

# Opinions



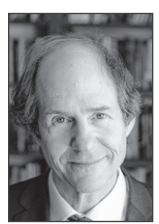
Joe Ahlquist / jahlquist@postbulletin.com

President Donald Trump speaks during a Make America Great Again Rally on Oct. 4 at the Mayo Civic Center in downtown Rochester.

## Donald Trump is amazing. Here's the science to prove it.

BY CASS SUNSTEIN

This column is really good. Actually it's amazing. In less than 650 words, it will explain the success of President



Sunstein

Donald Trump — and also show how to beat him. Behavioral scientists like to emphasize the role of heuristics, or mental short-

cuts, in our thinking. Lacking statistical knowledge, we use rules of thumb. In deciding whether a product or activity is risky, people tend to ask: Do I know about situations in which someone actually got hurt? That's the "availability heuristic" in action.

One of the least well-known rules of thumb is called the "confidence heuristic," which was initially explored in 1995. The central idea is simple. When people express beliefs to one another, their level of confidence usually reflects how certain they are. It tells us how much information they have. When we are listening to others, we are more likely to be persuaded by people who seem really confident.

Since 1995, empirical research has shown that groups tend to be most influenced by the views of their most confident member. Most of us are more likely to find confident people to be credible. Sure, confidence isn't a magic bullet. If people who are confident are shown to be wrong, their credibility will suffer. But they usually get the benefit of the doubt.

In this light, we should revise our understanding of the whole idea of the "confidence man" — con man, for short. It's usually thought that the con man finds a way to earn people's trust, and then takes advantage of them. But when con men succeed, it's usually because they enlist the confidence heuristic. They don't show any doubts. They act as if they know what they are doing.

There are obvious lessons here for aspiring and actual leaders in politics, business, education and elsewhere. For example, Philip Tetlock of the University of Pennsylvania has found that most people respond more enthusiastically to simple, clear rhetoric from leaders, downplaying tradeoffs, than to complex rhetoric that points to competing considerations and that can easily be seen as a sign of weakness.

Many successful politicians show an intuitive awareness of the confidence heuristic. Among

American presidents, John F. Kennedy stands out, but Ronald Reagan was probably the master. A president has to be pretty confident to say this: "I have left orders to be awakened at any time in case of national emergency, even if I'm in a cabinet meeting." Or this: "I've noticed that everyone who is for abortion has already been born."

But President Trump outdoes Reagan — not through wit, humor or charm, but through a kind of joyful, thuggish certainty about his own amazingness. "I alone can fix it," he said during the campaign. "Nobody's ever done a better job than I'm doing as president," he says now.

Sure, Trump's braggadocio turns many people off, and his critics ridicule him for it. But to his supporters, it's appealing and even contagious. And for people who aren't sure whether to support him, it can be highly effective. Many voters think: If he's so sure of himself, he's probably right.

I have noted that when confident people are shown to be wrong, people tend to stop believing what they say. On many questions, Trump has been shown to be wrong; consider his claim that President Barack Obama was not born in the United States, or that the audience for his inauguration was "the biggest ever."

But that's less of a problem than it might be. One reason is Trump's constant complaints about "fake news," which provide him with some inoculation against those who seek to expose him. For many people, his confidence makes him credible (if perhaps overenthusiastic).

There's a general implication here for politicians and presidential aspirants on the Democratic side. Jimmy Carter, John Kerry and Hillary Clinton have many strengths, but their tendency to see both sides of an issue, and their occasional willingness to display ambivalence and uncertainty, can be electoral liabilities. Such inclinations are easily taken as signs of weakness.

The good news is that confidence can be accompanied by generosity and grace (as in the cases of both Kennedy and Reagan). In the coming years, that's going to be a winning combination.

Trust me on this. You can take it to the bank.

Cass R. Sunstein is a Bloomberg Opinion columnist. He is the author of "The Cost-Benefit Revolution" and co-author of "Nudge: Improving Decisions About Health, Wealth and Happiness."

### OUR VIEW

# Study of state's immigrants provides surprising results

**A** new study of immigrants in Minnesota by the American Immigration Council contains some surprising facts about newcomers to the state.

For example, did you imagine that 33 percent of all immigrants in Minnesota hold college and advanced degrees? That compares with 35 percent of native Minnesotans, according to the AIC study.

You might be equally surprised to find that immigrants make up 20 percent of the state's workforce in computer and mathematical services, 18 percent of the state's workforce in military-related jobs, and 15 percent of the workforce in health care support.

