

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

## OUR VIEW: HEALTH PROVIDER TAX

# All benefit from healthy citizens

The debate over extending the health care provider tax instituted about 30 years ago shouldn't be about how much it costs, but rather how much it saves.

The 2 percent "provider tax" has made health care affordable for hundreds of thousands of Minnesotans since it was instituted by a Republican governor with bipartisan support in the 1990s. The tax was designed to underwrite the premiums and cost of MinnesotaCare, a program for those who didn't qualify for government's Medical Assistance but didn't make enough money to purchase market-rate insurance.

### Why it matters:

Some GOP legislators favor letting the provider tax expire at the end of the year, ending collection of \$700 million in revenue that funds health care for the poor.

About half of the \$700 million now funds the state's expanded health care program for the poor and disabled.

An agreement during the 2011 government shutdown called for the tax to sunset at the end of this year. Gov. Tim Walz wants to keep the tax in place to continue to help fund burgeoning health care costs and keep health insurance affordable. Some Republicans would like to see it end, saying the health care subsidies can be provided with general fund money.

Ending the tax and taking the money from the general fund would require the Legislature to cut spending in some other program. We don't see anyone proposing to cut any other budget items at this juncture to make up for the loss of the provider tax.

The health care subsidy the GOP backed last year for backstopping insurance companies took \$400 million of the health care access fund to keep premiums low for 5 percent of the people in the state who buy insurance on the individual market or about 162,000 people.

About half of the Health Care Access Fund goes to the state's Medical Assistance program for the poor, who number about 1 million. About \$36 million goes to subsidize MinnesotaCare. That program is now also supported by the Affordable Care Act, funding of which has been under attack by President Donald Trump and Republicans.

Walz proposes to keep the tax to expand eligibility for people to buy affordable health insurance. That seems like a worthy goal, given the market gyrations Minnesotans experienced a few years ago with premiums skyrocketing by 60 and 70 percent.

And federal subsidies for health care also remain under threat with the Trump administration.

But there are alternatives to the provider tax. GOP Sen. Scott Jensen, a Chaska doctor, has proposed moving the tax from providers to insurance carriers. Walz seemed open to exploring that idea. We applaud Jensen for trying to find a solution that can be supported by both parties.

Everyone seems to agree that all Minnesotans should be able to buy affordable health care and all of us benefit when we have a healthy population. Without health insurance, many are forced to visit expensive emergency rooms, where, under federal law, they must be served whether they have insurance or not.

Ending the provider tax would create chaos in health care markets. With replacement funding uncertain, it would likely cause more people to lose their health care.

We urge the governor and legislators to either continue the provider tax or find a workable alternative to support affordable health care for all.

## OTHER VIEW

### Roll call votes online

The Free Press provides a record of all significant votes in Congress and the voting record of Minnesota members of Congress online at [www.mankatofreepress.com](http://www.mankatofreepress.com).

Votes are listed under "roll call votes" under the "news" accessed through the drop down menu at the top left of The Free Press home page.

Readers can find votes going back to 2011 on topics ranging from gun control to homeland security and from

veterans' issues to Medicare spending.

"Left and Right Scores" are also tallied for each member depending on ratings of various interest groups in categories that include liberal, conservative, green, business, social and labor categories.

Votes for this year can be found by searching "How they voted" on [www.mankatofreepress.com](http://www.mankatofreepress.com) in the search bar on the home page.

FOUNDED IN 1887

# The Free Press

1st 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.

STEVE JAMESON, Publisher

#### EDITORIAL MANAGEMENT

JOSEPH SPEAR, Managing Editor  
KATHY VOS, News Editor  
TIM KROHN, Business Editor  
ROBB MURRAY, Features Editor  
PAT CHRISTMAN, Photo Editor  
JIM RUEDA, Sports Editor

