

OUTLOOK

# Arts leaders back bonds

HSPVA from page B6

and the Houston Arts Alliance that a new downtown campus for the High School for the Performing and Visual Arts will be an important addition to the Theater District, the central city and the greater Houston region.

We urge HSD residents to vote FOR the bond proposal Nov. 6 by going to the end of the ballot. It will help these young artists realize their dreams.

*This article was submitted by Bill Arning, director, Contemporary Arts Museum Houston; Gregory Boyd, artistic director, Alley Theatre; June Christensen, executive director and CEO, Society for the Performing Arts; Dean Gladden, managing director, Alley Theatre; Jonathan Glus, executive director/CEO, Houston Arts Alliance; Alene Haehl, executive director, HSPVA Friends; Mark Hanson, executive director/CEO, Houston Symphony; Josef Helfenstein, director, The Menil Collection; Andrew Huang, president, Houston Downtown Alliance; Perryn Leach, managing director, Houston Grand Opera; Fran MacFerran, president, The Hobby Center Foundation; Jim Nelson, executive director, Houston Ballet; Sarah Rothenberg, artistic and general director for Du Camera; Patrick Summers, artistic director, Houston Grand Opera; Gary Tinerero, director, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; Stanton Welch, artistic director, Houston Ballet.*



Chronicle file

**HSPVA students work on their painting skills. If voters approve, the school will move to a downtown campus.**

## FIRST AMENDMENT

# Students have a right to speak out

By Jonathan Zimmerman

Sunlight is the best disinfectant. Fight bad speech with more speech. I don't approve of what you say, but I'll defend to the death your right to say it.

That's what my fellow liberals say — unless the speech in question is religious. Then there's a problem.

Witness the recent dust-up in Kountze, where school district officials had barred cheerleaders from displaying Bible verses on banners at their football games. A judge granted a temporary injunction to the cheerleaders, letting them display the banners until a full court hearing in June.

The injunction triggered celebrations in Kountze but outrage from liberal organizations, which invoked America's venerable tradition of church-state separation. The banners are part of a school-sponsored activity, liberals argued, so they violate the First Amendment's ban on government endorsement of religion.

But I think they've got this one wrong. The First Amendment also guarantees the free expression of religion, as well as freedom of speech writ large. Instead of trying to censor the cheerleaders, liberals should be rallying to their defense.

Sure, the banners were displayed at a school event. But they were generated by the students, not by the school itself. And this is how they're different from the pre-game prayer in Santa Fe, another small Texas town that became the focus of church/state controversy in the 1990s.

By long-standing tradition, Santa Fe High School's elected student chaplain delivered a prayer over the public address system before each football game. After Mormon and Roman Catholic families filed a motion to block these exercises, which they described as Protestant proselytizing, the school proposed a student referendum to determine whether the prayers should continue. And if the pro-prayer side won, the school declared, it would hold a follow-up election to choose the student who would lead



Dave Ryan / Beaumont Enterprise/AP

**Kountze High School barred its cheerleaders from displaying Bible verses on banners at football games after being sued. A judge blocked the school's ban.**

the pre-game worship. But both practices violated the First Amendment's establishment clause, as the Supreme Court correctly ruled in 2000. "The plain language of the policy clearly spells out the extent of school involvement," the court ruled, "in both the election of the speaker and the content of the message."

Not so for the cheerleaders in Kountze, who reportedly designed the banners on their own and even bought their own supplies to make them. It's hard to see how their speech reflects the imprimatur of the school, or violates the establishment clause.

But it does raise a question: Would the cheerleaders' defenders rally in support of students putting up banners with passages from the Quran



Randy Edwards / Beaumont Enterprise

**Kountze Middle School cheerleaders display their faith-based signs at a recent football game.**

or Confucius? At a press conference held in support of the cheerleaders, Texas Gov. Rick Perry answered yes.

So, in line with the principle of challenging speech with speech, I urge every liberal organization to converge on Kountze

with banners quoting other religious texts. We'll find out soon enough whether Perry and Co. really believe in free expression, or if they just want to protect their own.

Would this exercise trivialize the other faiths? Possibly. But there are

plenty of Christians who think that game-day football prayers mock their faith too. Their ranks include the famously devout Dallas Cowboys coach Tom Landry, who said that on-field prayers "mislead people and belittle God."

