

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.



American Voices
Rachel Marsden

No surprise in Europe with Pence

PARIS – U.S. Vice President Mike Pence addressed a group of European dignitaries last week at a conference in Warsaw, Poland, meant to rally support for Middle Eastern peace, and he appeared visibly shocked by the audience's reaction to parts of his speech.

"The time has come for our European partners to withdraw from the Iran nuclear deal and join with us as we bring the economic and diplomatic pressure necessary to give the Iranian people, the region and the world the peace, security and freedom they deserve," Pence said.

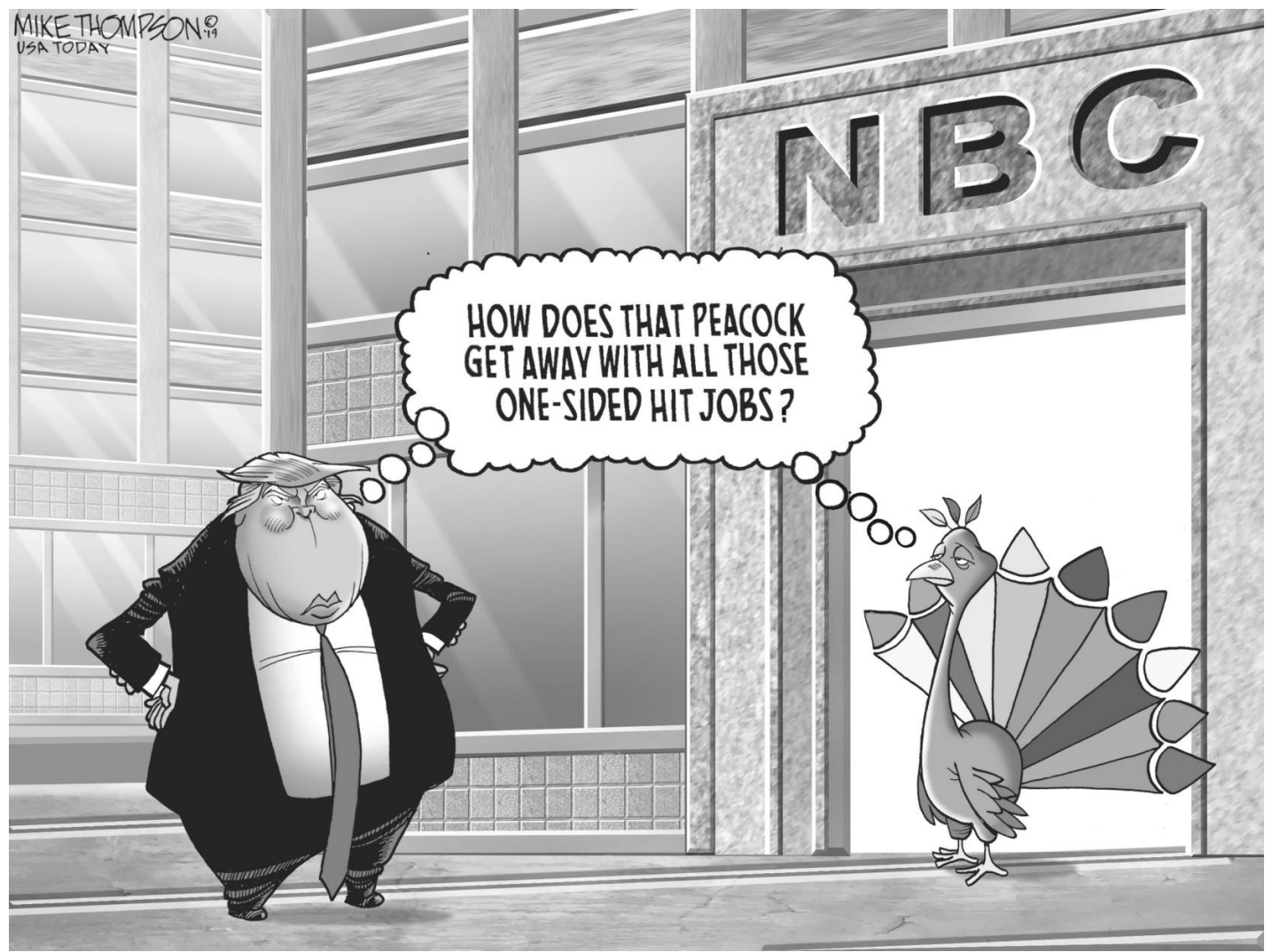
The vice president stopped for applause after this line – and was met with complete silence. He visibly bristled before continuing.

What's wrong with Europeans? Why aren't they applauding the desire for peace? Perhaps because Europeans long ago learned the lesson that "peace" is often just a euphemism for more war.

From the outset, the conference was a game of semantics to mask overt enthusiasm for further armed conflict. Originally billed as a conference about Iran, it was then labeled a Middle Eastern peace conference, with "peace" obviously defined as a Middle East run entirely by America's allies: Israel, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. The message was that such peace can only be achieved by bringing Iran to heel through conflict.

The problem is that when the U.S. addresses these supposed risks, it often becomes the rest of the world's problem. From Afghanistan and Syria to Libya and Yemen, Europe has had to pitch in with the cleanup and deal with the waves of refugees that result from such interventions.

Rachel Marsden is a columnist, political strategist and former Fox News host based in Paris. She is the host of the syndicated talk show "UNREDACTED with Rachel Marsden" Tuesdays at 7 p.m. Eastern: <http://www.unredacted-show.com>. Her website can be found at www.rachelmarsden.com.



LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Laying the tracks for Northstar in St. Cloud



Your Turn
Dan Wolgamott
Guest columnist

Central Minnesotans deserve world-class transportation options to commute to work, visit family and safely travel throughout our state. That's why the desire to extend Northstar to St. Cloud is as old as the commuter rail line itself. It's something I've heard at the doors, during community events and from advocates at the Capitol – "Finish Northstar."

