

Editorials are the institutional voice of The Free Press and independent of the newsroom reporting staff

OUR VIEW: SAFEGUARDING ELECTIONS

State, Congress need to focus on election interference

Last week's criminal indictment against a Russian woman who the Justice Department says conspired to interfere with the upcoming U.S. election is a reminder that we must be more vigilant about protecting our democratic process.

Prosecutors say Elena Khusyaynova was managing a sophisticated operation that aimed "to sow discord in the U.S. political system" by pushing arguments and misinformation online about a host of divisive political issues.

Why it matters:

Foreign interference in our democratic process is an ongoing reality and state and federal officials must ensure adequate funding and action is in place to fight it.

Prior to the 2016 presidential election, Russian hackers attempted to hack into voting systems in 21 states, including Minnesota, and gained access to voter-registration records in Illinois.

Homeland Security and other intelligence agencies say Russia is engaged in a major effort to

disrupt the mid-term election next month.

Unfortunately, President Trump has downplayed any risk to America's election process, but the majority of Americans and state election officials do realize the danger in allowing foreign governments to interfere in our electoral process.

Minnesota has long had a voting system and process that is trustworthy. Using paper ballots that can be kept and checked, thorough post-election audits and other measures have given Minnesotans a system they can trust.

But even here officials know that cybersecurity to protect the large and complex computer systems must be an ongoing effort. The federal government did supply Minnesota with \$6.6 million last year to go toward voting security but the combative standoff between the GOP Legislature and DFL governor meant lawmakers did not approve spending the money. Minnesota is the only state that is unable to spend the federal funds.

It's important the next Legislature and governor quickly vote to free the money so it can be used.

But those federal funds will not go nearly far enough to keep the system safe. A proposed bill last session would have allowed the Secretary of State's office to keep 2 percent of the current fees it charges for business filings to be used for cybersecurity, but the legislation didn't pass. The next Legislature will need to boost funding with either that proposed bill or find another way.

While there are very real concerns about interference those worries should not be used by anyone as an excuse not to vote. That would in itself give a victory to those who want to disrupt our process and erode faith in our system.

OTHER VIEW

Indictment of Russian national proves Moscow's meddling

New York Daily News

That the Russians meddled in U.S. elections in 2016 is a fact disputed by almost no one save, perhaps, President Trump.

His refusal to hold Vladimir Putin's hackers properly responsible for interference is especially dangerous because it leaves the DNA of American democracy vulnerable to compromise in 2018, 2020 and beyond.

So kudos to the Justice Department for Friday indicting Russian national Elena Alekseevna Khusyaynova for allegedly overseeing a social media information warfare campaign called Project Lakhta, aimed at influencing next month's midterms. As chief accountant at the St. Petersburg-based

Internet Research Agency, Khusyaynova oversaw a \$35 million operation mining and manipulating American divisions on hot-button topics like "the Second Amendment, the Confederate flag, race relations, LGBT issues, the Women's March, and the NFL national anthem debate."

Trump's reaction to the ongoing threat?

"It had nothing to do with my campaign," said the president Friday. "The hackers, a lot of them probably like Hillary Clinton better than me."

He's still obsessed with a woman who was on the ballot two years ago, and haunted by allegations of 2016 Russian collusion, when this year's elections hang in the balance. Super.

