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APPALACHIAN NEWS-EXPRESS

OPINION

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COLUMN

Toward a Christian nation?



Fillin' In

Russ Cassady

Since it's such a hot topic these days, I feel it's incumbent on me as a columnist who is regularly read by about five people (on a good week) to make my feelings known.

I want the United States of America to be a Christian nation.

There — I said it.

However, before you label me a fascist (if you're on one side) or call me an ally (if you're on the other), let's break down what I mean by that.

A lot of people are saying that they want the USA to be a "Christian nation."

I don't believe I have the market cornered on truth, and I certainly don't believe I'm always right, but I will say that my conception of a Christian nation may be totally different from what you commonly hear described.

For me, a Christian nation would not require people to be Christian, nor be a nation that looks down on or demeans those who believe differently, but would instead be a nation that inspires people to consider this Jesus guy because of the example his followers set and deals with people the same regardless of the conclusion they draw from that.

You see, in my eyes, those who believe that people should be forced to convert to Christianity are missing the whole point. We can't abrogate free will, the greatest gift God has granted us.

Becoming a Christian is ultimately a matter of choice. The best I can tell, God forces no one to come to believe in and follow Him.

A Christian nation, I believe, would not bar prayer from schools nor religious expression from public life, but would also inherently look down upon coercion as being something that is contrary to God's will, as well as the essence of the nation.

To me, a Christian nation respects and protects all life, from the womb to the tomb.

In my conception, a Christian nation would not just ban elective abortion, but instead

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GUEST COLUMN

Voters approve constitutional amendment

By Mitch Whitaker
State Representative
94th District

Another legislative effort aimed at keeping elected officials accountable received strong support from Kentucky voters earlier this month. On November 3, voters approved a proposed constitutional amendment limiting a governor's ability to grant pardons or commute sentences around a gubernatorial election. The measure passed by approximately 71 percent to 29 percent, reflecting broad support for adding a new constitutional safeguard to one of the governor's longstanding powers.

The amendment is the 42nd voter-approved change to the Kentucky Constitution and strengthens Section 77, which outlines the governor's authority to grant pardons, commute sentences and issue reprieves. Under the new language, a governor may not grant pardons or commute sentences during the 60 days immediately preceding a gubernatorial election or through the fifth Tuesday following that election. This period extends through the transition between administrations. The change applies to every governor going forward.

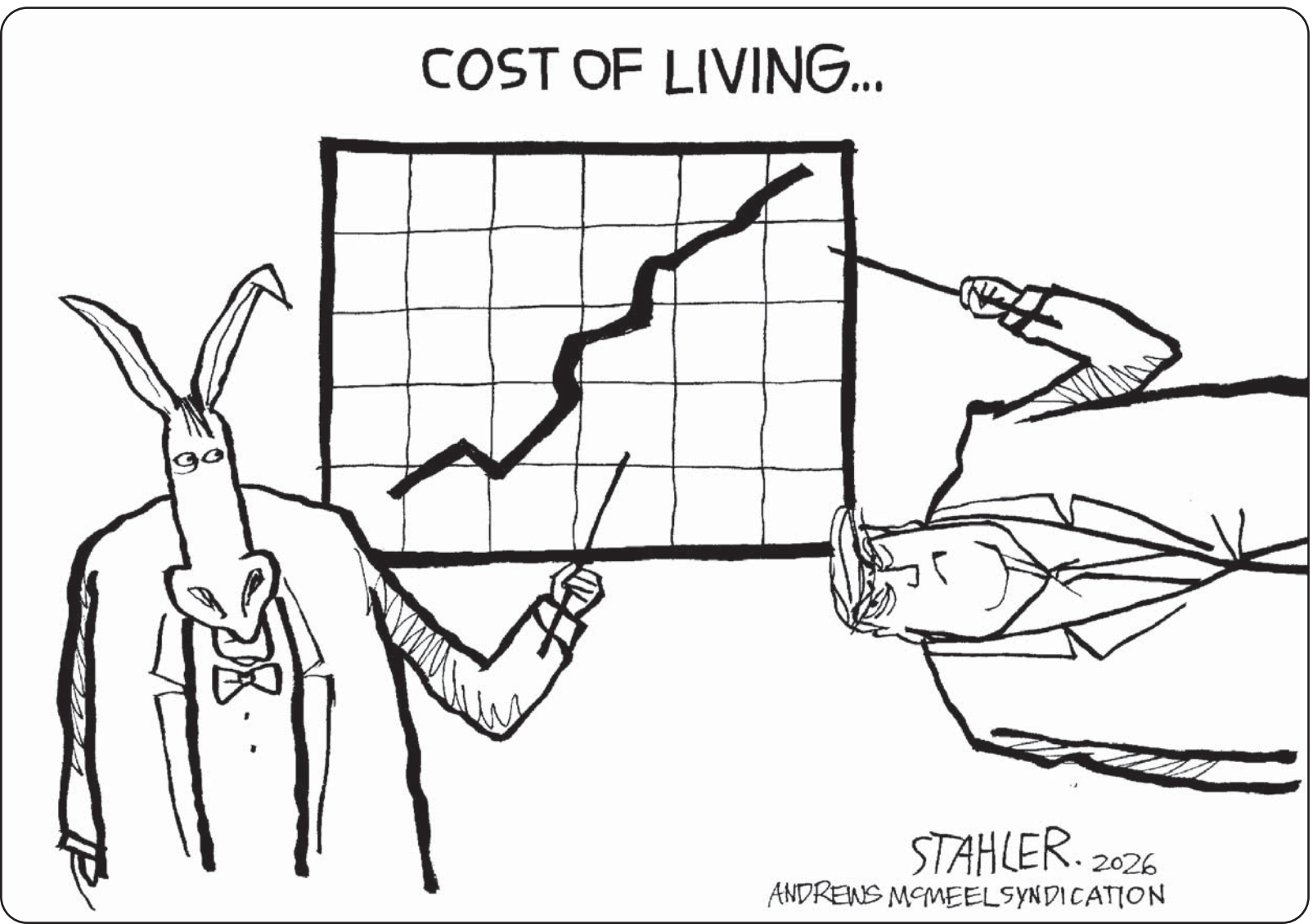
Importantly, the amendment does not eliminate the governor's existing clemency authority. Governors will continue to have the power to pardon individuals or reduce sentences outside of the restricted period. They will also remain responsible for filing a statement explaining the reasons for each decision, which must be available for public inspection.

