

OPINION

“CONGRESS SHALL MAKE NO LAW... ABRIDGING THE FREEDOM OF SPEECH, OR OF THE PRESS;”

The First Amendment of the United States Constitution

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Editorial

Trump and his wall

Turns out the wall is keeping Americans in, rather than foreigners out

Could it be that Donald Trump has been playing twelve-dimensional chess after all?

During the 2016 campaign, the xenophobic Trump promised to build a wall at our southern border and get Mexico to pay for it.

Now, thanks to President Trump, there is at least a virtual wall around America— only it’s one designed to keep Americans in, rather than keep foreigners out.

At a time when most other developed countries in the world are more or less back to normal thanks to responsible, science-based responses to the COVID-19 epidemic, America has become the world’s cautionary tale about the effects of extreme government mismanagement of the pandemic. While we make up less than five percent of the world’s population, the U.S. is now comprising almost a third of all new COVID-19 infections worldwide. That’s not a testament to more testing, as President Trump likes to falsely claim. Many other countries have higher rates of testing than the United States, with far fewer positive results.

At a time when tourists are returning to the European Union from many countries, Americans are barred from travel to most of Europe. In fact, these days a U.S. passport isn’t worth the paper it’s printed on. Americans can still fly to Mexico and Turkey, but the rest of the world is virtually off limits as other countries justifiably fear that Americans will bring disease to their shores. Under the Trump administration, Americans are now getting a feel for what it’s like to be international pariahs.

And while it’s tempting to put the onus for America’s public health failure solely on a historically incompetent president and administration, the fault ultimately rests with the self-indulgent nature of far too many Americans. President Trump is the ultimate symbol of the fall of a nation that used to actually do great things. Today,

we can’t even be asked to do the easy things, such as donning masks to help bring a dangerous pandemic under control.

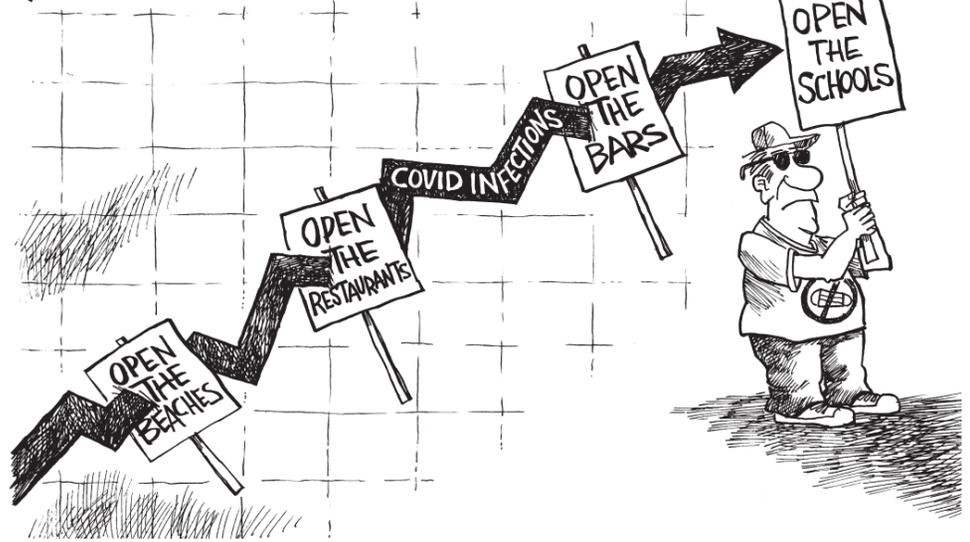
The Greatest Generation survived the Great Depression and actually fought for liberty in World War II. They gave up their freedom temporarily to join the war effort in countless ways. They sacrificed, in some cases everything, for the good of their country and its people. And yet today’s generation can’t be bothered to even wear a mask— in part to protect the health of the Greatest Generation. And they call themselves patriots? They seem only to recognize their rights as Americans, without recognizing the obligations and responsibilities that also come with living in a free nation. Fortunately for America, prior generations better understood the concept of citizenship and duty.

