



Promise breakers and Kool-Aid drinkers

This week's column makes history.

It celebrates two years – 104 consecutive weeks – of ensuring that the Constitution's mandate that Congress makes no law "prohibiting the free exercise ... of the press" wasn't for naught.

Journalists who dig and ask tough questions of the powerful are an endangered species. So when they do their job the right way, it's so exceptional, it becomes the news.

Rick Santelli of CNBC News serves as a great example. While reporting among traders on the floor of the Chicago Mercantile Exchange, Santelli described the federal government's bailout plan as "promoting bad behavior."

Stuffy anchors pooh-poohed him. But traders cheered when Santelli challenged the White House to "put up a Web site to have people vote on the Internet as a referendum to see if we really want to subsidize the losers' mortgages, or would we like to at least buy cars and buy houses in foreclosure and give 'em to people that might have a chance to actually prosper down the road, and reward people that could carry the water instead of drink the water."

Perhaps Kool-Aid would have been a more appropriate term. No matter, Santelli isn't drinking. For that, he and every other journalist in the nation, including those in Kentucky willing to ask the tough questions of congressmen in Washington, governors in Frankfort and mayors at city hall – are liberty lovers.

Liberty Lover: Kentucky Chief Justice John Minton Jr. ordered an independent audit of the commonwealth's massive decade-long courthouse-construction program. He also wants the results of the audit "made public upon completion."

This should prove interesting, especially with the increased scrutiny given to Garlan VanHook, former general manager of the facilities for the Administrative Office of the Courts. VanHook resigned Feb. 25.

Since 2000, 65 projects – a majority of the state's \$880 million in courthouse contracts overseen by VanHook – have gone to Codell Construction Co. Inc. in Winchester. The company hired VanHook's brother in November. The firm also was bonded for only 5 percent of the value of its work on public projects, rather than the 100 percent required by law.

"Bonding" with the right people in Frankfort can do wonders for business.

While the state builds Taj Mahals in small Kentucky counties to administer “justice,” taxpayers struggle to pay their mortgages. Thanks to Minton, some justice may finally come to taxpayers.

Liberty Lover: Momentum is building to eliminate prevailing-wage requirements on school construction projects.

A news release from the Kentucky Opportunity Coalition reported research by the Department of Education’s Facilities Management Division showing that prevailing-wage requirements “unnecessarily inflated the cost of school construction by more than \$480 million” between 1999 and 2004 – almost precisely the amount needed to repair crumbling school facilities.

Imagine what Kentucky schools could have done with that money. If prevailing-wage requirements had not been forced on school districts all these years, schools could have been repaired and Kentucky’s students could have received a better education.

Liberty Losers: While the economy is tanking, House Minority Floor Leader Jeff Hoover and Senate Majority Floor Leader Dan Kelly smiled and signaled “thumbs up” to raising taxes during the current legislative session.

Joining them were fellow Senate Republicans Charlie Borders, Carroll Gibson, Ernie Harris, Vernie McGaha and Robert Stivers. Senate Democrat Walter Blevins also broke his “No New Taxes” Pledge.

House Republicans Bob DeWeese, Danny Ford, Lonnie Napier and Jim Stewart shamefully joined with Democrats Royce Adams, Robert Damron, Jim Gooch, Keith Hall and Melvin Henley to increase our tax burden.

These 17 could have held the line. They didn’t, and Kentuckians lost.

A big, putrid “thanks for nothing” to these promise-breakers.

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