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TENNESSEE VOICES

A 'Year of the Horse' wish

Minority groups must get more involved in U.S. life

By Ming Wang, M.D., Ph.D.

The Chinese New Year is arriving soon, and this year will be the "Year of the Horse." On behalf of the Tennessee Chinese Chamber of Commerce and the Tennessee Immigrant and Minority Business Group, I wish everyone a happy new year!

America has been undergoing a tremendous amount of change in recent decades, most important of which is the increasing amount of cultural and ethnic diversity due to the rise

in population of minority groups. Today Hispanic Americans, African-Americans and Asian-Americans account for 18 percent, 15 percent and 6 percent, respectively, of the U.S. population, and it is anticipated that in the next decade these minority groups will become the majority for the first time in this country.

The rising population comes with an increased amount of social and societal responsibility. Traditionally, minority groups such as Asian-Americans are more focused on our own work and families, and have not been actively involved in mainstream American activities such as politics and seeking leadership positions in the community and government. This needs to change. As Asian-Americans increase in number and influence, we need to participate more actively in these community and governmental activities, and help to solve the problems America is facing as a country today.

As Asian-Americans, we have our own needs, as well. Like all other minority groups, we desire racial equality and equal opportunity, and we continue to fight against glass ceilings in the workplace, discrimination in the admission process at major American universities, and racial discrimination, which was exemplified by the nationwide demonstration across 27 U.S. cities that took place on Nov. 9, 2013, where more than 10,000 people gathered and protested ABC network's racially insensitive programs. The only way for Asian-Americans to achieve racial equality, however, is for us to have more of a voice in the American society, as well as



A crowd celebrates the Chinese New Year in 2012 at Eakin Elementary School in Nashville. This year the new year begins on Friday.

GEORGE WALKER IV / FILE / THE TENNESSEAN

more representation in the American government, both which will come only if Asian-Americans increase our participation in and contribution to society.

Asian-Americans do have a great deal to share with the rest of America. For example, one of the main issues facing America today is education. Asian-Americans are well known for our ability to educate our children to excel in school. However, we need to not only succeed in educating our own youths, but also and more importantly, share our knowledge and skills in this area with the rest of America so we can all work together to improve the educational system in America.

I hope this year's Chinese New Year — the Year of the Horse — will bring "galloping" changes in this country in the interest and attention of Asian-American community, includ-

ing Chinese-Americans. We should not be content with merely participating in our own communities' activities, such as celebrating the Chinese New Year with dumplings and dragon dance festivities, we should also be more confident and willing to step out of our own communities and participate more actively in the mainstream activities of the American society, such as politics and leadership roles in the community and government, so that we can work with all racial and ethnic groups and through collective effort help shape the future of America.

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Whimsical Gelett Burgess gave world the blurb

teachable moments
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"To appreciate nonsense requires a serious interest in life." Gelett Burgess arrived at this observation through experience.

In his 1902 essay "The Sense of Humor," Burgess reflected that nonsense could be found by reading between the lines of a story.

"It is ever the situation that is absurd, and never the victim; and in this lies the secret of his ability to appreciate a farce of which he himself is the hero."

Burgess was born in Boston on Jan. 30, 1866. He graduated with an engineering degree from Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1887, and left Yankee sensibility for the opportunity of California. He worked as a draftsman at the Southern Pacific Railroad, and in 1891 he was hired to teach topographical drawing at the University of California at Berkeley.

He was a natural iconoclast, and he was forced to resign his position when he was suspected of the New Year's Eve vandalism of a Cogswell fountain in San Francisco. Henry Cogswell was a dentist who had migrated west at the beginning of the

California gold rush. He was an early investor in mining stocks and real estate, and he became a leader of the temperance movement. Cogswell believed that if men had access to cool drinking water they would not frequent saloons. He erected three drinking fountains in San Francisco — Burgess and his pals toppled one in the wee hours of Jan. 1, 1894.

While considering his career choices, Burgess and some friends founded a magazine with a humorous outlook on life. The title, *The Lark*, reflected the whimsical beginnings, yet the publication was moderately successful, and the magazine published 25 issues over two years. The previously technically minded Burgess found that he enjoyed writing, and particularly enjoyed writing nonsense verse, a writing style that was later popularized by Ogden Nash, Theodor Geisel and Roald Dahl.

His verse "The Purple Cow" is a classic:

*I never saw a purple cow
 I never hope to see one;
 But I can tell you, anyhow,
 I'd rather see than be one!*

Once Burgess had determined his future was as a writer, he moved to New York City, where he wrote books and magazine articles.

He published 28 books in several genres, including young



Gelett Burgess

adult, where his most popular books were the "Goops" series of illustrated books and comics that taught young people about manners and etiquette.

Burgess' influence is seen on virtually every book cover, album cover and CD box, and movie promotion. In 1907, to help drive interest in his satirical book "Are You a Bromide," he included promotional text from the fictional Miss Belinda Blurb.