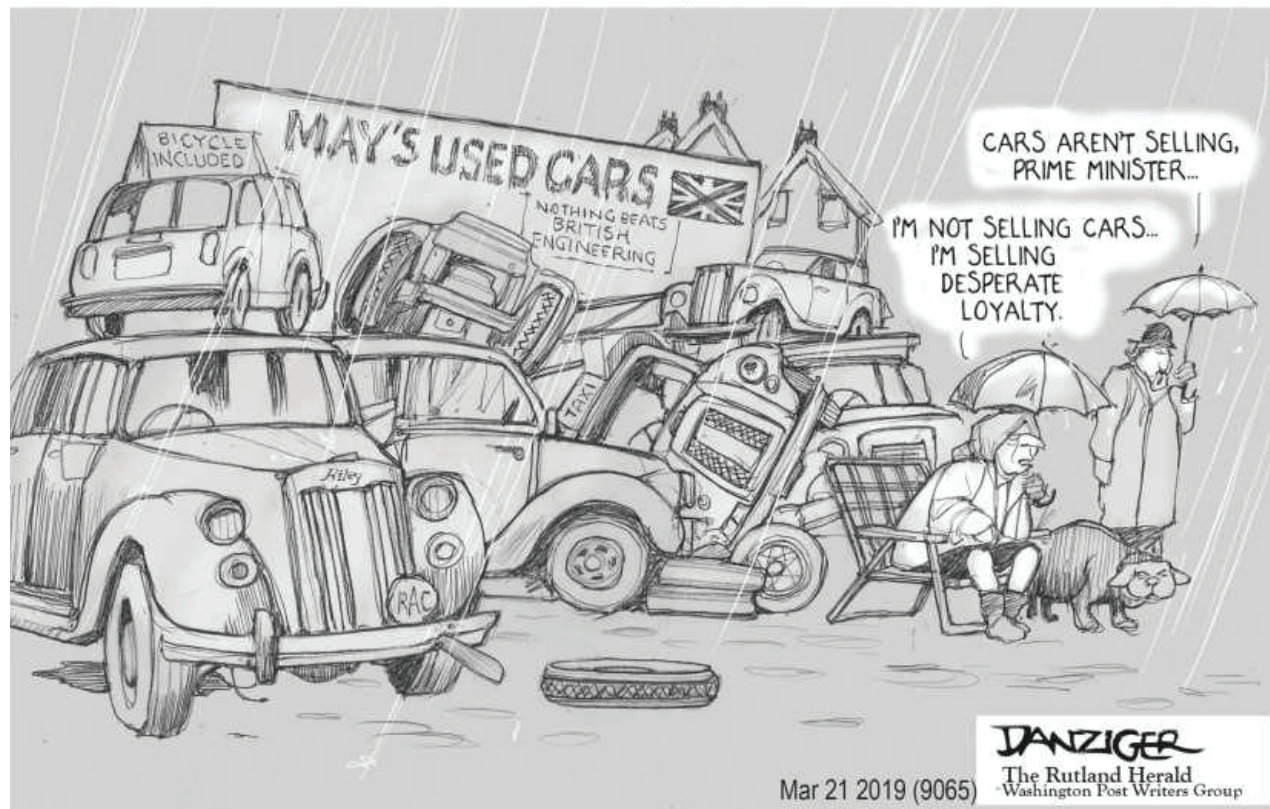
#### BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

JUSTIN NILES, Audience Development Director  
GLEN ASLESON, Facilities & Technology Manager  
TODD BROUWER, Press/Post Press Manager  
DEB PETERSON, General Manager - The Land

### LETTERS POLICY

The Free Press welcomes letters on any issue of general community interest. Please limit your letters to no more than 275 words, typewritten or clearly printed. Letters or emails citing facts that are not commonly known should include the source. Letters must contain the author's name, address and phone number for verification. All letters will be edited for clarity, grammar, spelling and space. You may email letters to the editor to [editor@mankatofreepress.com](mailto:editor@mankatofreepress.com).

### Don't Fixit, Brexit.



## Racial narratives leave untold stories

The racially charged times we now find ourselves in undercut the promises of our sweet land of liberty, and our pledge to be one nation indivisible.

There's not much to sing about, but there's a lot to kneel about, so it seems. The racially charged times are translated into racial narratives distributed by powerful media institutions. Those narratives can create even more racial discord.

A recent effort to educate a couple hundred journalists about their part in today's racial narrative offered hope for solutions or, at the very least, some progress on changing or bringing fairness to the narrative.

As I attended a two-day conference called "Truth and Transformation, Changing racial narratives in media," I took a few minutes to think about what we're doing as a community news organization when it comes to the local racial narratives. The program was sponsored by Minnesota Public Radio and the Minnesota Humanities Center and funded by the St. Paul and Minnesota Foundations as well as Minnesota's Legacy fund.

The premise, of course, is that the powerful institutions of media play a role in how we see each other in terms of race and community, and whether racial conflict will be solved with peace or violence. The idea was to get journalists to see their own biases and examine the racial narratives that impact communities of color and indigenous people.

The Free Press will try to play a part in improving that narrative.



JOE SPEAR  
Managing Editor

We'll be looking to tell those stories that have in the past been the "absent narrative." Absent narratives are untold stories that create the danger of the "single" story, the idea that groups can be defined by one story line.

In 2010, The Free Press convened a diversity panel, a group of people of color and others who could offer a view on our coverage and make suggestions for stories that would more clearly describe a community that is likely under-covered.

We disbanded the group after a couple years, perhaps prematurely.

We'll be reaching out again to that community and others. It's a given that journalists cannot cover the deepest stories in their community without building trust and relationships in that community. It's hard to build that trust when you show up only when there's bad news.

We'll be looking to tell those stories that have in the past been the "absent narrative." Absent narratives are untold stories that create the danger of the "single" story, the idea that groups can be defined by one story line.

But we'll need your help. We hope you take us up on the challenge we face.

We'll try to strike a balanced mix in our pages of showing the people of color beyond their role in mostly negative crime stories. A review of our coverage, shows we do that some already, but probably not enough.

