

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.



Patrick Henry
Columnist
Special to St. Cloud Times
USA TODAY NETWORK

Making end-of-life plans helps family later

Eighty. A full decade past the biblical “threescore years and ten.” A year, even, beyond Minnesota’s best-in-the-nation life expectancy for men, 79 years (for the state’s women it’s 83, though that’s only fourth).

Eighty. It’s what I turn later this month.

We recently attended the memorial service for a nephew who died of cancer at 43.

I’m among the lucky ones.

I tell you this not to elicit birthday wishes, but because I want to write about death.

Samuel Johnson (1709-84), among the wisest persons who have ever lived, remarked that “few things there are of which we can say, without some emotion of uneasiness, ‘this is the last.’” I first read these words 60 years ago. They come to mind as I sit down to write this, my 141st column.

It’s not “the last,” by the way; at least I don’t think it is.

But if I don’t know whether I’ll reach 100, or 90, or even 81, I’m aware that “the last,” while not necessarily imminent, is closer than it used to be.

This, of course, is a truism. From the moment we are born, our days start counting down. But time seems more compressed as the decades move on, and as I enter my ninth, the admonition in the Rule of St. Benedict (4:47) – “keep death daily before your eyes” – is both bracing and reassuring.

“Some emotion of uneasiness” understates what death calls forth in most of us most of the time. Maybe we think of it, with Hamlet, as something “devoutly to be wished.” Maybe we “do not go gentle into that good night” while we “rage, rage against the dying of the light” with Dylan Thomas. Maybe with John Donne we declaim, “Death, be not proud ... Death, thou shalt die.”

“Uneasiness,” yes. But my wife and I have overcome it, to give a gift to each other and to our children. We are planning our funerals.

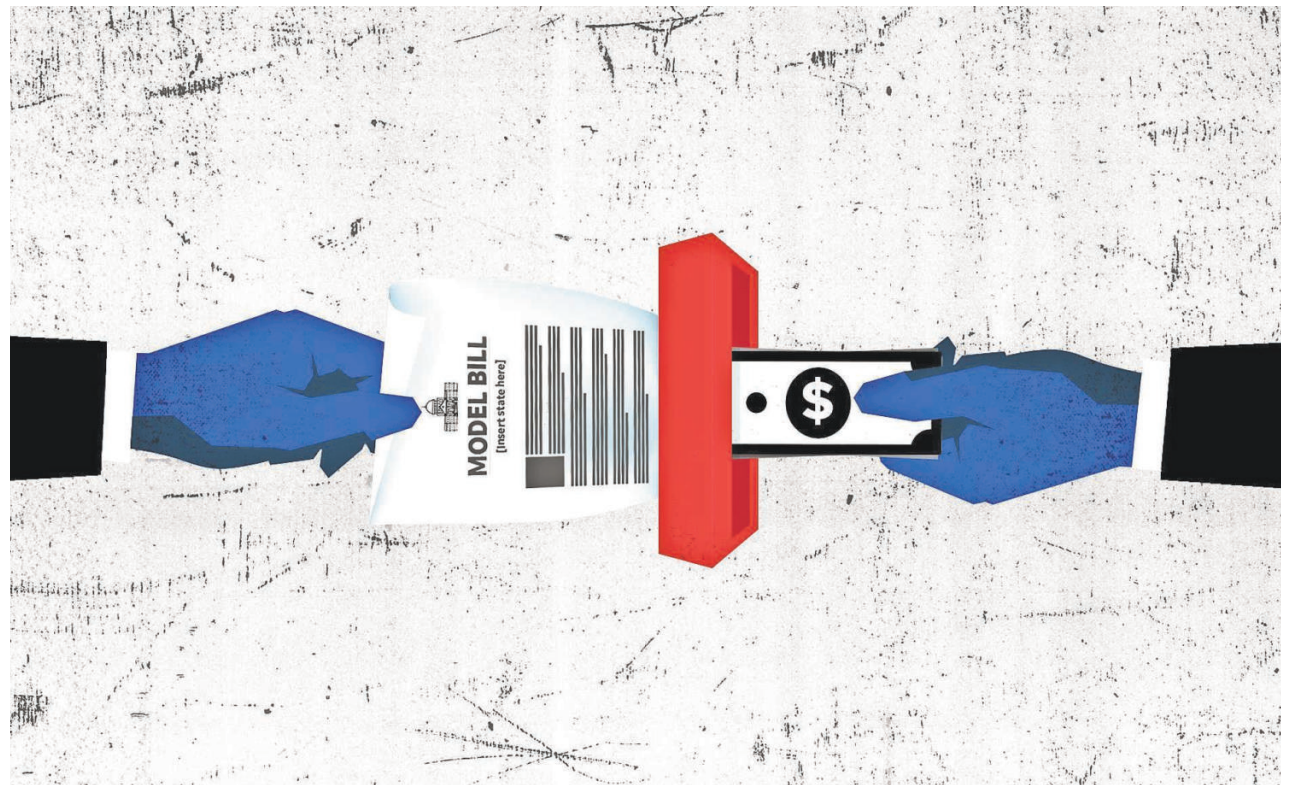
I hope that as I tell you what we have done, you will decide it’s something you should do too.

