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OUR VIEW: CENSUS

Being counted makes a difference

The actual collection of information is a year away, but awareness needs to be beefed up now about how important it is for Minnesota residents to participate in the 2020 census.

The attempt to count everyone — not just U.S. citizens but anyone who lives here — is a big undertaking that should be as accurate as possible. The U.S. Supreme Court would be wise to reject the Trump administration's attempt to put a citizenship question on the survey. The Census Bureau estimates adding a citizenship question would lower response rates among noncitizens, leading to an increased cost to the government of at least \$27.5 million for additional phone calls, visits to homes and other efforts to reach them.

Why it matters:

Census information determines federal funding and helps decision-makers do solid planning.

A lot counts on an accurate number. The data, constitutionally required to be collected every 10 years, help direct priorities for federal money, guide city policy and determine how many congressional seats each state gets. And that's just a few examples.

It was the 2010 census that determined the Greater Mankato area had enough population, at about 50,000 people, to be classified as a metropolitan statistical area. Being an MSA meant the area automatically qualified for federal funding — now about \$350,000 a year — that it had competed for in the past.

Also as result of that same count, a metropolitan planning organization, or MPO, was created here, guiding short- and long-term transportation spending. Studies on how to develop the Highway 22 corridor and Riverfront Drive were among those that benefited from the new resources that came with the MPO.

The city even uses census information to determine how to divide up patrol areas of police officers so they have a similar number of people in their assigned neighborhoods. The need for housing can be determined by analyzing census numbers.

Cities and counties aren't the only entities to benefit from good information. The data can tell planners about the size and location of upcoming assisted-living facilities and schools. The information is necessary for communities to make solid economic decisions based on projected needs. Building schools and care centers takes time.

Residents who are leery of filling out government census forms should know that under law, census information is secret. Census takers are prohibited from sharing your information with anyone, including police, immigration officials, landlords and child welfare officials. The penalties of breaking that law can include up to five years in prison and a fine of up to \$250,000. Census records are sealed for 72 years.

So if you are a college student, a jail inmate, a nursing home resident or a child, you should be among the counted.

Let's make sure the April 1, 2020, Census Day kickoff isn't a fool's errand. Too much is at stake for Minnesota.

OTHER VIEW

Biden's touching doesn't appear sexual

New York Daily News

Joe Biden's never touched us. We don't know how it feels, and have no interest in belittling anyone who's taken umbrage at the way he's grabbed their shoulders or embraced their body or, yes, smelled and kissed their hair.

Any woman touched by the former veep is free to tell him to take his hands or lips the hell away.

Still, we have brains to make distinctions and words to express them, so we ought to at least make this much clear: Biden has

not yet been accused of inappropriate sexual touching, of gratifying himself at another person's expense. Not forcible kissing, not grabbing buttocks as Al Franken did, not grabbing anyone "by the pussy" as Donald Trump boasted of doing.

There's a difference, and it should matter.

Biden is a flawed man whose positions and record and personal behavior should be scrutinized. But having made people uncomfortable doesn't disqualify him from public leadership. Yet.

