

# OPINION

EDITORIALS, LETTERS, COMMENTARY

## EDITORIAL

By Publisher Brent Schacherer and Editor Stephen Wiblemo



PHOTO BY ALEXISRAEL, COURTESY OF WIKIPEDIA COMMONS

A rose memorial was created for victims of the Sandy Hook Elementary School Shooting in Newtown, Connecticut.

## An opportunity to restore lost honor

On the sixth anniversary of the Sandy Hook massacre, the McLeod County Board has some unfinished business to tend to

Six years ago this week, 20 first-graders and six of their teachers and school administrators were shot and killed by a lone gunman at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut.

Our county's response to the mass murder and gun control debate that followed? In May 2013, the McLeod County Board voted 3-2 to declare all federal gun control laws null and void.

The three County Board members who favored the resolution made their point. They

don't like gun control. Neither do many other people — including numerous county residents who abhorred the board's action.

Now it's time to retrieve some sense of sanity over the issue of gun violence and to correct the board's horribly timed, over-the-top response.

It's not too late to go back and undo this symbolic, unenforceable response.

The County Board has an opportunity to recognize its overreaction, rescind the resolution, and recover some of its lost honor.

## READER LETTERS

## Will Christmas become just another pagan holiday again?

BY ORVILLE MOE  
Hutchinson

According to a series of articles in the Star Tribune beginning in July 2018, mainline Christian churches are facing an unprecedented decline in both the number of churches in Minnesota and the number of active members.

In its stories, the Star Tribune quotes an 11.3 percent decline from 2000 to 2018, with a reduction in active churches to 639 and membership dropping to 1.2 million. It also quotes a survey that states about one in five Minnesotans claim to have no religious affiliation of any kind. In the U.S. overall, the statistics on the decline are even greater.

On the other hand, the website salatomatic.com, an online guide to mosques and Islamic schools, claims the growth of 46 mosques in the Twin Cities area. It also claims 30 additional prayer spaces and 135 restaurants and markets serving the increasing Islamic community of more than 150,000 people.

The impact of this block of voters has been very apparent in the recent election of Islamic candidates to local, federal and state positions. Worldwide statistics on the number of people claiming to be Christians is now about equal to the number claiming the Islamic faith as their religion.

Christians are likely to be a minority in the very near future, and since our laws are driven by a majority vote it could soon be illegal to discuss, promote or worship the

Christian religion, as it is in those countries where non-Christian political leadership prevails.

As we enter this Christmas season, we find more pushback against the whole idea of Jesus Christ, God and the Holy Spirit as a significant part of the Christmas celebration.

History tells us that the celebration of Christmas as the birth of our savior, Jesus, was initiated in the fourth century as Roman Christians appropriated the pagan festival of "Saturnalia" (Dec. 17-25) from the Roman worship of Saturn. This was found to be so distasteful to the Puritans in Massachusetts that a law banning the celebration of Christmas was passed in 1659 and remained on the books for over 20 years.

However, most Christians recognize Christmas as a legitimate celebration of the birth of Christ, no matter what time of year it actually occurred.

Today, we are still able to worship Christ's birthday with only moderate objections by some people who think that all religious worship is "humbug" or those who actively oppose Christianity. I hope that we can keep this holiday as a celebration of Christ and not let it simply slip into a pagan commercial opportunity to have fun and buy gifts for ourselves.

Rather, let this be a time to give thanks to God for all the blessings which he has bestowed upon us and give back to those in need as we celebrate with our families.

Merry Christmas to all.

## COLUMN

## Gun debate requires empathy

Five years ago, Publisher Brent Schacherer and my predecessor, Doug Hanneman, began a solemn tradition.

Every December since 2013, the Leader editorial page marks the anniversary of the Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting with a reminder of the unfortunate resolution passed by members of the McLeod County Board in the wake of that tragedy. The resolution claims to nullify federal laws infringing on gun rights, but as County Attorney Mike Junge advised at the time, county commissioners have no jurisdiction in this realm. The Board of Commissioners essentially diminished itself to the level of a kangaroo court.

What was the reason for this overstep in authority? Those who supported the resolution said it was a preemptive measure to counter federal gun regulations that were being discussed following the massacre of school children. Of course no such regulations have been passed, and despite more deadly shootings in subsequent years it seems the commissioners' fears of the government coming for their guns were overstated.