How do you want to be remembered? To a considerable extent you can’t determine this. People will have their memories of you, they’ll tell them to each other, stories will take on a life of their own.

In one way, though, you can inject a powerful current into this interplay of memory ricochet – your obituary. We have each found it not gloomy or dispiriting, but actually exhilarating, to write

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OUR VIEW



ANDREA BRUNTY/USA TODAY NETWORK, AND GETTY IMAGES

Copypat bills demand questions, transparency

Voters should know more about measures’ origins

For anyone who follows state government, it’s always been a question: Why are Minnesota legislators so often addressing the same issues as legislators in other states? Is it the zeitgeist, or something else?

Think marijuana, tort reform, minimum wage, gay marriage, taxes on sugary drinks, etc.

Now we know why — copypat legislation crafted and pushed by special interests.

A two-year investigation by USA Today, The Arizona Republic and the Center for Public Integrity found that at least 10,000 bills almost entirely copied from model legislation were introduced in statehouses nationwide in the past eight years. More than 2,100 of those bills were signed into law.

Minnesota legislators introduced at least 247 such bills from 2012 through 2018. (The research tool has yet to examine legislation proposed this session.)

All these bills have roots in corporations, industry groups or think tanks. Those entities — essentially special interests — dream them up, tap experts to draft them and then find a legislator in targeted states to serve as chief author and lead the push to pass them.

As the USA Today report showed, sometimes legislators don’t even know these are “copy/paste/legislate” bills and often the bills are named in very misleading ways (as are original bills, to be fair).

Witness the Asbestos Transparency Act, which didn’t help people exposed to asbestos. It was written by corporations to make it harder for victims of asbestos-related illnesses to recoup money. The HOPE Act, introduced in nine states, was written by a conservative advocacy group to make it more difficult for people to get food stamps.

Those examples highlight the two most important takeaways. For voters: Ask more questions. For legislators: Be more transparent.

The lack of information involving these “copy/paste/legislate” bills is astounding. Until this report — which was generated through computer-assisted reporting that will continue with every legislative session — voters and even legislators likely did not know how common this practice had become.



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MINNESOTA DEPARTMENT OF ADMINISTRATION

Of course, for those practicing it, that was great.

As the report noted, copypat bills don’t require registered lobbyists, don’t show up on expense reports or on campaign finance disclosure forms.

Now, though, voters should demand to know what bills their legislators are sponsoring, who wrote them and why they deserve passage. If those bills are promoting good ideas, they will stand up to such scrutiny.

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The Editorial Board

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Plastic problem could be solved with creativity



Barbara Banaian
Writer’s Group
Special to St. Cloud Times
USA TODAY NETWORK

Plastic is everywhere on earth. It is in every ocean. It has even been found outside the earth.

It is durable and inexpensive. Its benefits are many, and it is called a building block of modern society. In fact, Americans now use over 4 million plastic bottles — per hour!

But it’s also considered a pollutant for the same reason: Once you make it, you cannot get rid of it. This week a pregnant whale washed up in Italy with 50 pounds of plastic in her stomach. These stories are increasing as more plastic filters into seas and waterways.

Less than 10 percent of our plastic in the U.S. is recycled. We will need to find

another use for it.

Recycling has become harder. Historically, China has taken in 40 percent of U.S. paper, metals and plastic. But in January 2018 it announced that only plastic that was 99.5 percent free of contaminants would be accepted. Cities that received income for shipping their recyclables to China now have to pay substantial amounts to get their recycled plastic taken away. According to *Governing* magazine, some cities have decided to incinerate their plastic instead because it costs less.

Thinking about this problem while driving one day, I was jolted. Of course it was a pothole. And I thought could we take one problem and use it to solve a different one?

One of plastic’s strengths — durability — could be put to use in roads and road repairs.

This idea was developed in India by Dr. Rajagopalan Vasudevan. And it is

being used in India to build roads, as well as being considered in the U.K. and Ontario. The Economist last September reported that a bicycle trail was built with 70 percent recycled plastic.

Recycled plastic has been used in many ways for years. My father-in-law worked in a plastics plant and, upon retirement, started buying scrap plastic that would have otherwise gone into recycling or landfills. Grinding it into flakes or pellets, the resulting material could be used to make many things, including plastic seating found at many ballparks and stadiums.

It is not a perfect solution, but it is a realistic solution. Because recycled plastic needs to be cleaned, sorted, ground and reshaped, you need the result to be something with significant value. Pothole repair could be such an item. With fewer potholes, our tires and vehicles will live longer. A plastic road, in good condition, may last a lot longer

than a conventional road.

Since plastic never degrades (or, very slowly at best), we need to re-use the plastic we already have. It could replace asphalt roads. In my opinion, this would be better than having it unrecycled in dumps or washing up on shores.

It may eventually leach back into the environment, but using plastic would buy us time to develop other strategies. A temporary fix, in my opinion, is better than no fix at all. And plastic seems to last longer than the current substances. Plastic simply will not decompose.

In my opinion, this should not be an excuse to reduce plastic consumption. Using plastic to make roads creates a set of issues of its own that we have not completely solved yet. Plastic generates dust, and in order to have that not get into the air and water you would want it to be sealed by mixing it with bitumen.

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