Fox News’ Tucker Carlson apologizes for comments about Wiccans

March 1 By KELLIE KOTRABA  Religion News Service

COLUMBIA | — Fox News contributor Tucker Carlson has apologized for his comments on Wiccans, saying he “should have left them alone.”

More than 40,000 people had asked for Carlson to apologize through online petitions after Carlson, the editor in chief of The Daily Caller, criticized the University of Missouri’s guidelines for religious holidays.

“There’s any religion whose most sacred day is Halloween, I just can’t take seriously,” Carlson said on the Feb. 17 broadcast of “Fox and Friends.”

“I mean, call me a bigot. Every Wiccan I’ve ever known is either a compulsive deep Dungeons and Dragons player or is a middle-aged, twice-divorced older woman living in a rural area who works as a midwife,” he said.

But on last Saturday’s show, Carlson noted he had offended people, not his intention.

“I also violated one of my basic life rules, which is live and let live. The Wiccans have never bothered me or tried to control my life. I should have left them alone. Sorry about that.”

The buzz began on Feb. 12 with a post by Mizzou grad student Christopher White on The College Fix. White criticized the university’s guide to religions for listing eight Wiccan and other pagan festivals “right alongside major religious holidays.”

Soon after, Fox News.com reported that “Students at the University of Missouri don’t need to cram for exams that fall on Wiccan and Pagan holidays, now that the school has put them on par with Christmas, Thanksgiving and Hanukkah.” The article called it “all part of the school’s effort to include everyone’s beliefs, although some critics say listing every holiday associated with fringe belief systems is a bit much.”

Members of Hearthfires, a group of mid-Missouri pagans from different spiritual paths, watched some of Fox’s coverage during one of their regular meetings. The group’s response was mixed — half-smiles and raised eyebrows, half disappointment and hurt.
When Carlson said, “Call me a bigot,” one Hearthfires member responded: “You are.”

The Fox stories prompted a flurry of online responses from pagans in the blogosphere. Articles and editorials appeared in the University of Missouri’s student newspaper, The Maneater, as well as local newspapers, the Columbia Daily Tribune and the Missourian.

“What we’re doing is making sure people understand the Fox News article is wrong,” said university spokesman Christian Basi. “The University of Missouri is not recommending any accommodations for students observing Wiccan or pagan holidays,” it said in a statement.

Two days after the Feb. 17 show, Carlson apologized on Twitter: “To Wiccans and pagans: Sorry for my pointlessly nasty remarks. Your holidays still confuse me, but you seem like nice people.”

Kellie Kotraba is the editor of Columbia Faith & Values.
Discord Over Scholar’s Tribal Research

By NICHOLAS WADE
Published: February 25, 2013

The battle among scholars over an American anthropologist’s research on an Amazon tribe has spread to the National Academy of Sciences, the nation’s most prestigious scientific body.

Marshall D. Sahlins, a social anthropologist at the University of Chicago, resigned from the academy on Saturday to protest its decision to admit the researcher, Napoleon A. Chagnon. “Noble Savages,” Dr. Chagnon’s widely reviewed new memoir about his 35 years of work with the Yanomamô tribe, takes an unsparing view of his fellow anthropologists.

In a statement, Dr. Sahlins called Dr. Chagnon’s election last April “a large moral and intellectual blunder on the part of members of the academy” and added, “so much so that my own participation in the academy has become an embarrassment.”

The two men have been at odds for decades over the validity of sociobiology, the idea that human social behavior is shaped by evolution and culture, not culture alone. Dr. Sahlins’s 1977 book “The Use and Abuse of Biology” says sociobiology is “completely unable to specify the cultural properties of human behavior.”

Dr. Sahlins’s principal criticism of Dr. Chagnon concerns a well-known article published in Science in 1988 in which Dr. Chagnon reported that the men of the Yanomamô tribe who have killed others in battle father three times as many children as those who have not. This claim has “proven to be shallow and baseless, much to the discredit of the anthropological discipline,” Dr. Sahlins said in his statement.

Dr. Chagnon said he was familiar with those criticisms but called them invalid and said none had been published in a peer-reviewed journal.
Pedestrian upgrades slated for College Avenue

Project aims to aid pedestrians.

By Andrew Denney

Sunday, March 3, 2013 at 2:00 am

The Columbia City Council is set to vote tomorrow on accepting federal funding for long-awaited pedestrian safety improvements intended to keep students from darting haphazardly across College Avenue near the University of Missouri campus.