FOUNDED IN 1887

The Free Press

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STEVE JAMESON, Publisher

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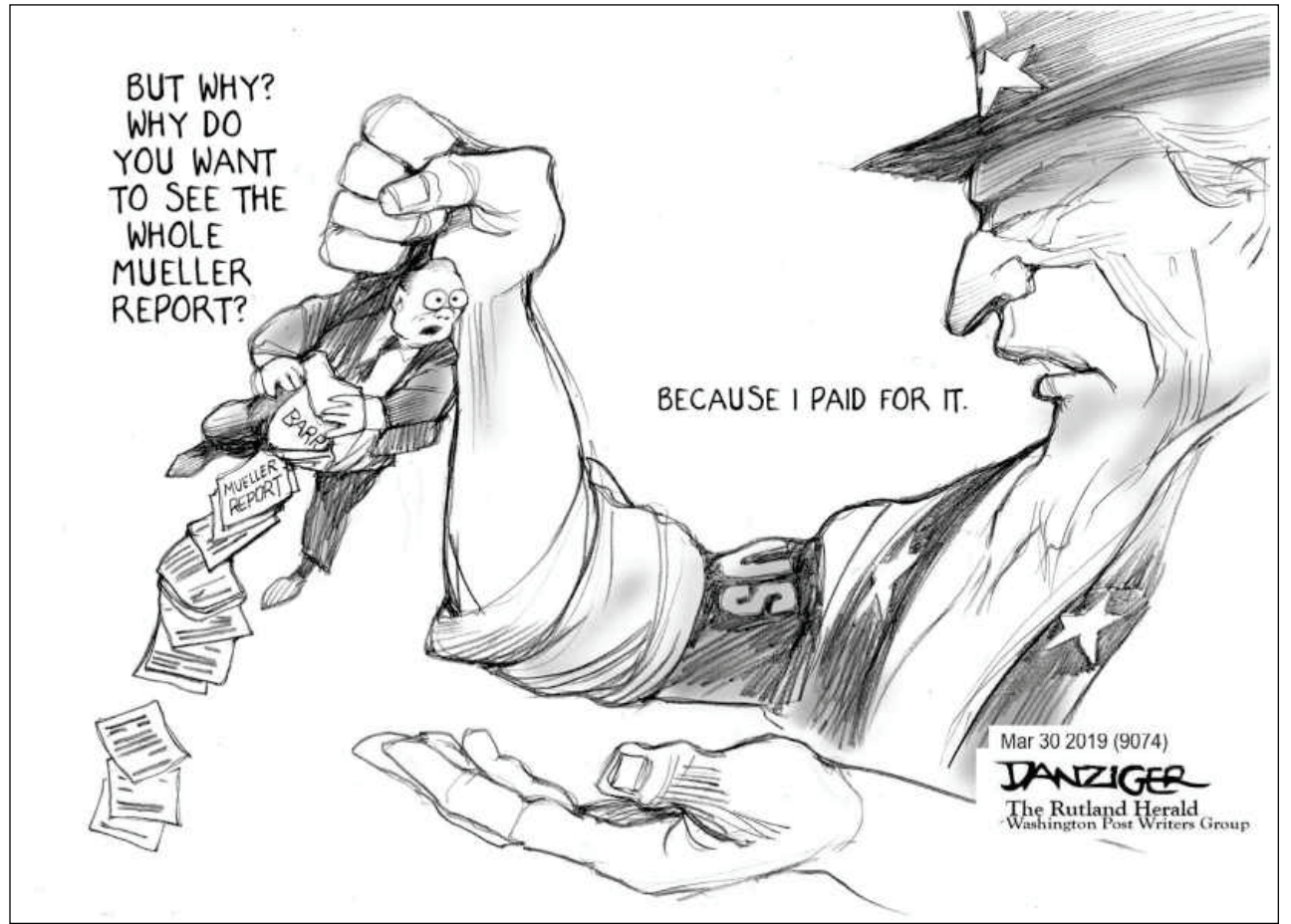
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Walz budget cannot be sustained

Gov. Tim Walz has unveiled his expansive and expensive budget. The impact is crystal clear: Minnesota businesses and all taxpayers would pay billions of dollars in additional taxes to support his budget that totals \$90 billion for the next two years, up more than 8 percent over the existing biennium.

We share the goal of investing in the state's future. But the governor's budget proposal is simply unaffordable and will impose additional headwinds to investment by private-sector job-creators.

The state does not lack in revenue. Minnesota has a \$1 billion budget surplus, and budget reserves are at \$2.4 billion. State spending will increase 4 percent in the next two years and another 6 percent in the following two years without changes by the Legislature. The governor's budget recommends raising spending by 8.4 percent for the next two years and more than 10 percent the following two years.

Employers will be asked to pay more than \$2 billion to fund this spending — as much as the amount in the state's rainy day fund.

The governor says Minnesota busi-

nesses benefited from the 2017 federal tax reform, justifying his proposal to disproportionately raise business taxes to grow state government. Facts say otherwise.

Individual taxpayers received a majority of the federal tax relief, and Minnesota already imposes a high cost of doing business. The federal tax changes capping the deductibility of state and local taxes will make Minnesota's higher tax rates even more of a competitive concern.

What's the alternative? A more competitive tax structure that lets employers invest in their companies, employees and communities. Targeted spending that brings a greater sense of value and accountability for public services and programs.

Of all the tax proposals in the governor's budget, the gas tax has generated the most attention. Investing more in roads and bridges is indeed essential, but a 20-cent, or 70-percent, increase would make Minnesota's gas tax the fourth highest in the nation. With this change, we would be adding another tax to our top 10 list of taxes. We would be making one of the more competitive and affordable taxes we pay one of the highest.



