

Viewpoint

Editorial Comment

Superintendents earned our trust this winter

Nobody likes Minnesota winter weather when it turns ugly, especially those in charge of the safety of our children, such as school superintendents and bus drivers. The superintendents make the call whether to start school late or call it off entirely, not just when the weather is bad — that happens a lot during a Minnesota winter — but also when the weather is dangerously cold, dangerously snowy and windy or the roads dangerously icy.

School bus drivers carry out their duty once the decision has been made and must brave not just the weather, but also deal with roads that are not yet cleaned, unseen hazards under the snow and deceptive ditches and driveways.

It's all too easy for parents and residents to second guess a superintendent's call — a call that has to be made early enough in the morning (5:30 a.m. at the latest) to alert bus drivers and parents, especially the morning of.

Before a superintendent makes that call, they do their homework. They look at weather reports and maps and work with the county on road conditions. Some actually drive the worst parts of a bus route to see for themselves what conditions are like. Others have drivers dedicated to checking those roads.

And they don't make that decision alone — they talk to each other, as well as to district staff and the school bus drivers.

Supt. George Weber in Pierz pointed out that some weather events are easier to call because the decision is obvious.

However, as Royalton Supt. John Phelps discovered, the decision isn't always so clear.

On one of the snow event days this year, Phelps was out driving roads and an early report forecasted 1 - 3 inches during the day. He was out driving at 4 a.m., and although the roads were still snow-covered, the plows were out. By the time he went home, ate, cleaned up and got ready for school, he opened his garage door to 3 inches of snow. The forecast had changed and 1 - 2 inches per hour was expected.

Studying weather maps, winds

and snowfall amounts per hour and predictions of the same, Phelps knew school would be let out early. That gives school bus drivers time to get their charges home safely.

Sometimes when the weather is awful in the middle of the day and the forecast is for it to lighten up, it's safer to keep students in class until regular closing time, than to send them home early.

Ultimately, it's a judgment call that must be made, Weber said.

Morrison County is a big county — and school districts at one

end of the county may not have the same drastic weather as districts on another end — so all school districts may not start late, call school off or close early.

It's a judgment call we trust our superintendents to make in the best interests of the students and staff under their

care.

Weber said superintendents know that late starts and early closings, as well as calling school off all together, cause havoc with parents who need to make sure their children are taken care of when they were scheduled to be in school.

There have been times Weber said he knew school should simply be closed, but that decision isn't easy when he understands the challenges it adds for many people.

Little Falls Supt. Steve Jones said at a recent School Board meeting that while the snowy and cold weather made a mess, it is what it is and superintendents can only do what they can do.

He said it's easy in retrospect for people to say if a superintendent made a bad decision — but no one ever knows if they made the right decision, because no one knows what had been prevented by not coming to school or having a two-hour late start.

He said someone once said to him: "I'd rather go to school in June than a funeral in February."

That kind of comment sticks with him when making those decisions.

It's something we should all remember when second-guessing a superintendent's call to close school, even if it means a make-up day later.



Check marijuana's link to mental illness, violence

Last fall, Minnesota elected a new governor, Tim Walz, who advocated for legalizing the recreational use of marijuana. When the ECM/APG Editorial Board questioned him about that position, he said we were deluding ourselves if we thought that recreational pot smoking was not widespread already.

I don't doubt him. It's obvious why. In 1976, Minnesota became the sixth state to decriminalize the possession of a small amount of marijuana. While the sale of marijuana for recreational use remains illegal, the courts and law enforcement did not want to be bothered with enforcing a law that thousands of Minnesotans wanted to break.

While the stigma of illegality remains, few Minnesotans remain overly concerned if someone they know is smoking pot. This is in part because of the belief that smoking marijuana is a victimless crime.

The problem is that the mentally ill often use marijuana to self-medicate. Studies have found that when they do, far from mellowing out, they are more prone to violence, psychosis and paranoia.