To understand why this change was brought before voters, it helps to look at the history of Kentucky's Constitution and how the governor's clemency powers have been used.

Kentucky's current constitution is the commonwealth's fourth and was adopted in 1891, making it more than 135 years old. It is considerably more detailed than the constitutions of many other states, with more than 260 sections addressing matters that other states often leave to the legislative process. While voters have approved amendments over the years, much of the original document remains in place, reflecting the social and political priorities of the late 19th century. For example, its original language limited voting rights to white men age 21 and older.

One provision that has received increased attention

SEE WHITAKER, PAGE 6A



COLUMN

Session results: Veterans, Military Affairs and Public Protection

By Bobby McCool
State Representative
97th District

During the 2026 Regular Session, the House Veterans, Military Affairs, and Public Protection Committee focused on issues that directly affect the safety, well-being, and quality of life of Kentuckians, while also supporting those who have served our nation. With a broad jurisdiction covering military affairs, the Kentucky National Guard, veterans' services and benefits, and the retention of military installations, the committee also considers matters involving fire prevention and public safety, food and drug protections, public health regulations, sanitation, and waste disposal. This work reflects the committee's important role in protecting Kentucky communities, supporting military families and veterans, and ensuring the health and safety of residents and visitors across the Commonwealth. I am especially honored to serve as Chair of this committee, both as a veteran myself and as a strong supporter of the brave men and women who serve as our first responders. This commitment is important to me, and I will continue working to ensure our veterans and first responders receive the respect and support they have rightfully earned.

Measures that received committee approval and cleared the legislative process to become law include:

HB 369 includes post-traumatic stress disorder as a qualifying medical condition for hyperbaric oxygen therapy.

HB 419 strengthens firefighter representation on the Kentucky Fire Commission and expand access to life-saving cancer screenings.

HB 436 allows free greens fees at state park golf courses to veterans who graduate from the PGA HOPE program.

HB 652 streamlines school mapping by consolidating it under the 911 Services Board, improving access to the most current floor plans in an emergency. Vetoed. Overridden.

HB 767 strengthens emergency response by requiring the Kentucky Division of Emergency Management to establish and maintain the Kentucky Qualification System, designed to ensure personnel involved in disaster and incident management have the proper training, qualifications, and credentials to respond effectively when emergencies arise. It also supports the development of trained incident management teams and emergency operations center support teams, helping Kentucky better prepare for and coordinate responses to disasters and other emergencies.

SB 11 establishes a

SEE MCCOOL, PAGE 7A