Because too many Americans see “liberty” as the right to act like undisciplined children, we are, in fact, no longer free to leave our own country in most cases. We’ve been made to go sit in the corner, because nations with more mature leadership recognize the risk that the pandemic poses to their people, and they understand the degree to which the United States has failed to protect its own public.

Perhaps Donald Trump has simply given his supporters what they wanted from the start: a backward and inward-looking country with no interest in the outside world. Perhaps the COVID-19 pandemic, fueled by Trump’s ignorance and incompetence, has, in the end, given his supporters their beloved wall. It’s just that in this case, it’s a wall that’s keeping Americans inside— just as the Berlin Wall used to deny East Germans the right to travel.

In truth, America won’t have actual liberty or an improving economy until we get the pandemic under control. And that will require that we start acting like a mature and responsible nation once again.

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Letters from Readers

The Stink Meter is nearing its limit in Greenwood

At the recent Greenwood Town Board meeting, the board decided to slash the town clerk’s hours and pay. The board claimed the Breitung Township Clerk gets her work done in 12 hours because that is what is posted as public office hours. If they had made one call to the Breitung Clerk, she would have enlightened them to the fact she works other hours outside the posted ones, but they were not interested in that truth. They only wanted a small truth that could be woven into a larger lie in order to achieve their goal of removing our clerk.

If you remember, the board placed Option B on the ballot in our last election, and if it passed, Option B would have removed the clerk from office and replaced her with a board-appointed clerk. Thankfully, the citizens voted, by a two-to-one margin, not to have an appointed clerk and also re-elected the clerk by an overwhelming margin.

Having failed in that effort, the Greenwood board moved on to passing ordinances that fine or imprison the clerk if she releases data that other townships would regard as “public” and just release.

These ordinances eliminate the transparency we should expect and were passed with no public input under the streamlined pandemic rules, under which the board has chosen to operate.

So here we are today, with the clerk having run for an office with hours and compensation that she was elected under for four years. Then the board plays a bait and switch, and she is left with too few hours to complete her work. If the clerk should choose to resign, the board will have taken away your right to elect your clerk and simply appoint one they like.

If she stays, who knows what scheme the board will cook up with their attorney to

force our elected Clerk Sue Drobac to resign. Observing how this Greenwood board secretly operates, the day will come when they give their appointed clerk more hours and pay and that’s when the “Stink Meter” will max out.

JoAnn and John Bassing Greenwood Twp.

Accountability in the Tower Area Ambulance Service

In response to the “Editor’s Note” that was attached to my letter last week concerning the Tower Area Ambulance Service accounts, I stand by what I wrote. Facts are facts, and I will certainly take Interim Clerk/Treasurer Lamppa’s statement in the 7-25-19 Timberjay that “even that fund [the ambulance subsidy account] had been drained almost entirely at various points.” And I do believe the city’s professional audit firm when it states that the ambulance service fund is short \$697,299, “Due From Other [City] Funds”. A forensic audit, which was recommended by St. Louis County investigators when the city council asked them to investigate the former clerk/treasurer was never accomplished by the city. Why not? That would have led to needed transparency. The townships deserve some answers, and at least a “thank you” for persevering in this mismanagement by the city.

And I’m not impressed with the Editor’s view of the ambulance service account, profits that are generated from ambulance runs. The Editor states: “The city has tapped those funds for other city expenses, but no township funds were involved in those transactions under the current administration.” Notwithstanding that those ambulances were purchased with significant township money, and that township residents are members of the ambulance crew, the idea that it’s apparently OK for the city to use those profits for city expenses is incredible. Money earned by the ambulances needs

to be used in the ambulance service. And I’d sure like to see the state statute that says a new city council is not responsible for past city debts. Wouldn’t that be something? The city needs to make good on the \$697,299 and the city needs to pass a formal resolution preventing future TAAS profits from being diverted to cover city expenses.

Lee Peterson Greenwood Twp.