Clearly the facts don't entirely support a popular narrative that immigrants can be a burden on the state. Most of us know that to be untrue at some level, but seeing these numbers brings reality into focus.

Stop and think for a moment of the professor from China who teaches math to your daughter at college, the pediatrician from India who treats your child's ear infection, the technician from Africa who performs the ECG at your annual checkup.

**ON WEDNESDAY:** Minnesota's tax structure contributes to high quality of life.

Not all immigrants are that accomplished, of course, and the AIC study bears this out. One-quarter of the state's immigrants don't have the equivalent of a high school diploma, compared with 5 percent of the native-born population.

That's one reason, perhaps, that while immigrants make up 8.3 percent of Minnesota's population, they make up 12 percent of the workforce in accommodation and food services, and 13 percent of the workforce in manufacturing.

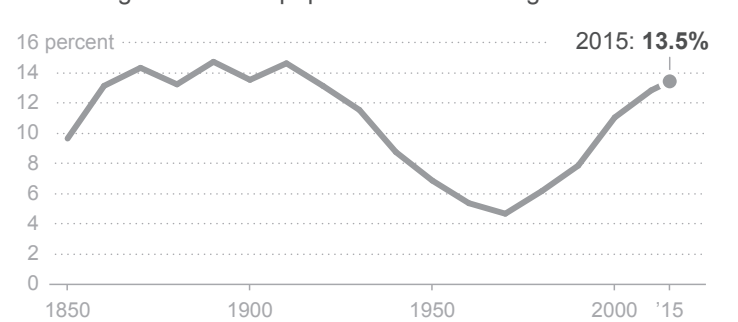
Other noteworthy findings from the study:

- Immigrant-led households in Minnesota paid \$2.2 billion in federal taxes and \$1.1 billion in state and local taxes in 2014.
- There were 24,144 immigrant business owners in the state in 2015, accounting for 8 percent of all self-employed Minnesota residents. Those immigrant-owned businesses generated \$489.1 million in income.

All of us hold knee-jerk visions of "typical" immi-

## Immigrants in the US

Percentage of the U.S. population that is foreign born:



Includes naturalized citizens, legal permanent residents, asylees, refugees, those holding nonimmigrant visas and those in the U.S. illegally.

Origins of legal permanent residents in FY 2015 by region

Top origin countries of legal permanent residents in FY 2015

Americas	438,433	Mexico	158,619
Asia	419,294	China	74,558
Africa	101,412	India	64,116
Europe	85,791	Philippines	56,478
Oceania	5,385	Cuba	54,396

SOURCE: Migration Policy Institute analysis of census data

AP

grants that, while frequently based on anecdotal or firsthand experience, are just one part of the story of immigrants in Minnesota.

Here, as elsewhere, immigration continues to be a complicated and emotional issue. It does all of us good to check in with reality now and again.

## What I learned from my miscarriage

BY CYNTHIA M. ALLEN

I don't believe in signs, not really, but on Mother's Day we came home from church to find an exasperated dove on our front porch trying in vain to coax her wounded chick to fly. It was sad and poignant and reminded me that there are times as mothers when all we can do is stand by and watch and pray.

Two weeks later, I'd find myself on a stretcher in the emergency room, praying, as the tiny, nascent life within me poured itself onto the white sheet below, while I cried uncontrollably, unable to save the child I didn't yet know but already loved.

I was sent to labor and delivery to recover — an unnecessary cruelty made worse when after a shift change, a nurse wandered into my room and without thinking asked, "Where's your baby?"

Catholics are free to believe that miscarried babies immediately enter into the presence of Christ — "Let the little children come to me." No purgatory, their souls have been perfected; and since they are body and soul, they are not angels but saints. I love that, and who doesn't need

more people in heaven praying for them?

Just two months later, after returning from a Mass we had dedicated to our tiny saint, a pregnancy test returned two pink lines. As I said, I don't really believe in signs, but it felt like a promise — a rainbow — and I cried tears of joy; I felt a renewed sense of hope. A visit to the doctor later that week indicated this baby wouldn't be joining us on earth either. Although the event itself was private, quieter, more "normal" as these things go, it was harder somehow. And I wondered how God could allow this to happen — again — so soon, and how could my broken heart stand another crack.

It's a strange thing, missing someone you've never met; miscarriage is confusing that way — ask any woman who's experienced one. And when you've already been blessed as a mother; the sense of loss, the longing and aching for the baby you're not holding can make you feel ungrateful for the children you have; you can't help thinking about the ones you lost, because they are your precious babies, too, and no matter what anyone tells you, all of their lives matter.

