



A five-finger discount worth the risk

By Jim Waters

Keep this column away from the kids. It promotes stealing.

For the record, I believe in the King James Version of the Ten Commandments, including the No. 8. But even the Old Testament offered mercy to desperate people.

“Desperate” defines Kentucky when it comes to new ideas and leadership backbone stronger than a banana, both noticeably absent in the current gubernatorial campaign.

Mind you, I’m not advocating that public officials nab money from Kentuckians. Lord knows, (and He *does* know) that practice thrives, including the current administration’s penchant for mixing campaign stops with ribbon cuttings on taxpayer time while using vehicles financed by hard-earned money lost to taxes. After getting caught, they soberly agreed to reimburse taxpayers. Saintly.

No, I’m talking about importing policies that work in other states in order to revive Kentucky’s stagnant economy.

Apparently, former gubernatorial hopeful Jonathan Miller disagrees.

During a recent candidates’ forum before dropping out of the race, Miller expressed opposition to fellow candidate Bruce Lunsford’s borrowing ideas from those running for office in other states.

Miller suffers from the NIH (Not Invented Here) virus that plagues the commonwealth and infects most of the state’s education and economic policy wonks.

Thankfully, Miller failed to make it appear that what Lunsford did deserves hard time or hot time in the biblical sense. (Steven Beshear also borrowed another candidate’s ideas).

Still, I’ll bet that if Miller thinks it’s wrong for candidates to borrow wording or ideas from campaigns in other states, he most likely would resist as governor “borrowing” policies succeeding in those states.

Successful companies such as Toyota and UPS have discovered a competitive edge in “borrowing” best practices from other firms – sometimes even from competitors – to improve business.

Why shouldn’t lawmakers and governors do the same?

For instance, Kentucky’s next governor could wield a positive influence over the commonwealth’s sluggish economy by going south of the border, grabbing Tennessee’s right-to-work policy and bringing it back.

Right-to-work laws simply protect employees from being forced to join unions or pay dues whether or not the benefits are worth those payments. The government doesn’t force any other citizen to pay dues to an organization. Rather, citizens voluntarily choose which organizations to join and support. Union membership should be no different.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that states near or bordering Kentucky with right-to-work laws outperform – in key economic areas – states without such a law.

Five nearby right-to-work states that often compete with Kentucky for new jobs – Georgia, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina and Tennessee – averaged nearly 287,000 new jobs between 1996 and 2004, the bureau reported. Kentucky added a measly 83,477 new jobs during that same time period.

Still, NIH persists.

While endorsing gubernatorial candidate House Speaker Jody Richards recently, United Steelworkers of Kentucky labor boss Ernest “Billy” Thompson twice crowed about Richards opposing what he called “right-to-work-for-less” policies.

The facts: The bureau reports that people in right-to-work states tend to make more money. Personal incomes are higher and unemployment rates lower in “right-to-work-for-more” states than in Kentucky.

There was no mention of this dichotomy in an article on the United Steelworkers of Kentucky Web site entitled “Right-To-Work Hurts Everybody In The End, Including The Boss.”

The piece, written by Berry Craig, identified as a member of national and state teachers unions, attacked right-to-work works laws and their proponents. Missing, however, from Craig’s article is:

- data backing his claim that “paychecks in right-to-work states are a lot skimpier than in non-right-to-work states.”
- proof that states without right-to-work laws have bustling economies.
- testimonies from out-of-work Kentuckians claiming that right-to-work laws equal the twin sister of greedy employers.

The truth as stated – factually – by the Bureau of Economic Analysis: Right-to-work states that border Kentucky rank higher in personal incomes than Kentucky. For example, Virginia ranks No. 8 in per-capita personal incomes among all states.

Kentucky ranks No. 46.

Our next governor should beg, borrow or steal *any* ideas that would change such miserable results.

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