DOUG LOON
My View

YOUR VIEW

It's time for 'Medicare for All'

The Free Press April 3 editorial recognizes health care advancements attributed to the Affordable Care Act. A look at our overall health care system, however, reveals major flaws the ACA does not address.

First is overall health care spending. It is widely recognized that per capita spending in the United States is approximately double that of other industrial nations. The ACA does nothing to control costs or cost increases.

The Minnesota Depart-

ment of Health projected that health care spending in the state will increase at an average rate of 7.4% annually from \$47.1 billion in 2016 to \$94.2 billion in 2026. Nationally, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services projects overall health spending will reach \$6 trillion annually by 2027, up from \$3.5 trillion currently. This will represent 19.4% of the nation's GDP, up from 17.9% currently.

The Free Press credits the ACA for recent reductions in

average annual health insurance premium increases without crediting taxpayer funded subsidies and reinsurance. A Kaiser Family Foundation study from 2017 found that health insurance affordability has been deteriorating since 2015.

A study published in the American Journal of Public Health earlier in 2019 found medical issues continue to be the leading contributor to personal bankruptcies and that there has been no reduction in medical bank-

ruptcies since the ACA was implemented. Most medical bankruptcies occur among individuals with health insurance who cannot afford out of pocket expenses not covered by their insurance.

A new Gallup survey finds that one in four Americans skipped medical treatments because of cost. Even with the ACA, the current system is not sustainable. It is time to transition to Medicare For All.

Glen Peterson
Mankato

Brunei's human rights disaster

Los Angeles Times

The tiny oil-rich nation of Brunei implemented a particularly brutal version of Sharia law last week under which men who engage in gay sex or adultery or women who have abortions may be stoned to death. Lesbians may be whipped and imprisoned. People who steal may have their limbs hacked off.

It's difficult to believe such barbaric and anachronistic punishments still exist in the 21st century, and that they're being applied, in most of these cases, to behavior that shouldn't be considered criminal in the first place. Brunei, a country in Southeast Asia with fewer than half a million people, is not the only nation that interprets Islamic law to allow for the execution of homosexuals or adulterers. So do Afghanistan, Iraq and Saudi Arabia, among others. But even those countries don't employ such heinous punishments. Stonings are rare.

This new law ought to be reversed before it is enforced. There has been a forceful outcry from around the world. The United Nations said, perhaps stating the obvious, that stoning people and chopping off their body parts amounts to torture and a violation of basic human rights.

Human rights organizations and world leaders have called on Brunei's Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah to immediately halt implementation of the order. Celebrities including George Clooney, Ellen DeGeneres and Elton John have joined the fray, urging people to boycott hotels owned by the Brunei Investment Agency, including the Beverly Hills Hotel and Hotel Bel-Air as well as establishments in London, Paris and Rome.

Too bad the voice of President Trump was not among the throng of critics. Not even a quick tweet, though his thumbs were otherwise busy all week as he commented on topics as varied as Puerto Rico's ungratefulness to him and the border crisis he insists is underway.

Instead, the administration has been oddly quiet on Brunei other than a weak statement issued by the State Department on Tuesday that said "Brunei's decision to implement Phases Two and Three of the Sharia Penal Code and associated penalties runs counter to its international human rights obligations, including with respect to torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment." Really? That's awfully brief and tame from an administration that just weeks ago promised a global

campaign to go after countries that criminalize gay people.

While the sultan is one of the richest men in the world and may not care if his hotels lose money, he seems to care about his country's reputation in the U.S. and abroad. In 2013, when Brunei first announced that it had plans to implement stoning and amputations, the news was met with opposition from around the world. Hollywood in particular snubbed the Beverly Hills Hotel and bookings dropped off noticeably. Brunei then delayed the phased-in implementation of the law, which Human Rights Watch suggests was in response to the outcry.

Then late last year the attorney general of Brunei quietly published plans on its website for the April 3 implementation date.

Brunei defends the new code, saying "apart from criminalizing and deterring acts that are against the teachings of Islam, it also aims to educate, respect and protect the legitimate rights of all individuals, society or nationality of any faiths and race."

That's baloney. If Brunei hopes to educate, respect and protect people's legitimate rights, it will reverse this odious law immediately.