The bill would authorize City Manager Mike Matthes to enter agreements with the Missouri Highways and Transportation Commission to receive more than $1 million in federal enhancement funds for pedestrian improvements to College and for the construction of a sidewalk on the east side of Garth Avenue between Parkade Boulevard and Leslie Lane in north Columbia.

The improvements on College, which is maintained by the Missouri Department of Transportation, would receive $710,000 in enhancement funds, and the city and MU would split $142,000 in matching funds for the project — with the city as the lead agency.

"Pedestrian improvements on College have been needed for many years, and we are happy that this project will address concerns that we have had for our students' safety," said Karlan Seville, a spokeswoman for MU Campus Facilities.

According to a council report, the project would include the construction of landscaped barrier medians and two crosswalks on College between University and Bouchelle avenues. A consultant MU hired recommended in 2009 that new crosswalks and concrete barriers would increase pedestrian safety on College, but the university did not have funds available then to pay for improvements.

A 2009 two-day count of pedestrian traffic on College found that, out of about 7,500 pedestrian crossings between University and Bouchelle, about 5,000 were taken between crosswalks. According to the MU Police Department, between the beginning of 2009 and last summer, there were 11 injury accidents on that stretch of College involving pedestrians.
Assistant Public Works Director Dave Nichols said the city is seeking a consultant for the project, and he expects design work to be completed this summer. According to a council report, the city has a Dec. 1, 2014, deadline to find a contractor.

Mike Dusenberg, project manager for MoDOT’s Central District, said funds were made available through a federal roadway enhancement grant that can be used for road projects not directly related to automobile travel, such as bike trails and beautification.

Plans for the projects on College and Garth were submitted along with proposals from across the state and were awarded funding based on their potential for statewide impact, Dusenberg said.

"You have a number of folks from all over the state attending that university," Dusenberg said.

The Garth improvements would receive $293,600, with the city providing a $58,720 local match. The bill is on the council’s consent agenda, in which numerous bills are approved in a blanket motion.

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Posted in Local on Sunday, March 3, 2013 2:00 am.
Dogs help children with autism, MU researchers find

By MU NEWS BUREAU

Saturday, March 2, 2013 at 2:00 am

Families who have children with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) often are faced with significant challenges, such as caregiver burden, sleep deprivation and psychological distress. Because of these difficulties, ownership of pet and service dogs by families with ASD children has received growing attention as a way to provide benefits for these children and their families. Through a novel method of monitoring social media, interdisciplinary researchers from the University of Missouri have found that families with ASD children regard dog ownership as having a positive impact on their households. Rebecca Johnson, director the MU Research Center for Human-Animal Interaction and professor in the MU Sinclair School of Nursing and College of Veterinary Medicine, says these findings further indicate the positive effects animal interactions can have on children with autism. "We are beginning to learn how companion animals may provide comfort and unconditional love to families of children with autism, and to the children themselves," Johnson said.

For their paper, which was presented at the 2012 International Communication Association conference, the MU researchers analyzed word clusters such as "family" "pet" and "love" from thousands of Internet forum and social media posts by members of families with ASD children. Based on the researchers' analysis of these word groups, they concluded that dogs trained to be service or therapy animals can help children with autism in their social and school lives, as well as improve the overall quality of life for all family members.

This research is a result of collaboration through the One Health, One Medicine and Media for the Future areas of Mizzou Advantage.

— MU News Bureau
Extreme weather makeover: Has abnormal become the new normal?

March 2 By RICK MONTGOMERY The Kansas City Star

Those drought-damaged evergreens outside? Regional climatologists say to expect more in the years ahead.

And the surreal mounds of snow now hiding shrubs that barely survived summer’s heat? Get used to that, too.

It seems contradictory, this weird weather whiplash. But just consider the last couple of years in the nation’s midsection. Floods unleashed by record inflows into the Missouri River basin in early 2011. Then sudden and prolonged dryness.

Now 20 to 25 inches of snow heaped on Kansas City in the most dramatic, back-to-back smacking delivered by any winter week that many of us can recall.

Yet to experts who study climate change models, it makes sense.

Think extreme.

Like everything else about the 21st century, Midwest weather in the coming age could be set on sensory overload.

Crispier summers. Fewer but heavier snowfalls. Thunderstorms more intense, bursting between slightly longer arid periods. Crop yields that bounce from boom to bust and back.

“The cutting edge in climate research is in understanding these extremes,” said Bob Oglesby, professor of atmospheric sciences at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. “The (climate) models suggest we’ll be getting more of them … and now we think we’re beginning to see it in reality.”