Thanks for the good laugh

After reading Marilyn Mueller’s letter last week, I broke out laughing. Not about her saying that we as taxpayers should see all politicians’ tax records, because I believe we should, but about the way she colors Donald Trump and about not needing to see his. She said, we as taxpayers don’t need to see the tax records of a highly motivated [clearly self-centered motivated], hard-working billionaire [prove it, as he plays another round of golf on our buck], who became a public servant [why take a “pay cut” and work for free? Think about it harder]. I could go on and on about those statements.

I think Marilyn should read Donald Trump’s own book “The Art Of The Deal,” because I can easily tell she has not. It will explain in his own words why she is blind to the truth about him and his con game. I do thank her, however, for the good laugh!

Barry W. Tungseth Fall Lake Twp.

We welcome your letters

The Timberjay encourages letters to the editor. You can submit letters by mail at PO Box 636, Tower, MN 55790, or email letters to marshall@timberjay.com.

Letters are subject to editing, primarily for length and clarity.



Don’t ask me - I’m still wondering about Lee

Prediction: If a certain candidate doesn’t win the Presidential election in November, members of his party in Congress will support a military coup to make him President anyway.

Reality: We’ll never know, because Andrew Jackson defeated John Quincy Adams in the 1832 election. However, conspiracy theorists were certain



DAVID COLBURN

that if Jackson had lost he would have been “placed in the Presidential Chair, at the point of fifty thousand bayonets!!!”

Surely even the most ardent of Trump detractors couldn’t believe I was talking about the current occupant of the Oval Office – or could they? After all, no less than Democratic candidate Joe Biden is already

on record as being convinced Trump will try to “steal” the election and will refuse to leave if he loses. Right?

And while Democrats can’t seem to contain their glee over Trump’s sinking poll numbers, they consistently fail to account for the intensity of those voters who know that electing Biden virtually assures that billionaire investor George Soros will be free to consolidate his plans for a new world order, providing he has enough money left after paying to buy all the bricks and bus in all the protesters for all

the violent civil unrest in our cities. This huge “silent majority” surely will ride to Trump’s rescue in November. Right?

Conspiracy theories are as American as apple pie, and our appetite for the former is as voracious as it is for the latter. They’re more visible and more dangerous than ever in the digital age, but to suggest that Americans on both the right and the left have suddenly become suckers for a good conspiracy theory is ludicrous. We’ve always been suckers for wild flights of fantasy and deception,

right down to believing that P.T. Barnum actually said, “There’s a sucker born every minute.” He didn’t.

My first foray into the realm of conspiracy theory came when I dove headlong into all the theories about the assassination of President John F. Kennedy in a Dallas motorcade in 1963. Although I was just a month shy of turning six years old, it made a huge impression on me. As I grew into my late teens and twenties, I read most everything

See CONSPIRACY...pg.

Letters from Readers

Twin Metals mine plan is unacceptable

I'm the son and grandson of iron and taconite miners on the Iron Range and hope that copper-nickel mining can go ahead because our economy needs these good, high-paying jobs. I am, however, deeply disappointed to see the new Antofagasta mining plan which does not meet the high bar of doing this right.

I have long held that the one, non-negotiable, environmental standard that must be met here is simply stated as follows: Mine the ore where it is found but process the ore south of the Continental Divide, outside the Kawishiwi drainage. Ironically, the original Twin Metals mining plan did just that, taking into account the basic reality that mining itself entails little environmental risk while all the steps in processing the ore are extremely hazardous. But no, Antofagasta apparently decided we are just one more indigenous tribe to be exploited for profit as mining companies have done around the world. This will not stand.

The mining industry and the men and women working in the ferrous mines in Minnesota have been doing a wonderful job for over a hundred years of providing this nation the raw materials to make steel, and have done so while keeping our lakes and streams clean. But copper-nickel mining is something else, far more dangerous, and requires a new vigilance. And know this: mining is no walk in the park. Here are four basic facts about mining that must be considered.

► Stuff Happens.

