

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.



Karen Cyson
Times Writers Group
St. Cloud Times
USA TODAY NETWORK

‘Midwest values’ not supportive of women

Earlier this month I attended a vintage tool swap meet in southern Minnesota. As I made my way through the crowd, a male shopper picked up an item, held it up and loudly proclaimed, “Look! A wife beater!” I spun around and said, “That’s not funny.” “Yes,” he replied, “It’s a wife beater.” Quite loudly I answered, “That’s not funny.” Heads turned. The room got quieter. Sufficiently chastened, he put the item down, said, “It’s a rug beater,” and walked away.

There’s nothing funny about domestic violence. No one deserves to be beaten. There’s nothing funny about sexual assault and violence against women. Nothing funny at all.

Our community is fortunate. We have the Central Minnesota Task Force on Battered Women, operating as Anna Marie’s Alliance. Anna Marie’s is “dedicated to providing safe shelter, support, and referral services for battered women and their children.” In addition, the alliance “works with the community on systems change and violence prevention.”

Could there be anyone who thinks this is a bad idea? Is there anyone who wouldn’t support this effort?

What about our 6th District U.S. House Rep. Tom Emmer? How does he vote on efforts to prevent violence against women? His current media blitz claims he’s standing for our “Midwest values,” so how does he vote?

Three weeks ago there was an attempt in the House to debate a bill (HR 6545) that would reauthorize the Violence Against Women Act through 2023. This act, which originated in 1994, finances programs to prevent domestic violence, stalking and sexual assaults and to help victims repair their lives after these events occur.

The House voted on discussing this extension. Emmer, along with other House Republicans, voted to not allow debate.

That’s correct. They didn’t vote to limit debate. They didn’t vote to postpone debate. Emmer and his fellow House Republicans voted to deny debate. No debate on the bill, much less voting on approving it.

Is this standing for our “Midwest values?” Not even discussing the possibility of continuing to finance programs to help women in violent situations?

Those aren’t my values, that’s for certain. Apparently, Emmer feels differently. Apparently, he feels he is accurately representing our values by not even considering discussing renewing this program.

As a community we should be grateful that Anna Marie’s Alliance perseveres in its efforts to serve victims and seeks funding at a grassroots level.

Since the founding of the organization in 1979, it has helped nearly 16,000

See **CYSON**, Page 14A

OUR VIEW



The new Mississippi Lofts apartments are pictured Thursday, March 29, in Sauk Rapids. The complex opens Friday. About 40 of the 57 apartments have been rented already. DAVE SCHWARZ, DSCHWARZ@STCLOUDTIMES.COM

Change your definition of ‘affordable housing’

Minnesota home prices have gone up 8.9% in a year

“Affordable housing.”

The term has been around so long it has picked up associations that go far beyond its actual meaning. Now, saying the words “affordable housing” evokes responses ranging from the emotional to the political:

“Affordable housing is ...”

■ “A moral obligation of society.”

■ “An unnecessary government intrusion in the free market.”

■ “Just a way for businesses to keep wages low.”

■ “Good for families and student success.”

■ “Bad for neighborhoods and property values.”

■ “Low-quality apartments that will just deteriorate.”

■ “Another word for welfare.”

■ “Another word for corporate welfare.”

■ “Affordable housing is only for poor people.”

Whew. That’s a lot of baggage for two little words to carry.

What’s new about a fresh report from the Governor’s Task Force on Housing is the apparent commitment to change the conversation — and those expected to be at the table.

Do we really have an affordable housing problem?

The market rate for a two-bedroom rental in St. Cloud is \$800, according to reporting this summer on findings by the National Low Income Housing Association. A worker needs to earn \$15.38 an hour in a full-time position to afford it, which may not sound unreasonable.

But there’s a twist: The mean wage of renters in the St. Cloud area is \$11.80 per hour.

And it’s not just renters, and it’s getting worse: Minnesota home prices have gone up 8.9 percent in the past year, according to the governor’s task force. Homes here are selling at prices 26 percent higher than surrounding states. And rents increased 4.1 percent Minnesota during the same time.

So check your last raise. If it matched those increases, we salute and congratulate you. If not, join the very large club.

Yes, we have a problem.

The Editorial Board

Our View represents the Times Editorial Board, whose members seek to provide opinion, information and leadership that promote public discussion and build a better community.

BOARD MEMBERS

- Lisa Schwarz, news director
- Randy Krebs, content strategist
- Andrew Fraser, content coach

The new conversation about why you should care: It’s good for business

Affordable housing *is* good for families and kids, and some might see it as a moral societal obligation, as well.

But it’s good business, too, say backers of the task force’s approach being promoted in a series of community meetings around the state. The most recent was Tuesday in St. Cloud.

Affordable housing *is good for business*. It’s good for *community development*, they say.

And they are calling for a market-spanning approach that would create 50,000 new housing units a year for the next five years *at all price points* to reduce the state’s housing demand backlog.

Redefining “affordable housing” to address availability across the market’s price range is a near-revolutionary addition to the discussion. Calling on the business community to stand up to its stakeholder role in housing issues as a primary tactic — not in the back seat to moral issues — is novel.

But it makes perfect sense.

Lack of affordable housing hinders employers who are trying to relocate here or fill vacant jobs, from entry level to management. (And if you haven’t heard the local business community cry out in desperation for qualified workers recently, you just haven’t been pay-

See **OUR VIEW**, Page 14A

Superintendent: St. Cloud school district’s objectives remain strong



Your Turn
Willie Jett
Guest columnist

Students and staff have settled comfortably into school routines as our first months have quickly passed by. With autumn comes the well-known rituals of homecoming dances, walkathons and family conferences. The familiar patterns of a school year bring a sense of comfort, but because each year is new, never complacency. We remain focused,

committed to the important work of teaching today’s children and tomorrow’s leaders.

Our district’s mission — to create a safe and caring climate and culture in which we prepare, engage, educate, empower and inspire all learners in partnership with their surrounding community to be successful in today’s and tomorrow’s society — guides us and motivates us every day and in every decision we make.

Five years ago we developed our mission statement and strategic plan in partnership with our engaged community. Our goal was to identify our collec-

tive values, strengths and challenges and use that information to better our district. During this process, we gathered feedback from families, students, staff and business and higher education partners. Together, we collaboratively created a strategic plan that set high goals for ourselves and our students, and provided clear timelines and measures of progress.

We want to take the opportunity to reflect on the gains we made and thank those who gave feedback, served on planning teams and helped us progress toward meeting our goals.

Our strategic plan includes three key

objectives. The first is to ensure all students demonstrate readiness skills for success today and in the future. To meet this goal, we focus on improving academic outcomes for students. The national College Board identifies a score of three on Advanced Placement (AP) exams as an indicator of academic success. Seventy-one percent of our students taking AP courses earn a three or higher compared with 67 percent of students statewide and 61 percent globally.

We understand that today’s students are the vital workforce of the future, so

See **JETT**, Page 14A