I didn't know National Pregnancy and Infant Loss Awareness Day (observed Oct. 15) was a thing until it popped up in the social media feeds of friends and acquaintances.

So many women are conversant in this kind of loss, yet their experiences, like the day meant to commemorate them, pass without any of us knowing.

Just like any profound human event that warrants a hashtag these days, there are reasons we don't talk about miscarriage: It's difficult; we're told that it's "common"; it will "trigger" someone else.

Or maybe we don't talk about it because we're afraid it will get political. Because it seems to me that to truly appreciate someone's pain for what it is — the loss of a child, not merely the promise of one — we have to first accept a fundamental truth, not so universally acknowledged, about life and death and human dignity.

"A person's a person, no matter how small." That shouldn't be political — it isn't, really. Because whether you believe in science or religion or simply the words of Dr. Seuss, we should all be able to recognize that each human life, from its earliest stages, however long or short, matters to someone. And that should matter to us all.

Cynthia Allen is a columnist for the Fort Worth Star-Telegram. Her column is distributed through Tribune News Service.

### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

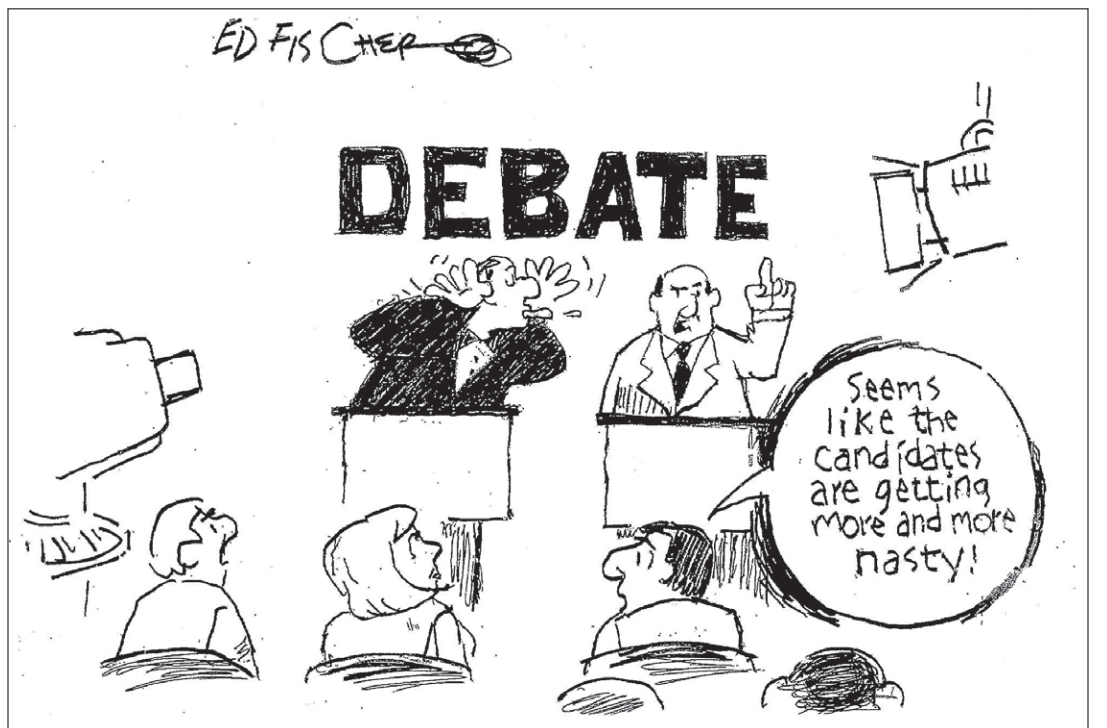
#### Critics distort and lie about Kaepernick's motivation

Fact: Colin Kaepernick took a knee (a genuflection in my view) to protest the number of black young men being killed by police. Some warranted, some very not.

He was not protesting the American flag, nor those serving in the military. Far from it. Not even close. His protest was personal and resonated with many of his fellow athletes. Somehow, in this media age, his message was usurped by those with political agendas. He became a traitor, someone disrespecting patriotism and the American flag.

Calling him out for addressing the lives of young black men seems racist and the ad played during today's football games with the grainy film and scare inducing audio is nothing more than a dog whistle to a lie. I wish we could get back to a place where truth prevails. I am so sick of the constant lying.

Judy Bird, BYRON



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IF IT MATTERS TO YOU, IT MATTERS TO US

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