

Opinion

The First Amendment

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances.



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Open dialog necessary in refugee resettlement

Pardon me if I sound wary of Paul Brandmire's Dec. 2 call for dialog on refugee resettlement in St. Cloud.

While I agree in principle with the assumptions he asserts in his Dec. 2 Your Turn column in the St. Cloud Times opinion page, I question his support for listening to "BOTH" sides of the issue while simultaneously supporting "closing the seemingly wide-open spigot of refugees coming here until we can assimilate those who are already here."

Hmm. "Wide-open spigot" is an interesting turn-of-phrase from this newly elected St. Cloud City Council member who calls for listening to both sides.

In arguing to close the spigot, Brandmire is putting the cart before the horse. He is advocating a solution to a problem he has defined, while also calling on city residents to find common ground. Let's flip that. Common ground should precede both defining the problem and seeking a solution.

In dialog – as opposed to debate – active listening is essential. It requires one to keep an open mind and open heart to the viewpoints and experiences of others.

I agree with Brandmire's primary assumption: "Just because we love and value our own culture and traditions, it doesn't mean we hate the others."

There is a common complaint by people in our community who question the costs of refugee resettlement, that they are accused of racism and/or Islamophobia by merely asking questions.

I'm not going to question their sincerity, but how I wish these same people would speak out forcefully against the hatred against refugees and immigrants that does exist in our community.

Such an effort would go a long way toward establishing common ground.

It is easy to gain an inkling of the hatred and bigotry in our community just by skimming comments on local stories posted on social media. I don't dwell on such comments, and I know they are not representative of the majority of area residents.

But they are out there, reflecting poorly on our community, and they are hurtful.

The Nov. 14 deer carcass incident in the parking lot of the St. Cloud Area Family YMCA is instructive. As has been widely reported, two Somali men emerged from the Y to find skinned deer carcasses on the hoods of their cars in the parking lot.

They were understandably alarmed and felt threatened. According to the police complaint as reported by the Times, one of the men "expressed fear

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The funeral for Bush, who died Nov. 30 at age 94, was held at his beloved St. Martin's Episcopal Church. It kicked off with renditions of "America the Beautiful" and "The Star-Spangled Banner," and granddaughters of the former president provided readings from Scripture. JACK GRUBER/USA TODAY

Was Bush among last leaders to put nation first?

A man of character ... He was a statesman ... A diplomat of unmatched skill ... An imperfect man, he left us a more perfect union ... He never viewed people who disagreed with him as enemies.

Tributes from all sides of the political aisle — not to mention the globe — flooded every media platform this week in the wake of the death of George H.W. Bush, America's 41st president.

Meanwhile, The Associated Press reported this from Wisconsin's Legislature on the very same day of Bush's funeral in Washington, D.C.:

Republicans pushed through protests, internal disagreement and Democratic opposition to pass the bills after an all-night session. The measures would shift power to the Republican-controlled Legislature and weaken the authority of the governor and the attorney general. Republicans lost both seats in the November election.

It's fair to wonder if President Bush was rolling over in his casket.

After all, it's hard to imagine simultaneous events that make a more telling statement about how far this nation has fallen into the partisan gutter since Bush left office.

Granted, Bush — as president and vice president for Ronald Reagan — faced his share of bruising partisan political battles. Look no further than, as president in 1990, him having to break his own "Read my lips: No new taxes" pledge, which he made as presidential candidate at the 1988 Republican National Convention.

Some fiscal conservatives to this day still hold that against him.

Yet former Wyoming Sen. Alan Simpson said this to The Houston Chronicle this week about Bush's decision to break that promise as a way to address spiraling federal deficits:

"He often said that when the really tough choices come, it's the country, not me. It's not about Democrats, or Republicans. It's for our country, that I fought

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for."

That's a powerful philosophy — and one too often trampled these days by well-funded, highly partisan office holders bent on preserving their special interests, even if it means ignoring the will of the voters, destroying their opposition and torpedoing the moral foundations underpinning this nation's governance.

Witness the power grab Wisconsin Republicans are attempting after being throttled in statewide races Nov. 6.

Instead of respecting the voice of the people, the Legislature is using a lame-duck session to craft several bills that would weaken the power of the governor and attorney general, all in the name of protecting Republican policies adopted during the seven straight years that party has controlled those offices and the Legislature.

Similar moves are underway in Michigan and several other states, mostly involving Republicans.

But don't think Democrats are above this type of political power play. Remember that in 2013 Democrats

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Obesity continues to be an epidemic in the US



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Do you consider yourself overweight? Have you pondered the possibility you might be obese?

If you answered yes to either question you might wish to examine the findings of Ashkan Afshin, an assistant professor of health metrics sciences at the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation at the University of Washington. He writes, "Excess body weight is one of the most challenging public health problems of our time, affecting nearly one in three people."

Incredibly, the increase in adult obesity rose 10 percent between 2000 and

2016, according to the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention.

Obesity is not only to blame for increases in diabetes, cardiovascular disease, high blood pressure and certain cancers, but it's responsible for nearly 300,000 deaths annually in the United States. That may not seem like a tremendous amount when our population exceeds 325 million, but this illness is not caused by viruses or bacteria, it's totally self-inflicted.

According to USA Today, obesity is causing problems for the military as it searches for new recruits. In southern states where the Army traditionally found many of its candidates, obesity has become an issue. Adult obesity is 35 percent higher in Alabama, Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi and West

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Trump's leadership is what America needs now

Your Turn

Bay Buchanan
Guest columnist

Few presidents have faced the kinds of challenges Donald Trump has had to face every day.

From the unprecedented attacks on a Supreme Court nominee to caravans heading toward our southern border, lesser men would have buckled and given in to the political and national security pressures this president has confronted.

Thankfully, Trump is the strongest leader America has had in decades, taking decisive action where his predecessors displayed timidity, and his strength is just what America needs at this time in our history.

Americans knew they were voting for a fighter with Trump. The intensity

he showed on the campaign trail in 2016 translated to dogged determination in domestic affairs and steadfast poise in the international arena ever since. In fact, polls show that the American people recognize this strength.

Enticed by the siren calls of American open borders activists and reassured by the active or passive encouragement of prior administrations, thousands of people are marching to the American border en masse. These "caravans" are merely the most visible manifestation of a decades-long tragedy of crime, trafficking and death on our southern border.

But both the caravans and the wider crisis actually stem directly from American weakness in the past.

President Trump's predecessor, Ba-

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