We'll also invite you to join our discussions on a number of issues, some of which seem obvious and others will be tough.

Some news organizations have decided to discontinue using the

derogatory Native American term for the NFL franchise based in Washington, D.C.

Speakers from the African American community challenged media to defend the relevance of bringing up past minor criminal violations of young black men who are shot by police.

Does a record for possessing a small amount of marijuana make shooting that person more justifiable? Previous criminal backgrounds are generally not allowed to be brought up in court. So it's worth discussing whether they should appear in crime stories.

We'll also try to dig deeper on social problems. If it's clear a large number of refugees or some other group seem to be getting into trouble with the police, we'll find out more about their community and the "absent narrative" if there is one.

Journalists must acknowledge their power to influence community narratives. To get it right, we need to do our work of fact verification and follow journalistic principles. We need to build trust in those communities where we are now strangers. And we need to devote resources to these stories.

And we would like to hear your ideas on how we can change racial narratives.

Joe Spear is editor of The Free Press. Contact him at [jspear@mankatofreepress.com](mailto:jspear@mankatofreepress.com) or 344-6382. Follow on Twitter @jfspear.

## NOT REAL NEWS

### Transfer of funds didn't happen

#### The Associated Press

A roundup of some of the most popular but completely untrue stories and visuals of the week. None of these is legit, even though they were shared widely on social media. The Associated Press checked these out. Here are the real facts:

**Claim:** Beto O'Rourke gave a remaining \$4.5 million from his unsuccessful U.S. Senate campaign to Texas Democrats and the party returned it to him on the day he announced his presidential campaign.

**The facts:** The Texas Democratic Party did not give \$4.5 million to O'Rourke's presidential campaign as social media posts suggest.

O'Rourke did give that amount from his Senate campaign to the party ahead of the 2018 midterm elections, but the party spent it before he launched his presidential campaign.

O'Rourke's announcement that he had raised \$6.1 million online 24 hours after entering the race led to social media posts questioning whether the amount showed he had grassroots support. The issue was raised in a tweet by a supporter of Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders who noted that O'Rourke had not released information on individual donors.

According to a review of federal campaign data, O'Rourke's U.S. Senate campaign fund made several donations totaling \$4.5 million to the state's Democratic Party in September and October. The state party spent more than \$8.1 million between Oct. 1 and the end of the year, leaving the party with only

\$264,164 at the end of February. O'Rourke launched his campaign March 14. The Associated Press reported that O'Rourke said his first day \$6.1 million in donations came from 128,000-plus contributions. Sanders also raised about \$6 million for his presidential campaign in the first 24 hours, which he said came from 225,000 donors.

In an email, a Texas Democratic party spokesman confirmed the state party has not donated to O'Rourke's presidential campaign.

**Claim:** Tom Ford refuses to dress Melania Trump: "I have no interest in dressing a glorified escort who steals speeches and has bad taste in men." -tweets

**The facts:** Designer Tom Ford did not make that statement. The fabricated quote was trending Tuesday on Twitter and was shared widely, including from the account of rapper 50 Cent, who has 10 million followers.

A spokeswoman for Tom Ford released a statement on Twitter saying, "This is an absolutely fabricated and completely fake quote that somehow went viral. Mr. Ford did not make this statement; it is completely false." The company confirmed that statement in an email to the AP.

The false claim also circulated online in 2016. Ford did say during an appearance on "The View" that year — shortly after Donald Trump was elected president — that he had been asked to dress Melania Trump before she became first lady and he declined. "She's not necessarily my image," he said. Ford also noted he is a Democrat, voted for Hillary Clinton and was disappointed she

didn't win. But, Ford added that he didn't think either of the women should wear his clothes because he thinks they need to be relatable to the public and his clothes are "too expensive."

**Claim:** Nearly nude person with words written on body is said to be Democratic presidential hopeful Beto O'Rourke.

**The facts:** A photo of a person with words such as "feminist," "naturist" and "atheist" written on their body is not O'Rourke, despite posts that circulated widely on social media after he announced his run for president on March 14.

The person in the photo is wearing red lipstick, a flower in their hair and a leaf-adorned thong. The caption reads: "REMIND EVERYONE OF THIS PIC WHEN THIS FOOL SAYS HE IS GONNA RUN FOR PRESIDENT. THIS IS ROBERT O'ROURKE (beto)."

The photo, which can be found in Getty Images archives, was taken during a gay pride parade in Athens, Greece, on Jun. 11, 2016, according to its caption information. The photographer, Giorgos Georgiou, told the AP that the person in the photo is a "well-known Greek citizen" named Jason-Antigone Dane. Dane was featured in a 2017 article from the Athens Voice titled, "Jason-Antigone talks about how to be a non-binary person in Athens." Chris Evans, O'Rourke's communications director, confirmed that "the photo is not of Beto."

This is part of The Associated Press' ongoing effort to fact-check misinformation that is shared widely online.