► Stuff Breaks.

► Operational managers are only about half as smart as they think they are.

► Shift Supervisors bucking for promotion cut corners.

Knowing these basic facts of the mining world, no responsible mine owner would put copper-nickel processing facilities on the shores of Birch Lake, which drains directly into Basswood and on into the heart of the Boundary Waters. This is insanity. This is not a new mine plan—this is a declaration of war, economic war against the people of northeastern Minnesota. So, let me offer a little friendly, constructive advice.

First to Antofagasta: Go back to some version of your original mine plan which moved ore processing near where PolyMet is. That was a defen-

sible mining plan. This is not. This new plan will never be built in the face of determined public protest, in my judgment. Please reconsider.

Second, to Minnesota officials: Here are the specific environmental mining standards you need to uphold, if you are serious about protecting the Boundary Waters.

► Oppose any copper-nickel mining plan that includes processing these ores in the Kawishiwi basin. That is simply non-negotiable.

► Allow Antofagasta to be a mine operator but not a mine owner or lease owner. They are legally untouchable if things go wrong, and by submitting this revised mine plan, they have demonstrated bad faith on an epic scale. Deal with them as they are, not as who you wish they were. Your choices here will be vividly clear to Minnesota voters.

► Include a lease requirement that all Information Technology-related jobs for these mines must be held by employees living within reasonable driving distance of the mines. By the time this mine is built, there will be no need for a single miner to work underground and all those trucks and other heavy equipment will be largely self-driving. The jobs to operate all that equipment could just as well be in Santiago, Chile, as in Ely, Minnesota, and will be, unless you make this a lease requirement. Do not ignore this reality. You must not take environmental risk for jobs that turn out to be just ghosts in the machine we call the Internet.

► If Antofagasta insists on this mine plan, these leases must be denied even in the face of great controversy. And if you are one of those politicians who has been riding the fence on this issue, now is the time to climb down off that fence and take a stand. This is one place you could take that stand.

Finally, to my good old boy friends who support this mining and who also like to fish Basswood and especially to old timers who used to take 19-foot square sterns with a ten-horse Johnson all the way to Thursday Bay of Crooked Lake, now is the time to go down to the Twin Metals building, pound on the door, ask to see the management and tell them they can't put this operation on the shores of Birch Lake. Tell 'em so they know you mean it. That is what I am trying to do here. Please help me.

**Hans Olsen
Ely**

Enough nonsense from Greenwood

I was shocked and really upset when I read the news in *The Tower News* and *The Timberjay* papers about Greenwood's supervisors slashing our clerk's hours. Sue Drobac has been a wonderful addition to Greenwood's office. She is friendly, knowledgeable, and willing to help. She assisted me with our 40th anniversary party for the township. I know for a fact that if Sue has to leave the office for any reason, she always leaves a note on the door saying where she can be reached. And to my knowledge, she always notifies the chairman or another supervisor where she can be reached, if her assistant cannot come to the office.

The board stated that the Township of Breitung's clerk kept their office open only 12 hours a week and that there is no reason for us in Greenwood to be open for 20 hours. They then reduced our clerk's salary to \$27 per hour and gave her 12 hours a week to complete her work. THIS IS NOT A TRUE STATEMENT! The clerk of Breitung asked her board if the hours between 12 noon to 4 p.m. each day could be the time when the public can come in and get their questions answered and business done. After talking to Jorgine Gornick, who has been Breitung's treasurer for many years, she stated that, most days, they both come in and start working around 8 a.m., until 5 p.m.

Chairman Mike Ralston stated that the board wanted to be more fiscally conservative. Really. MIKE, WHY THEN DIDN'T YOU CUT YOUR AND THE OTHER SUPERVISORS' SALARIES? I found out that Greenwood's supervisors get \$179 per hour when they have a meeting and that he as chairman gets \$191 per hour.... The supervisors get their monthly pay even if they are not present at their monthly meetings. The supervisors can miss up to three months before this is brought up to the board. I FEEL THIS IS DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN. I am shocked and very disappointed in our supervisors! Why have they not made the public aware of this practice?