This week we made the first real steps toward making that a reality when my bill was introduced. There have been past attempts to extend Northstar, but my bill, HF 1179, contains funding, accountability mea-

asures and a bipartisan approach to actually getting the job done.

My bill provides funding from two different places to get the project going: \$850,000 from the general fund and \$6.5 million appropriated from the sale of general obligation bonds.

My bill also directs the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) to commence negotiations with BNSF Railway once the project is underway. To ensure accountability, MnDOT would provide annual legislative reports in 2020 and 2021, enabling the Legislature to take action as needed to support the project to its completion. In our community, there is urgency to do the project as soon as possible, and I have urgency to do it right.

Not only is this bill going to be heard, we're bringing the committee hearing to you. The House Transportation com-

mittee will meet from noon to 3 p.m. Friday at St. Cloud City Hall. I hope I see you there.

Testifying in support of my legislation will be Mayor Dave Kleis, as well as St. Cloud Chamber of Commerce President Teresa Bohnen. These leaders, like many others in our community, recognize the need for this rail and the significance of this bill.

Rep. Tama Theis is a co-author of the bill, demonstrating her commitment to take a reasonable and bipartisan approach to bringing Northstar to St. Cloud. I'm excited for the opportunity to take our first steps towards finishing Northstar, and I'll continue to fight to get this project done for our community as your state representative.

If you would like to testify on this bill for our Friday hearing, please contact John Howe at john.howe@house.mn.

Personal responsibility must come with freedom



Paul Bugbee
Times Writers Group
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USA TODAY NETWORK

When people start talking about the legalization of marijuana, I'm quick to respond, "They might as well legalize stupidity."

But then I realize that stupidity isn't illegal, with an afterthought of personal gratitude. Who among us hasn't done something that we regret later in our lives?

The debate goes beyond the desire, by some, to fill their lungs and their minds with intoxicating stimulants. It even goes beyond issues of healthy choices, substance abuse, impaired reactions, addiction, the loss of mental faculties, tax revenues, penalties and production.

In my opinion, the issue of legalizing marijuana is yet another example of pushing the envelope of personal freedoms and the perceived rights of individuals to make decisions for themselves — right or wrong, good or bad.

Libertarian Party advocates fiercely defend all matters pertaining to individual liberties. If our life choices affect only ourselves, causing no harm or adverse impact on others, they say, why shouldn't we be free to make our own decisions? If we choose to live in an altered state of mind, whether for a moment or a lifetime, shouldn't we have the right to decide?

Pot smokers and marijuana legalization advocates would resoundingly say, "Yes!"

The bigger question, however, is whether any one person is or truly can be an island among themselves in a

world where we all depend upon each other in nearly every aspect of our lives. At the very least, we depend upon a certain world order of tolerance and respect for each other; a certain level of civility, acceptance and decorum.

Images of "reefer madness" suggest just the opposite.

On the other hand, perhaps it is these societal expectations themselves, these levels of civility and decorum, which create the need for escape and the desire for hallucination.

Maybe that's the bigger picture here: the human propensity for escape. Whether it's alcohol, the mind-numbing influence of too much television, social media, shopping, gambling or a plethora of other legal or illegal inducements, what is it about our being that so desperately seeks escape?

Is life so miserable and painful that we need the stimulus of mind-altering drugs or the numbing effects of external influences to cope?

Torn between the moral persuasions of established religious orders and a well-spring of public tolerance and desire, lawmakers must choose between

the levels of escape that are deemed acceptable or not.

Centuries of human suffering promulgated by societal norms fill our history books. What were once considered immoral, illegal or sacrilegious are now accepted as commonplace and irrelevant.

Ultimately, issues of individual freedoms always come down to matters of personal responsibility.

Can we consume alcohol "responsibly?" Can we smoke dope "responsibly?" Can we surf the internet "responsibly?" Can we do sports betting "responsibly?"

How about other mind-altering or pain-relieving concoctions? Can we inhale cocaine "responsibly?" Can doctors dispense opioid medications "responsibly?"

Where do we draw the lines between acceptable behaviors and victimless crimes? How do we define responsibility? Or, better yet, where do we find happiness and fulfillment?

On the surface, I could care less if people want to smoke dope. Although it's not for me, how they choose to live their lives is their business.

But if there comes a time when they abuse their personal freedoms; when their lifestyle choices present challenges for me or others in society due to self-imposed economic hardships, social stigmas or declines in mental or physical health, then it becomes our business.

Is it our government's responsibility to protect us from ourselves?

As far as I'm concerned, why do we spend enormous amounts of tax dollars trying to keep people from making poor decisions? Why should we have to assume responsibility for the few who can't assume responsibility themselves?

Why should the public have to subsidize food, housing, healthcare and other essentials of living for those who make poor decisions; legal or not?

I've said it before and I'll say it again and again, "Personal freedoms assume personal responsibility!"

Are we there yet?

This is the opinion of Paul Bugbee, a Central Minnesota resort owner. His column is published the third Thursday of the month.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letters to the editor should be the author's original work and credit other sources when appropriate. They should be typewritten, exclusive to this newspaper and no more than 300 words. Include your name, address and daytime phone number for verification. Letters are edited for length, clarity and grammar.

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YOUR TURN GUIDELINES

Columns should focus on timely local, national or international issues of concern to people in our community. State your opinion and use facts and well-reasoned arguments to support it. Be typewritten and about 600 words. Include a paragraph at the end explaining who you are. A photograph of the writer also is requested to accompany the article. Include your name, address and daytime phone number for verification. Some Your Turns may be edited for length, clarity and accuracy.

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