FOUNDED IN 1887

The Free Press

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STEVE JAMESON, Publisher

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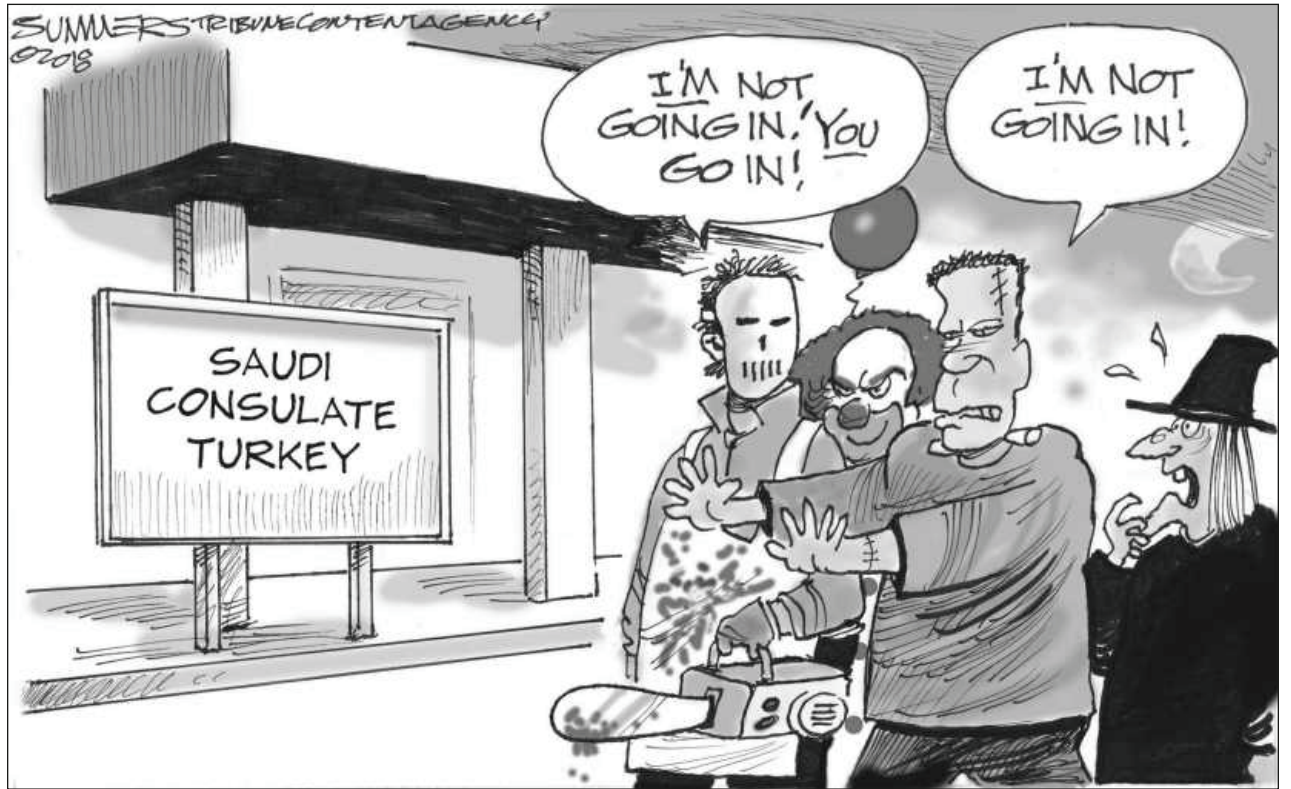
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YOUR VIEWS

Hagedorn has not forgotten his roots

The contest to represent the 1st District of Minnesota in Congress has come to one of the most disgusting amount of attack ads from both parties, using outside monies to try and influence the voting public.

Unfortunately, attack ads work or there would not be any. We are better than that.

With that being said, I write my letter in support of Jim Hagedorn to represent the 1st District. I have known him for several years. He is more aligned with the values of southern Minnesota. He is pro-life, supports the Second Amendment, knows the needs of agriculture, is ready to undo the disaster known as Obamacare/ACA, go after waste spending in government, work to help veterans affairs, etc.

Hagedorn was raised in southern Minnesota on the family farm, spent years in between Truman and Washington, D.C., when his father represented Minnesota in the 2nd District.

He has never forgotten his Minnesota roots that formed his personal values of hard work, being up front and being able to articulate his ideas to make a better country. He is a devout Christian with these values showing in all he does.

He is one of the hardest working candidates I have ever known, visiting all 21 counties many times, not forgetting the small communities along with the more populated areas.

All of southern Minnesota would be well represented by Hagedorn.

His opponent did not live in the current 1st District until July 2017. He is fully supported by the Obama administration and Nancy Pelosi. Need I say more.

Vote Hagedorn, Nov. 6. Your vote is very important.

Fred Lenz
St. James

Feehan intends to put principles above party

As a fiscally conservative libertarian, I went into the 1st Congressional District forum at South Central College with an open mind in regards to who would win over my vote for the upcoming election. Both candidates provided responses that I found myself aligning with, and both provided answers that I found myself disagreeing with.

What stood out to me more than any policy comment was Dan Feehan's statement in regards to how he would vote if representing the 1st District in Congress, "principle above party."

What I heard and saw out of Feehan's presentation appeared to be a sincere effort to meet in the middle and advocate for the people of this district. His competitor's comments demonstrated an agenda that reflected what we have plenty of in Washington — partisan politics.

I left the forum wondering if Feehan's competitor would be willing to make the difficult votes that went against his party's agenda, but benefited the people he represents.

In a race where both candidates have pros and cons, this libertarian will be giving my vote to Feehan with the hope he fulfills the promise of being an independent thinker who represents what is best for the people of the first district.

Thad Shunkwiler
North Mankato

Levine would make excellent county attorney

I write a letter of support on behalf of Elizabeth Levine who is a candidate for Nicollet County Attorney. I think Levine would be a breath of fresh air for the office and the citizens of Nicollet County.

Often these contested races for

county attorney come down to who can be tougher on crime. In my 31 years of experience as an attorney, I have never found an incumbent or challenger lacking in their resolve to keep the citizens safe from dangerous criminal conduct.

I know Levine would work very hard to seek convictions and maintain safe communities.

