

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.



Super Spotlight
Aaron Sinclair
Guest columnist
USA TODAY NETWORK

Keeping kids safe requires teamwork

For several decades, public school buildings in Minnesota and across the country were designed to provide easy access with many points of entry. Children would come and go with relative ease, and visitors could walk through a school's hallways before encountering an administrative office or a staff member.

Indeed, many of the schools our kids attend were built during a different era — well before continuing safety threats forced us to rethink what safe and secure schools require. As a result, there is a renewed push to remodel schools so that they are better equipped for detecting and responding to serious threats.

The challenge, of course, is that schools must balance many different objectives. We want our schools to be welcoming and inclusive to all members of our community. We want to maintain a thriving and engaging environment for students, faculty and staff. And we want to be sure we are doing all we can to make our buildings safe and secure for everyone inside.

For example, during school hours we must lock the front entrances of our school buildings because they can't be seen from the main offices. This limits our ability to monitor anyone entering our buildings and is hardly welcoming to visitors.

This design problem — having administrative offices located away from main entrances — is common across the country. Thirty to 40 years ago, the idea was to have administration be at the heart of the school in a way that is easily accessible for students. Unfortunately, that concept allows anybody to enter the school and have unfettered access without a check-in process or monitoring.

Over the past year, residents have told us that the security of our school buildings is among their top concerns, and we have been undergoing a comprehensive review of our security programs and emergency response.

The school board did not wait to address the issue. We are investing \$4.4 million this summer to undergo numerous safety and security upgrades using general fund dollars and grant money from the state of Minnesota. Each school building will be brought to the same level of structural security, including the expansion and upgrading of current security camera systems.

The primary goal is to create more secure entrances that will be equipped with a visitor monitoring system so that we can safely check in visitors. When completed, all schools will have a vesti-

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OUR VIEW



People hold signs during a town hall meeting with U.S. Rep. Tom Emmer on Wednesday at St. Cloud City Hall. DAVE SCHWARZ/ST. CLOUD TIMES

Citizenry must alter nation's political tone

Legislators don't hold key to ending savage dialogue

The level of political rhetoric in the United States today is in the sewer. And it's mostly our, the citizenry's, fault.

Yes, high-ranking politicians at every level of government do, on occasion, lob verbal molotov cocktails out into the air we breathe.

Yes, the political parties twist talking points into memes with the most polarizing language and images imaginable (until they outdo themselves next week).

Yes, the extreme right- and left-wing propaganda "news" sites and radio talk shows sometimes spread blatant lies to advance their agendas — even if that agenda is simply to become highly rated stars in their own microuniverses.

They do all of those things because they know those messages work — and will be shared. We fall for it, spreading those messages far and wide, and not to mention completely for free.

But *we* hold all of the power to do what the sensible middle, and even the extremists, say they want: to have reasoned debate of the issues Americans disagree on.

The fact that we now communicate largely by shouts, jeers, hats, T-shirts, memes, bumper stickers

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and expletive-laden social media comments is rooted solely in our acceptance and participation. Because it's "funny" or made us feel powerful, we the public started playing in the mud.

Which means we can stop.

U.S. Rep. Tom Emmer, R-Minnesota, was well criticized for going light on his constituent outreach earlier in his term. Since changing his ways and scheduling more town halls, he has commonly been met with crowds that apparently want to punish him with yelling, finger-pointing and jeers.

Don't think we believe deference should come with

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Embrace beauty that comes from our imperfections



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Several years ago I attended an art fair in the Twin Cities. While wandering from booth to booth I stopped to admire the turned woodwork of an artist.

His shelves were filled with pens, letter openers, vases and lamp bases, but what caught my eye was a small bowl. The wood itself was plain, but running through the bowl, from lip to base, was a small vein of turquoise.

I inquired about the lovely swirl of blue and was told, "Oh, that. It was a huge mistake." He'd turned the bowl from wood that was still green and, as it dried, it split. Not wanting to waste the bowl, he'd found a technique that mixes ground turquoise and resin to fill cracks. When dry, the compound was sanded

and polished.

What could have gone in the scrap pile with the wood shavings was now a true work of art.

The Japanese have a similar technique: kintsugi. Used to repair broken ceramic items, kintsugi (literally "gold joinery") mixes gold, silver or platinum dust and lacquer to mend broken vessels and plates. The philosophy behind this is that whatever happened to the object is just an occurrence in the life of the item. Practicing kintsukuroi ("golden repair") will allow the object to remain useful and embraces the imperfection.

In our "use it and toss it" society, which we practice at our peril, there's a lesson to be learned in the acceptance of the wabi-sabi aspects of life. Wabi-sabi is the acceptance of imperfection. As Leonard Cohen so aptly reflected in his ballad "Anthem," "There is a crack in everything; that's how the light gets in."

Wabi-sabi: accept imperfection. Kintsugi: repair what is imperfect to improve and beautify and keep the object useful. A golden vein in a cracked vase is kintsugi. Keeping a cracked fender attached to your vehicle with duct tape and cable ties is not.

Among friends of mine who sew, quilt and knit, there's a similar repair trend: Mindful Mending. Rips, tears, stains and moth holes leave unsightly blemishes on otherwise beautiful and useful garments and household textiles.

Where previous repair techniques would have left a noticeable scar, Mindful Mending leaves a mark of beauty. Tears in quilts are repaired using Sashiko stitching, big decorative stitches using thick thread. Small holes in knitwear are embroidered over with colorful flowers or geometric designs. The philosophy is that the damage is going to remain visible so the repair might as well be attractive rather than perfunctory.

My high school boyfriend's mother was an early adopter of Mindful Mending. Using broderie perse techniques, she'd cut large floral designs from drapery fabric and applique them over the holes in the knees of his jeans. At the time she and I did not see eye-to-eye on many things, but upon reflection I have to admire her creativity and resourcefulness.

It's all well and good to reduce, reuse, recycle. Better the blue bin than the green bag. And "Use it up, wear it out, make it do, or do without" has a certain timeless frugal charm.

While it will never be alliterative or folksy, I propose an additional slogan for its environmental effects and aesthetic appeal: Embrace the wabi sabi cracks and tears, add a beautiful repair and enjoy your efforts. Let your inner artist put something back together.

This is the opinion of Karen Cyson, a member of the Times Writers Group.