Alex Berenson is the author of the book, "Tell Your Children: The Truth About Marijuana, Mental Illness and Violence." In a speech Jan. 15 at the Hillsdale College center in Washington, D.C., Berenson noted that the first four states to legalize recreational marijuana (Colorado, Washington, Alaska and Oregon in 2014-2015) collectively had 450 murders and 30,300 aggravated assaults in 2013. In 2017, they had 620 murders and 38,000 aggravated assaults. Even after accounting for differences in population growth, he said, the percentage increase was far greater than the nation as a whole.

While advocates say if THC is really that bad, Western nations would have seen increases in psychoses alongside rising use. Berenson noted that even though the government tracks diseases like cancer with central registries, no such registry exists for schizophrenia or other severe mental illness.

West Words



by Tom West
Former Editor/General Manager

Berenson noted, however, that Finland and Denmark do track mental illness comprehensively. They have shown "a significant increase in psychosis since 2000, following an increase in cannabis use."

Citing an article in Schizophrenia Bulletin, Berenson said that, while schizophrenia patients are only moderately more likely to be violent when taking antipsychotic medicine and avoiding illegal drugs, when they add those drugs, their risk of violence skyrockets. The article stated, he said, "that 27 percent of people with schizophrenia had been diagnosed with cannabis use disorder in their lives. And unfortunately — despite its reputation for making users relaxed and calm — cannabis appears to provoke many of them to

"The problem is that the mentally ill often use marijuana to self-medicate. Studies have found that when they do, far from mellowing out, they are more prone to violence, psychosis and paranoia."

A Swiss study of 265 psychotic patients, he said, found that young men with psychosis who used cannabis had a 50 percent chance of becoming violent. "That risk was four times higher than for those with psychosis who didn't use, even after adjusting for factors such as alcohol use."

Proponents have argued that marijuana convictions are being used as a way to discriminate against blacks. I've only seen national studies that say as much. However, Minnesota has Uniform Sentencing Guidelines, so if blacks are being punished disproportionately, it is either because of racial bias in the judiciary or wider use of marijuana by black communities, neither of which justify legalization.

The likelihood of recreational use of marijuana becoming legal in Minnesota this year is slim.

Senate Majority Leader Paul Gazelka, R-Nisswa, said, "Legalizing recreational marijuana is a controversial issue to say the least and not something I would consider a priority issue."

But the chances aren't zero. One state Senate co-sponsor is a medical doctor and a Republican, Sen. Scott Jensen, R-Chaska. If pro-pot forces can peel off some GOP votes from the libertarian wing of the party, it could still pass in spite of Gazelka's objections. The senators should remember that the THC-psychosis link is not just about the users; the lives of others may be at stake.

This is also an issue that is thought to have election implications. During the last election, candidates for both the Legal Marijuana Now and Grassroots — Legalize Cannabis parties garnered over 5 percent of the vote in a statewide race, meaning that those parties now have major party status and will be on the ballot in 2020, same as the DFL and GOP. In every race those parties entered, one or the other polled at least 2 percent.

Although it is impossible to analyze, it is thought the legalize marijuana votes took mostly from DFL vote totals. If those parties had fielded legislative candidates, taking 5 percent from DFL candidates, the Republicans would have retained control of the Minnesota House. That's one reason the push for passage is coming from DFLers and Walz.

One idea being floated is to put the question up as a constitutional amendment. Some legislators are happy to use that as a cop out so they won't be held responsible for doing what they were elected to do — resolving the issues on which society has significant disagreement. Such referenda are getting a bad track record in recent years. California state government has become a mess because of them, and then there's the Brexit fiasco in Great Britain. Better to hold hearings on the risks and the realities than to ask voters to do the Legislature's job.

I've written against legalization before. We need more mental health, not less, in U.S. society.

Tom West, now retired, is the former general manager of this paper. Reach him at westwords.mcr@gmail.com.

Letter to the Editor

OCC-U-PIE honors Theresa Skorseth

To the Editor:

The Little Falls OCC-U-PIE honored Theresa Skorseth, with the "2019 Activist of the Year Award."

Despite frigid temperatures, she joined us at local Martin Luther King Day memorials and Black Lives Matter rallies in January. She helped organize the first Central Minnesota Peace and Diversity Fair in June 2012, and attended peace vigils in front of Camp Ripley.

