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OUR VIEW

Franklin Rogers lives up to its billing



Thumbs up to the city of Mankato, the Mankato Moondogs and others who invested in a near total remodeling of Franklin Rogers Park last year that brought new turf allowing games to be played in March.

The first games took place last week and the Frank lived up well to its billing as an almost all season ball park. Bethany, using the Frank as its

new home field, has played a number of games and Minnesota State University has used the field also for early games as the natural turf fields were drying out from an unusually wet and snowy winter.

Snow was able to be removed and the black pellet laden turf warmed up very nicely, according to observers.

The \$4.5 million investment in renovation of the park included not only new turf but a number of amenities including new locker rooms, seating areas and a new concessions area. The group seating area known as the Dog Pound was expanded and premium Dugout Club seating was added.

All area baseball teams will benefit from the new park as they can get their games completed without worrying about Minnesota weather. It's a real plus for the fans too.



Endangered Mississippi

The upper Mississippi River has always been viewed as a near pristine stretch, meandering from its Lake Itasca headwaters to the Twin Cities, where the Mighty Mississippi gets demonstrably murkier, in large part to the sediment dumped into it by the Minnesota River.

But a new study highlights growing threats to the upper Mississippi and a need to protect it now rather than face billions of dollars in cleanup later.

The damage to the upper stretch is coming from a familiar mix of more development, the clearing of forest land and marshes and more fertilizer and chemicals going into the river from agriculture.

The Nature Conservancy said taking more than 100,000 critical acres and preserving it through purchases or conservation easements would create serious benefits. The cost would be hundreds of millions. But they cite even larger savings for things like cities spending less to treat drinking water and seeing higher property values and more tourism jobs.

The upper Mississippi is a gem for the state and a robust debate on protecting it before things deteriorate further is necessary.



Guilty plea the best outcome

Thumbs up to the prosecutors in northwestern Wisconsin who engineered a guilty plea from Jake Patterson, the kidnapper of Jamie Closs and murderer of her parents, thus sparing the teen the trauma of one or

more trials.

To be sure, it may not have taken a great deal of work to extract that plea. Patterson told a Twin Cities television station a month ago that he would plead guilty, and his defense attorney said this week after the hearing in which Patterson entered his plea that the 21-year-old had said so from the day they met.

Still, it is noteworthy that the prosecutor in Douglas County, the jurisdiction in which Patterson held Jamie in captivity for months, opted against bringing any charges for the crimes Patterson committed there. The reason: Filing charges would necessarily require publicly detailing what happened to the girl. While justice and retribution would suggest throwing the book at Patterson, it would not be in Jamie's best interest.

Patterson has not yet been sentenced; that is to come in May. We are confident that the judge in Barron County will insure that Patterson, with two murders and a kidnapping on his dossier, will not walk outside prison walls again. More charges are unnecessary to achieve that.

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The Free Press

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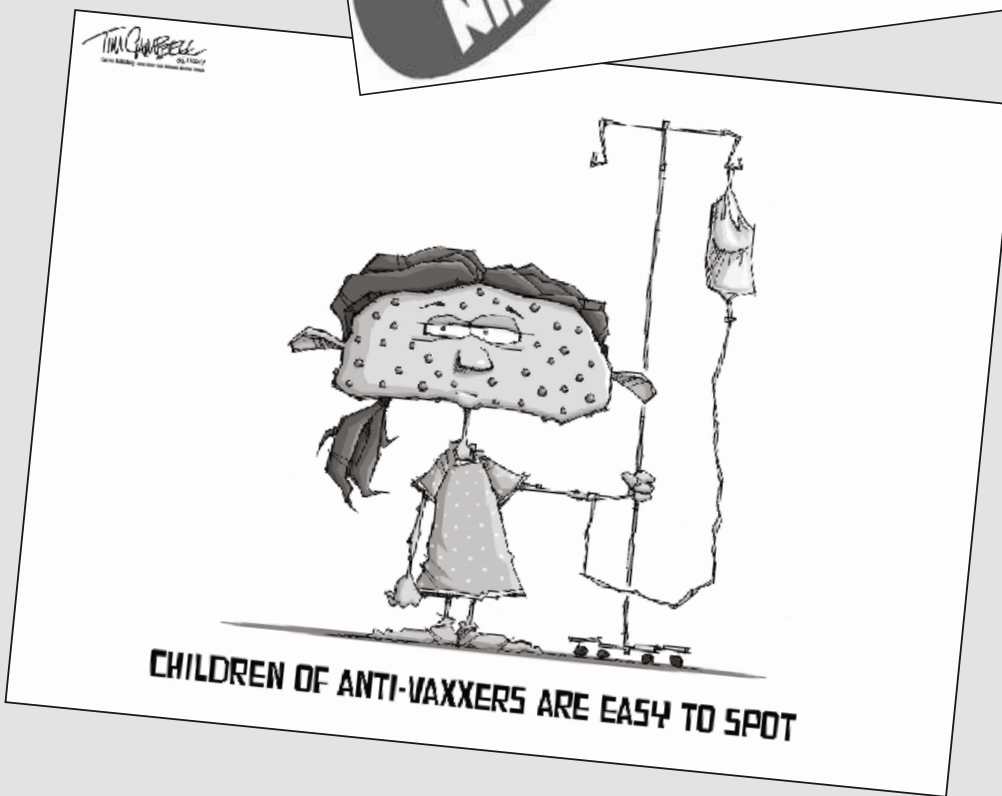
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VIEWPOINTS FROM THE CARTOONIST'S PEN