No weather event or bizarre season or even stubborn two-year drought proves anything about a warming planet. Even a “superstorm,” the news media’s term for Hurricane Sandy after it dropped from hurricane status, could wind up being a once-in-a-lifetime affair for the New York City region.
That is the hope, of course.

But 2012 was, for America, the overall warmest year ever recorded. And many scientists see the snows that just buried our region as being consistent with long-term climate models that predict more severe swings, and extended periods of extreme, to come.

The latest thinking is partly based on a study published last year in the journal Geophysical Research Letters. It pins “extreme weather events that result from prolonged conditions” on a jet stream that in recent decades has become slower and wavier, with higher ridges and steeper troughs.

Researchers Jennifer A. Francis and Stephen J. Vavrus determined that polar warmth melting Arctic ice also was altering the pace and course of west-to-east weather systems around the Northern Hemisphere.

Picture a weather pattern in the belly of a python rather than gliding along a smooth-bending highway. As the jet stream gets loopier, dry spells may stick around longer, the research suggests, and cold blasts may linger. (Recall that just two years ago in Kansas City, at least 3 inches of snow covered the ground for about a month, practically unheard of.)

When a storm system bulges up, it’s apt to barge through this jet stream with pent-up abandon.

Francis and Vavrus noted: “As autumn freeze-up begins, the extra solar energy absorbed during summer in these vast new expanses of open water (from melting sea ice) is released to the atmosphere as heat, thus raising the question of not whether the large-scale atmospheric circulation will be affected, but how?”

In the Plains region and the Midwest — where extreme weather comes with the territory — the question becomes: How extreme can extreme get?

Can we count on more tornado seasons arriving in February rather than March, as the residents of Branson, Mo., and tiny Harveyville, Kan., witnessed last winter? Or will 2013 feel nothing like 2012, which didn’t act much like 2011?

“We could be heading into a period that shows more variability from year to year, or a stretch of a few years being unusual,” said University of Missouri climate scientist Tony Lupo.

Over the long run, “maybe abnormal is normal,” he said.

STORY CONTINUES...
A double dose of Heat-Moon on ‘Blue Highways’ anniversary

March 1  By BRIAN BURNES  The Kansas City Star

It has been 30 years since the publication of “Blue Highways: A Journey Into America.”

William Least Heat-Moon’s best-selling book about wandering and desire has been reissued in paperback. Accompanying that is a new hardbound collection of articles and essays published over the years, “Here, There, Elsewhere: Stories From the Road.”

Those who admire Heat-Moon know his regard for the magical state of being in transit. Before that there was the excitement of just being in print.

That first happened for Heat-Moon in July 1956, when 16-year-old William Trogdon of Kansas City submitted a letter to “Speaking the Public Mind,” the letters column of The Kansas City Star. His topic: the lack of sportsmanship exhibited by Ted Williams of the Boston Red Sox, who — upon stepping on home plate after hitting his 400th home run a few days before — had spit in the direction of the Fenway Park press box.

“To be a fine athlete, it takes sportsmanship and ability,” Trogdon wrote. “Williams definitely has the latter; definitely not the former.”

Not only was the letter published, it appeared alongside a drawing, rendered by a Star artist, depicting Williams standing next to a spittoon in the outfield.

The effect this had on Trogdon and his family was powerful.

“It put the seed in the heads of all of us that I might have some kind of a career as a journalist,” Heat-Moon said recently.

The letter and drawing are reprinted in “Here, There, Elsewhere.” If that event now seems to Heat-Moon a crucial career moment, there have been others. Among them, some 20 years later, was the assignment given him and several others enrolled in the photojournalism sequence at the University of Missouri School of Journalism.

That was a total-immersion drop into Glasgow, a small Missouri River community in central Missouri.
The students’ task: approach the residents, discern the community’s prevailing narratives and then find the right the words and photographs to convey them.

“I was enchanted with that experience, walking into a small community and finding a story,” Heat-Moon said.

“That was in October 1977.”

He set out on his three-month, 11,000-mile driving tour of smaller communities — on which “Blue Highways” would be based — the following March.

Heat-Moon, of English, Irish and Osage ancestry, published the book under his pseudonym. The name was given him by his father and formally bestowed by the Tribe of Mic-O-Say, the honor camping organization operated by the Heart of America Council of the Boy Scouts of America.

He avoids grand statements regarding the current state of the rural America he traveled back in 1978.

“It’s a mixed bag,” he said.

“Of all the things that have changed that I find worrisome, one is the continual sprawling of America. Even the small towns are losing their edges.

“They don’t stop anymore, they just sort of peter out.”