Shortened to blurb, the "flamboyant advertisement, or inspired testimonial," is embedded in our culture.

Burgess died Sept. 18, 1951, in Carmel-by-the-Sea, Calif.

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OUR VIEW

President's visit is nod to TN education

Today, President Barack Obama makes his first visit to Nashville since 2008, when he was presidential nominee Obama debating Republican contender John McCain on the campus of Belmont University.

While reports suggest security and scheduling constraints will make the chief executive's visit brief, it is significant that the president has chosen to make Middle Tennessee one of his first stops after his State of the Union address — and that the setting will be McGavock, a public high school in a state that has seen its educational fortunes change dramatically.

The overriding message of Mr. Obama's State of the Union was income inequality, and Tennessee certainly has its share of that, but the key drivers of Tennesseans' lower-than-average per capita income and high levels of social assistance are inadequate levels of education and lack of incentives to graduate. What the president is expected to talk about today is how a good education can be a great equalizer.

The energy and enthusiasm surrounding education in Tennessee have been growing for a few years now, since national yardsticks warned that the

state's schools were harboring a misconception that students were performing better than they actually were. That led Gov. Phil Bredesen and his successor, Bill Haslam, to make education reform their priority, with the added incentive of a half-billion dollars in "Race to the Top" funds from the federal government to make it all happen.

President Obama's presence here today is in part a recognition of the hard work that state leaders, educators and students throughout Tennessee have put in to reverse their fortunes.

By the way, for the president to make a favorable example of a school system in your state — for the rest of the country to see — is a good thing. The negative spin that has been leveled by some in advance of Mr. Obama's arrival is deplorable, even if a majority of Tennessee voters do not approve of his performance. Simple courtesy should be expected, just as Tennesseans were hospitable to Presidents Bush and Kennedy when they came to Nashville.

President Obama's visit is a strong acknowledgment that the people of this state can show others how to make education shape a better future.

OTHER VIEWS

Obama should quit campaigning, lead

By Chris Devaney

Divided. Troubled. Deteriorating.

Those were the top three words used by respondents to a national poll from NBC News asking about the state of our Union. Some may be surprised at those adjectives being used to label America. But should anyone be, in this era of a White House that continually places an emphasis on campaigning — and dividing — in lieu of leading?

The latest example of President Obama's preference for lecturing on the hustings, and not policy-making, will occur later today here in Music City.

Mr. Obama is scheduled to be at McGavock High School, where he will surely remind us all of the lofty promises made to America during his State of the Union address on Tuesday night.

On its face, this should be expected: Presidents rally support for their causes. In fact, it has nearly become a time-honored tradition for our national chief executives to travel around the country and make an appeal directly to Americans. Typically, this involves corraling support from Democrats, Republicans and independents alike.

But this Oval Office eschews that last part and tends to use such occasions to extol the virtues of an expanded federal apparatus while rapping Republicans over the head for their failure to fall in lockstep behind the president. See his last stop in Tennessee as an example. Mr. Obama's Chattanooga speech quickly morphed into a rally — far below what's expected of a statesman seeking solutions. And Obama seriously wonders why he cannot get anything through Congress?

Perhaps he should take a page from the way we do things here in Tennessee. Instead of allowing his team to play the search-and-destroy political games that abound in Washington, President Obama should focus on building

bridges with members of Congress. Or how about an emphasis on crafting smart policy instead of smart comments in stump speeches?

That's not how we operate here. You see, in Tennessee we have a great story to tell. We're moving and achieving like never before. Gov. Bill Haslam was elected in 2010 to bring a jobs-focused approach to Volunteer State government — and he's succeeding in completely revamping how our state markets itself and lures investment. Thanks to his vision and the hard work of our Republican legislators, Tennessee has been named a top five state for job growth and was recently awarded the title of "State of the Year" for economic development. In education, Tennessee is the fastest-improving state and we saw the largest gains in the classroom that have ever been measured by the National Assessment of Educational Progress.

But these accolades were not given because Gov. Haslam bludgeoned his way through the General Assembly or because every single legislator with a different idea was undermined or castigated. Quite the contrary. An environment of innovation has dominated legislative deliberations where fiscally responsible and unique policy perspectives have been advanced. The results speak for themselves.

In Tennessee, Republicans are building an opportunity economy for all. That means children, regardless of income or ZIP code, are prepared by high-performing schools to enter society ready to contribute, families are given a stable environment to grow, and careers are created for long-term financial success. All this is being accomplished by a governor and legislature that are working together and not embroiled in never-ending campaigns.

Amid thick irony, Obama is going to say he wants what we have in Tennessee for the rest of the nation. Of course, that would require him to quit campaigning. And if you think that's going to happen, then I have a first-class ticket on Air Force One to sell you.

Chris Devaney serves as the chairman of the Tennessee Republican Party.