She champions the Palestinian movement for self-determination and justice, as well as the Boycott, Divest, Sanctions (BDS) campaign aimed at pressuring Israel to end its occupation of Palestinian lands in the West Bank. She opposes drone assassinations and wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya,

Syria and Yemen.

Theresa challenged the false assertions of Islamophobic speaker Usama Dakdok in 2016, countering with principles of inclusion, understanding and mutual respect between people of different faith traditions.

She moderated informative public access television shows for six years.

Theresa also spoke out against city bias, selective enforcement/prosecution, lack of transparency, misuse of public funds and ran for City Council.

Herb Davis, nine-year St. Paul police officer, 30-year law enforcement instructor, friend and activist, stated, "Theresa raised two daughters that are dedicated to equal rights."

The entire Minnesota peace community is grateful for her commitment to social justice. — Robin Hensel, Little Falls

Letter to the Editor

Abortion remains hot topic of the day

To the Editor:

NY State just instituted a state law legalizing abortion up to birth. What does the Bible say about this? It's a violation of the 6th commandment, murder (Exodus 20:13); the deliberate taking of a life made in His image (Genesis 1:27). Exodus 21:22-25 says if a

married woman is pregnant and violence is done to her so that the baby comes forth (Hebrew "yasa") or is born and dies, the penalty would be death to the perpetrator.

Many say it's the woman's right to choose, however a baby involves both the mother and the father. Genesis 2:24 shows they become one flesh; neither one having control over their body (1 Corinthians 7:3-4).

The principle from scripture re-

garding abortion, (other than for a truly medical need), would be considered a violation of the 6th commandment, thou shalt not murder, for any involved in the actual deed.

Acts 3:26 tells us Jesus was sent to bless us in turning us away from our sins. Forgiveness of sins is available, even for abortion, if we truly repent and sin no more. — James Steinle, Swanville

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The Record welcomes letters. The Morrison County Record invites readers to contribute letters to the editor. E-mail letters are preferred to mcr@mcrecord.com. Letters should be no more than 200 words and Thank You should be no more than 75 words in length. Letters containing libelous material, or those intended as advertising will be refused. All letters must include a signature, address and a daytime telephone number. Deadline for letters is Wednesday at 5 p.m. Letter writers are limited to one letter every 5 weeks.

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Online Poll

Do you think that "Colton" the schipperke was unfairly ruled ineligible for best in show at the Westminster Kennel Club Dog Show?

1. Yes. Who cares if a friend of a friend of a judge's partner is involved.
2. No. The conflict of interest would make it unfair.
3. It would not have mattered, the right dog won.
4. I did not hear about this, nor do I care.

Last week's poll results

Do you feel Minnesota should legalize recreational marijuana?
53.8% - Yes - it's long overdue.
30.8% - Not under any circumstances - it's a gateway drug.
10.3% - Not until they figure out how to test those who may drive under the influence.
5.1% - Maybe - it'd be good revenue for the state.

Cast your vote online at www.mcrecord.com



Thank you letters

To the Editor:
On behalf of the Franciscan Sisters of Little Falls, thank you all — sisters, volunteers, businesses, individuals and parents who helped at the Soup Supper fundraiser Feb. 2, at St. Francis Convent. We served 489 people homemade soups, fresh breads and bars. Funds raised will benefit St. Francis Health and Wellness Center and St. Francis Music Center, Little Falls. — **Mary Thomas, volunteer coordinator, Little Falls**

Harding Place would like to thank Connie Pierzinski and family, Richardson Lions, Pierz Auxiliary for the holiday gatherings hosted for the residents. We would also like to thank Farmers and Merchants State Bank of Pierz and Holy Cross Church for organizing gift trees for the residents. The thoughtfulness and generos-

ity is greatly appreciated as it allowed for a memorable holiday season. — **Laurie Doroff, Harding Place**

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an appreciation for community, friends and family. She has been practicing law for over 30 years and is part of a team at BGS that can offer solutions to all of your legal questions.
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