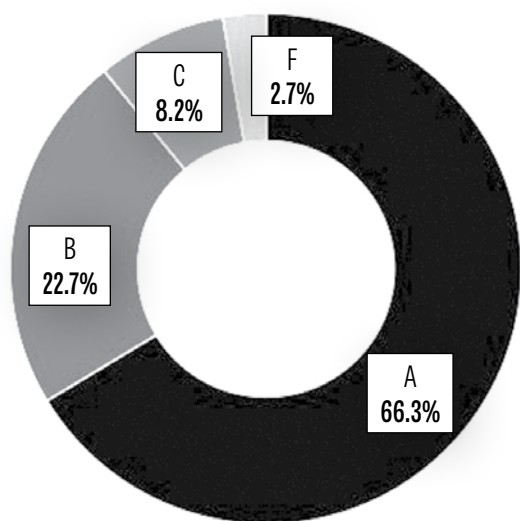


ONLINE POLL:

How would you grade the state and local flood response?



This poll reflects the opinions of 292 respondents. Visit www.state-journal.com to take part in today's poll.

EDITORIAL

Spread the word about flood relief fund

While the Kentucky River has flowed back into its banks and its mud has been scrubbed from the streets it inundated earlier this month, the hard work of cleaning out and, in some cases, rebuilding remains before us. One of the biggest needs right now is funding, which is why the Franklin County Community Fund created the Frankfort/Franklin County Flood Relief Fund.

Earlier this week, Mayor Layne Wilkerson and Judge-Executive Michael Mueller announced that the fund had eclipsed the \$100,000 mark. And while that is great news, it is merely a drop in the bucket compared to what will be needed to put the pieces of our city and county back together again, which is why we encourage our readers to share the website for the flood relief fund via word of mouth and social media.

Online donations may be made at <https://tinyurl.com/franklincountyflood>. All contributions to the fund will be distributed through vetted community non-profit organizations to those affected by the historic flood.

"We're getting a lot of attention statewide, even nationally and I think we need to capture that right now while can because we need to bank some of this money while the nation is focused on us so that we can help our friends and neighbors in the days and weeks ahead," the mayor explained last week.

In its commitment to full transparency, the Franklin County Community Fund intends to share regular updates on how the funding is being used to support those affected by the flood.

City and county officials started working on a process for fund distribution this week. Grants will be awarded on a rolling basis, based on the recommendations of a local committee with firsthand knowledge and expertise of the needs and the local organizations best positioned to quickly respond.

The first round of grants are expected to be handed out next week with additional grants awarded on a weekly basis until all funding is exhausted.

The needs of our community are great and recovery will be long road for the hundreds who have been affected. While there are plenty of organizations collecting monetary donations for flood victims, those who contribute to the Frankfort/Franklin County Flood Relief Fund can rest assured that their donation will go toward helping a neighbor in their time of need.

I cannot fathom life without ability to read

Reading is in my blood. As I've mentioned in this column before, my mother was a school librarian. But my lineage on this subject runs even deeper. Two of my grandparents served on the local library board, and my uncle was a book dealer. Still, my greatest inspiration for reading may have come from a family member I never even met.

Clem Coomer, my second great-grandfather, was born in rural Adair County in 1877. Like so many of his generation, formal education was a luxury. The demands of the family farm took precedence over school, and as a result, Clem spent much of his life not knowing how to read.

That changed when he met Miss Bertha Hamilton. Bertha was among the first graduates of Lindsey Wilson College and soon taught at a one-room schoolhouse in the community where Clem lived. Despite their vastly different backgrounds, the two fell in love and soon married. Already in his thirties, Clem learned to read under the patient instruction of his wife.

Naturally, I never knew Clem personally. But he lived to the age of 95, and both my mother and grandmother knew him well. Through their stories, I gathered a sense of who he was — a kind and compassionate man with a remarkable gift for storytelling. Yet what resonated with me most was his devotion to reading the Bible daily. For a man of deep faith who had been denied literacy for so long, the ability to read the Bible for himself was a treasure, not just a skill.

I can't recall a time when I didn't know how to read. My parents undoubtedly played a role in teaching me, as did Nannie Ben-

nett, who cared for me as a child. I also credit my preschool friends for assisting — primarily the ones I found on WDCN in Nashville: "Sesame Street," "The Letter People," and "Read All About It!" By the age of four, I was reading Bible passages, and by kindergarten, my teacher, Mrs. Gail Miller, would often ask me to read the class stories aloud.



