"When did this rash of bad publicity first appear, Governor Fletcher?"