And these critics cite their own scriptural passages, especially Matthew 6:5: "When thou prayest, enter into thy room and when thou has shut thy door, pray to thy Father in secret." That's really, really different from doing it in a packed football stadium.

Personally, I find the whole concept of game-day prayers absurd. Why do players and fans thank God when they win, but never blame him when they lose? And doesn't he have more important things to worry about than a football game?

But, as a card-carrying liberal, I stand by the right of people to disagree with me. And I'm especially delighted that the conservative side now wants to protect students' free speech, after years of trying to muzzle it.

"No student should ever have to leave his or her religious expression at the schoolhouse gate," one of the cheerleaders' attorneys said last week. The game metaphor comes straight from Tinker v. Des Moines, the Supreme Court's landmark 1969 ruling allowing students to wear antiwar armbands in school.

Since then, liberals have struggled to protect student free-speech rights and conservatives have chipped away at them. In 2007, for example, the conservative majority on the Supreme Court barred an Alaska high school student from displaying a banner declaring "Bong Hits for Jesus."

The Kountze cheerleaders delivered a more reverent message about Jesus, of course. Just like the Alaska student, though, they invoked the Tinker case. Liberals should be happy about that. And they should rededicate themselves to protecting all student speech, no matter how pious — or impious — it might sound.

*Zimmerman teaches history and education at New York University. His article is reprinted with permission of the Los Angeles Times.*

## SPACE

# Time to reinvest in Houston's greatest legacy

By Kenneth M. Evans, Padraig Moloney and Kirstin R.W. Matthews

Next month, NASA again will face the looming uncertainty posed by a presidential election. In the last two years, budgetary restrictions have put short-term plans for manned spaceflight on hold or outsourced to private companies. With the expected gap in federally funded manned space exploration, NASA needs a more defined destination, a reasonable deadline and a multiyear budget commitment that can be supported across administrations. Investing in long-term basic and applied research should be a key component in NASA's mission and provide more fiscal stability during changing political climates.

Houston's own Johnson Space Center (JSC) has long been one of the nation's largest hubs for human spaceflight operations. However, as space travel becomes increasingly privatized, Houston is losing ground in one of its greatest economic, science

and engineering traditions. During the nationwide budget woes of the last several years, funding for the center has followed national trends and dropped from \$5.8 billion in fiscal year 2009 to an estimated \$4.5 billion in fiscal year 2013, a 22 percent decrease over the course of just four years.

As the agency's budget has decayed over the past decade, funding for research and development has often been cannibalized to support nearer-term programmatic needs. Nanotechnology, which is often said to have the most potential for translational research, or transformative scientific advancement, has suffered from disproportional funding cuts during this time frame.

While JSC has been a long-standing trendsetter in space technology, many

of its research facilities have languished since the outset of the National Nanotechnology Initiative (NNI) in the early 2000s. Further, NASA has made little progress in adopting internally developed nanotechnologies into existing mission platforms.

Encour-

agingly, this year's NASA budget proposal includes funding for the promising Space Technology Mission Directorate, an organization that focuses on "developing breakthrough space capabilities and applications," including several nano-based research

initiatives. In addition, following five years of steady decreases, the NNI reports a 29 percent increase in NASA nanotechnology-specific projects in 2012, from \$17 million to \$23 million. However, the majority of the funds went outside of Houston to other NASA centers.

The future of federally funded manned space travel will remain in a state of constant uncertainty as long as the grants for NASA's long-term research and explorations projects are evaluated and funded on a year-to-year basis. A new report we authored at Rice University's Baker Institute for Public Policy (available online at [www.bakerinstitute.org/policyreports54](http://www.bakerinstitute.org/policyreports54)) reviews the history of nanotechnology research and development at NASA and makes spe-

cific policy suggestions for reformulating the agency's appropriations process. According to our study, NASA should reinvest in basic research and space technology development with a clear intention toward a specific goal. Additionally, grant life-cycles should be extended beyond the presidential tenure and NASA's central office should encourage idea sharing and collaboration between individual centers as well as universities.

By refocusing on research during the lull in manned space exploration, JSC and Houston can maintain their position at the forefront of space technology research and development.

*Matthews is the science and technology policy fellow at Rice University's Baker Institute for Public Policy; Evans is a graduate intern for the Baker Institute Science and Technology Policy Program who is working toward a Ph.D. in applied physics; and Padraig Moloney is a recent Rice University engineering Ph.D. graduate.*