The distinguishing feature I point out between Levine and Michelle Zehnder Fischer is in the area of child protection. The incumbent has been throughout her career passionate for her advocacy in this area. Under Zehnder Fischer's direction, the Nicollet County Attorney's Office has a history of prosecuting these cases, which have resulted in high out-of-home placement costs for Nicollet County.

I do not believe Nicollet County has an epidemic of poor parenting; but Nicollet County does have aggressive prosecutions of these types of cases.

Social workers who have disagreed with Zehnder Fischer fear of being unfairly singled out and marginalized.

As a former Nicollet County property taxpayer, I can say Levine would be a fresh set of eyes to these important social service cases that have cost the taxpayer dearly throughout the years. She would make an excellent county attorney.

James D. Fleming
Minneapolis

GOP's the problem, not immigrants

There is a picture that nicely illustrates the distribution of the Republican tax cut signed into law in December. It shows a table piled high with cookies. The caption reads: A billionaire, a worker and an immigrant are sitting at a table with 1,000 cookies. The billionaire takes 999 cookies and says to the worker, "Watch out, the immigrant is going to take your cookie."

Now Republicans want to take money out of our Social Security and Medicare programs to pay for the \$1.5 trillion worth of cookies they bought for their wealthy friends and charged to our credit card.

It's not immigrants we have to worry about, folks. It's the GOP.

Elly Zaragoza
Mankato

Zehnder Fischer's honest, hard working, dedicated

I am urging the residents of Nicollet County to re-elect Michelle Zehnder Fischer as county attorney.

Zehnder Fischer is very thorough and detailed oriented in all the duties of a county attorney, including criminal prosecution, child protection, victim/witness assistance, taxpayer protection, family services and civil advice just to name a few.

Zehnder Fischer works very closely with law enforcement to prosecute cases. She is not afraid to take on complex and difficult cases to help keep our county safe. She also works to ensure the victims of crimes have a voice, and helps them get the justice they deserve.

She advocates tirelessly for families and children, working closely with law enforcement and human services. Her consistent goal is to do what is in the best interest of the child.

Zehnder Fischer is also fiscally responsible. She does not waste taxpayer money on unnecessary prosecutions, but does her best to keep our communities safe with limited resources. She regularly utilizes alternatives to traditional sentencing, including Drug Court, juvenile diversion, substance abuse treatment, community service and probation.

As county attorney, she is the legal adviser to the County Board, depart-

ments, officials and drainage authority to improve the lives of all county residents by advising on issues such as planning, zoning and land use issues making Nicollet County an ideal place to live.

Zehnder Fischer is honest, hard working and dedicated. You won't find anyone else who is more committed to her job, community and family. She is more than qualified to do the job.

Please take the time on Nov. 6 and re-elect Zehnder-Fischer.

Sandy Howe
North Mankato

Turning on vehicle lights may prevent crashes

Recently, I experienced a near-miss collision. A car was traveling after dark with no lights on.

I feel lucky to have escaped the accident but also feel compelled to remind all drivers to heed the rules we have for driving in inclement weather.

Lights are to be displayed by every vehicle (2018 Minnesota Statutes 169:48):

- at any time from sunset to sunrise;
- at any time it is raining, snowing, sleeting or hailing;
- at any other time when visibility is impaired by weather, smoke, fog or other conditions when there is not sufficient light to render clearly discernible at a distance of 500 feet people and vehicles on a highway.

These basic regulations are designed to make all of us safer and feel more secure. With daylight hours getting shorter and darkness coming earlier, we most be more alert and cautious.

Although there usually is less traffic at night, nearly half of all fatal accidents in Minnesota occur after dark.

A solution to resolve this problem is basically rather simple. Once in a vehicle, secure the seatbelt, turn the ignition on, clear the windshield if necessary and turn on the lights if that's not an automatic feature on the vehicle.

These few reminders may save you or your loved ones from an accident that could have been prevented.

Earle Peters
Mankato

Candidate has vested interest in county's success

I write this letter in support of Michelle Zehnder Fischer for Nicollet County Attorney.

As a practicing attorney for the past 18 years I have dealt with dozens and dozens of prosecutors in southern Minnesota. Out of all the prosecutors I have encountered, none are as seeking of justice and committed to their role in the legal process as Nicollet County Attorney Fischer.

I am a citizen of Nicollet County and feel it is critically important that our county attorney has put down roots in the county she serves. Her children attend school here and her husband has worked in North Mankato for decades.

Zehnder Fischer has a vested interest in seeing Nicollet County succeed.

The reason I can't vote for her opponent is that Elizabeth Levine has less than five years' experience in criminal law, has never been a prosecutor, and has lived in Nicollet County for less than six months.

I need a county attorney who has shown a commitment to service and to the justice system and to Nicollet County and that person is Zehnder Fischer.

I urge all my fellow citizens of Nicollet County to vote Nov. 6 for Zehnder Fischer for Nicollet County attorney.

Jason Kohlmeier
North Mankato