A weekly sampling of what editorial cartoonists are revealing about the world around us



The bloody price of gun rights

"This is the price of freedom."
Bill O'Reilly on the Las Vegas massacre

"Freedom to be afraid is all you won."

Gil Scott-Heron from "Gun"

Originally, this was going to be a column about Sydney Aiello. She was 19 years old, a graduate of Marjory Stoneman Douglas High in Parkland, Florida, and she was buried Friday after committing suicide. Her parents said she lost friends in last year's shooting at her school. They said she carried survivor's guilt and had been diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder.

Then the column about Sydney became a column about Sydney and a boy, his identity not yet released, who died of an apparent suicide the day after her funeral. He was a sophomore at her old school.

Then the column changed yet again. Jeremy Richman, the father of 6-year-old Avielle Richman, who was killed in the 2012 mass shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary in Newtown, Connecticut, was found dead of an apparent suicide on Monday. It seems reasonable to suspect, though at this point not possible to know, that proximity to tragedy played a role in the deaths of the man and boy, as it evidently did with Sydney.



LEONARD PITTS
Miami Herald

So this is a column about the three of them. And the 328 million of us. And the singularly grotesque thing Bill O'Reilly said two years ago after 58 people died and over 500 were wounded in the deadliest mass shooting in U.S. history, a thing that has hovered like smoke over every mass shooting since.

"This is the price of freedom," he said. Which is, of course, ridiculous. Canada is free. Australia, Spain and Finland are free. As the nation that gave us the Magna Carta, England might fairly be said to have invented freedom.

None of them has anywhere near the level of gun violence America does.

But it is not the inaccuracy of O'Reilly's statement that gives it such grim resonance in the wake of this triple suicide. It is, rather, the substance, that idea of paying a price for so-called "gun rights."

We think of that price in terms of fallen bodies, blood shining on asphalt. Truth is, that's only the beginning.

Long after the bodies have been recovered and the asphalt scrubbed, after the media fold their tents and the nation turns its restless attention elsewhere, there are people left learning to walk again, or talk again. And there are families with

holes shot through them, hearts that grieve behind sunny smiles, invisible wounds bleeding. Because each bullet that finds flesh injures not just its victim, but everyone around her until eventually, the whole country is walking blood stained and wounded.

We have second-graders with PTSD. We have preschoolers practicing active-shooter drills. In South Carolina, a 7-year-old survivor takes to pulling out her eyelashes and clawing her own skin. In Arizona, a 4-year-old cries "active shooter" as fireworks burst overhead. In Florida and Connecticut, three people are dead by their own hands. This is our new American normal.

And for what?

"This is the price of freedom," O'Reilly said, trying to imbue mass murder with a sheen of patriotic sacrifice. His absurd words reflect a nation that resolutely refuses to do anything but think and pray about an ongoing national disaster. We regard gun violence like earthquakes and windstorms, acts of God we cannot prevent, but only learn to live with.

But gun violence is no act of God. And we can't live with it. That's the whole point.

"The price of freedom," he says. Well, that price keeps going higher. And whatever we're buying, freedom isn't it.

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