Tommy Druen
Guest columnist

I cannot fathom life without the ability to read. Beyond the joy of literature, literacy is fundamental to learning. Every class I ever took — regardless of subject — demanded reading. And, in adulthood, I can't imagine trying to function without understanding how to read books, newspapers, internet sources or manuals. But literacy is not merely about recognizing words; it's about comprehension, critical thinking, and the ability to build upon knowledge. It is the most essential of all essential skills.

Given its importance, I was pleasantly surprised to learn that the global adult literacy rate now stands at 86.3%. That figure exceeded my expectations. But any optimism I had quickly vanished when I discovered that the United States lags behind at just 86.0%. That's right — our nation falls below the global average.

A deeper dive into the data only worsened my dismay. The U.S. has the lowest literacy rate among industrialized nations. Every European country surpasses us — our closest peer, Greece, stands at 97.9%. Even within the Americas, we rank below every

nation except Belize, Guatemala, and Nicaragua, where access to education remains a significant challenge.

How did we get here? The United States has the highest GDP in the world — nearly double that of China, our closest competitor. Our total national wealth and median per capita income lead the globe. Compulsory education has been the law of the land in all 50 states since 1929, and we spend more per student on public education than almost every other country, exceeded only by Luxembourg, Norway, and Iceland.

For Americans, illiteracy is not a matter of access or resources — it is cultural. And that realization troubles me even more. What does it say about our values? What does it mean for our future? Ray Bradbury once warned, "You don't have to burn books to destroy a culture. Just get people to stop reading them."

I realize I'm preaching to the choir, because you are reading this yourself. But take note of how much time you spend reading versus scrolling through your phone.

How often do you read to your children or grandchildren? Do people see you putting value towards literacy? It doesn't have to be a literary classic. It doesn't even have to be of high quality. People just need to read more, if no other reason than to practice, and appreciate the skill that so many wish they had.

I have no doubt Clem Coomer would agree.

Tommy Druen is a 10th-generation Kentuckian who resides in Scott County. He can be reached at tommydruen@gmail.com.

LETTERS

'PROVIDING NUTRITIOUS MEALS TO STUDENTS SHOULD NEVER BE A POLITICAL DEBATE'

Dear editor,

The Community Eligibility Program (CEP) has been a lifeline for students in Frankfort, ensuring that every public school student receives free breakfast and lunch daily — no paperwork, no stigma, just nourishment. However, proposed cuts to CEP funding threaten to undo this critical support system, leaving thousands of children vulnerable to hunger and placing financial strain on our schools and local economy.

If funding is eliminated, Frankfort Independent Schools and Franklin County Schools stand to lose hundreds of thousands of dollars in federal reimbursement. This loss will force the districts to reinstate meal costs, pushing many low-income families to choose between paying for lunch or covering other essential expenses. Research shows that when meal programs are no longer free, participation drops significantly — meaning many children will go hungry during the school day.

Additionally, this funding cut will harm our local economy. Frankfort Independent Schools currently source fresh produce and proteins from local farmers, infusing critical dollars into Kentucky's agricultural community. Without CEP, schools will struggle to afford these partnerships, and local farms will lose a steady and reliable buyer.

Providing nutritious meals to students should never be a political debate. Hungry children cannot

learn, and when we invest in feeding them, we invest in our future workforce, economy, and overall community well-being. Our legislators must act now to protect CEP funding — because no child in Frankfort should go without a meal.

*Natalie Gwishiri
Frankfort*

WRITER WRONGLY ATTRIBUTED QUOTE TO LINCOLN

Dear editor,

A previous letter writer submitted quotes allegedly attributed to Abraham Lincoln ("Letter: In Lincoln's words," April 3). I thought the words did not sound like they came from the compassionate man he was. Nor did they sound like the words of Jesus as I read them in the Gospels.

A little research (Abraham Lincoln online.org) revealed that these quotes were not made by President Lincoln, but by Rev. J. H. Boetcker who was an opponent of organized labor. These quotes are known as Rev. Boetcker's Ten Cannots. The wrongly attributed quotes appear to be due to a pamphlet put out by a conservative political organization in 1942 which had actual Lincoln quotes on one side and Boetcker's Ten Cannots on the other.

Speaking of religion, why do conservative "Christians" want the Ten Commandments placed in public spaces, but not the teachings of the actual Christ. This has always puzzled me.

*Mark Roberts
Frankfort*

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