In this action taken by the Board of Commissioners, the piece that seems to be missing is empathy. When it comes to the debate about gun regulations, that piece is often missing on both sides of the argument.

Empathy is understanding the feelings of others, even if you don't agree with them. That last part is especially important when dealing with contentious issues such as gun regulations.

We all have different viewpoints that are created by our own experiences. When we lack empathy, the results may lead to careless decisions such as the one made by the McLeod County Board of Commissioners.

For example, a person feeling empathy in 2013 might have thought, "I disagree that more gun regulations will make us safer, but I understand how the deaths of 20 first-graders would upset people. I also understand that while these



FILE PHOTO



Stephen  
WIBLEMO

EDITOR

people want action taken to avoid tragedies in the future, it doesn't mean they want to take all of our guns."

Similarly, a person feeling empathy might think, "I believe that more gun regulations are needed to keep guns out of the hands of dangerous people, but I understand people who disagree with me may still care about the safety of our children."

My personal experience in this debate began when I was young. My family did not have firearms in our house, but by the time I was about 10 years old my grandfather began teaching me how to shoot with a small rifle, one of several firearms he owned.

He would take me to a shooting range and discuss the basics of gun safety, and then we would shoot at cans and other targets downrange. I loved spending that time with my grandfather and I'm glad someone

taught me the basics of how to respect firearms.

I support people's rights to own firearms for recreation and self-defense, and when my sons are older I would like them to attend a firearms safety course. Even if they never own a gun, I believe it's important for everyone to understand and respect guns.

Unfortunately, that's not where my experience ends.

In January 2012, my grandfather who taught me how to use a firearm had one used against him. He was shot dead in his doorway by a depressed alcoholic. My grandmother who was home during the attack had to step over his body to run to her neighbor for safety.

The man who shot my grandfather had no past trouble with the law, so I don't believe there was any reasonable regulation that would have prevented this murder. However, knowing how it feels to have a loved one taken at the point of a gun has shaped my views. I understand the pain people feel when it happens to them, and I empathize with their desire to change things.

Fortunately empathy doesn't require a traumatic or life-changing event, but it does require a sincere attempt to acknowledge other viewpoints as being worthwhile. We would all be better off to remember this in our lives, or when crafting public policy.

## Support funding for national parks

BY MATT STEINRUECK  
Minneapolis

For years I have enjoyed our national parks for hiking, camping, exploring and sightseeing. In Minnesota, we are fortunate to have five national park sites including Voyageurs, Pipestone, Grand Portage and portions of the St. Croix and Mississippi Rivers.

Visitation to national parks is at record highs. Last year, 1.2 million people visited national parks in Minnesota, and they spent more than \$64 million in our local communities, which created 924 jobs.

Unfortunately, increased visitation, aging facilities and

inconsistent federal funding has taken a toll. Right now, national parks in Minnesota need \$17.8 million for infrastructure repairs. Crumbling historic markers, outdated electrical systems and deteriorating trails and roads are now common.

The good news is that Congress is considering bills to create dedicated funding for park maintenance needs. The House of Representatives' Restore Our Parks and Public Lands Act and the Senate's Restore Our Parks Act would direct federal funds each year to ensure that our national parks are maintained and accessible for all visitors.

In addition to fixing these American treasures, this investment

would help the state's job market. A recent study commissioned by The Pew Charitable Trusts found that over 200 infrastructure-related jobs would be created or supported in Minnesota if Congress invested in repairs to national park sites.

As a proud Minnesotan, I am delighted that our state is home to some of America's finest natural and cultural landscapes. These national park sites offer us places to contemplate the outdoors or learn about our shared history. Because of that, they are too critical to neglect. That's why I hope Congress will see these bills through to final passage so that our national parks can be enjoyed for generations to come.

**ONLINE READER POLL**  
Views from www.hutchinsonleader.com readers

**Reader poll question**

Do you plan to attend a Truth-in-Taxation hearing?

**Total votes: 47**

	<b>14.8%</b>	Yes
	<b>85.1%</b>	No

**The current question is:**

Should the U.S. punish Saudi Arabia for allegedly killing a journalist?

**About the poll:**

The results of the most recent online reader poll from hutchinsonleader.com are above. Readers wanting to suggest a question may email wiblemo@hutchinsonleader.com. This poll is not a pure scientific sampling of readers' views but rather is intended to create community discussion of issues.