Chairman Ralston also stated that Breitung Township has many more services than Greenwood is responsible for, but Mike failed to state that Greenwood has twice as many people. In another decision, when Greenwood's treasurer resigns at the end of July, Chairman Ralston has asked the board to

vote to appoint Belinda Fazio as interim treasurer, without asking for a background check of her, as well as Tammy Mortaloni, who Belinda Fazio had asked to be appointed as assistant to the treasurer.

As a voting resident of the township of Greenwood, I object to both appointments. There appears to be a conflict of interest involved in these appointments. I recently found out that Fire Chief Fazio, who is Belinda Fazio's husband, works for Mike Ralston. This is a conflict of interest. Why didn't Chairman Ralston ask permission to post these positions in our local papers and SEE if we have other candidates in our township who might want the job and maybe be more qualified? This has been the practice in the past when there is a vacancy.

In closing, I really feel all of us residents of Greenwood Township should become more observant to what is going on in our township. We supposedly have more residents with degrees from bachelors to doctorates than any other township, but we don't have more than one who is on our town board. We need all of us to start rethinking who we place on our town board. This is not the "good old boys" club. This is serious business when we elect supervisors who do not know their responsibilities. It has become very obvious to me that Chairman Mike Ralston does not know rules and order and how to conduct a lawful meeting.

**Pam Lundstrom
Greenwood Twp.**

Greenwood board's arguments on clerk don't hold up

In response to the arguments that the Greenwood Town Board made in justifying their decision to cut the clerk's pay, "Breitung Township offers so many services that Greenwood doesn't." Yes, they maintain roads (with a staff and a supervisor to direct them). They have a water and sewer plant they share with Tower (with staff to maintain it) and a police department (with a chief to oversee it). This would seem to indicate that the Breitung clerk's main "duty" over the various departments is to record the report they give the town board at their meetings.

When I was Planning Director, I heard that if everyone was at their cabin and the resorts in Greenwood were filled at the same time, the population would swell to over 10,000! Greenwood is

more than twice the physical size of Breitung and has greater population. I checked--Breitung population was 575 as of April 1, 2019, while Greenwood's population stood at 896.

The other reason for cutting our clerk's hours and pay was "because we are trying to be fiscally conservative here." If that were the truth, the supervisors would have cut their own pay by 40 percent also.

A portion of the clerk's duties include not only helping folks who come to the office, but also answering telephone calls, which the supervisors don't deal with.

Make no mistake about it: Our national and state capitals are not the only places where politics are corrupt. Pay attention to who you vote for! Even Jesus had harsh words to say to the corrupt leaders in their nation.

**Marilyn Mueller
Greenwood Twp.**

Groceries, not COVID

Tuesday, July 21, was a gloomy day of rain. Grocery shopping was a good idea. I put on one of my masks and stepped into an Ely grocery store that was crowded with people of all ages. Squeezing past so many folks, I paused to compliment one woman on her very unusual mask and paused again to give a thumbs up and express "You are wonderful" to a masked mom and her four young masked companions. Three un-masked young adults about two feet away from me said they were social distancing.

I applaud all of the folks who are wearing masks in Ely! But some still do not. Shopping in Ely's two busy grocery stores puts everyone into spaces with narrow aisles and—especially on rainy days—into close proximity with each other. I know. In the past, we liked it this way!

Would our grocery stores follow the lead from a growing number of large retail stores? You could show us all the Ely pioneering spirit and could dare to step up in a time of need as leaders.

Please. Could you require masks of all adults and children entering the store?

**Phyllis Ryan
Ely**

**Where the
North Country
Sounds Off!**

CONSPIRACY...Continued from page 4

that was written about the assassination. When I lived in Dallas briefly in 1987, I simply had to visit Dealy Plaza to look at the "grassy knoll" and the former Texas School Book Depository building to see the area for myself.

To this day, the possibility of conspiracy still intrigues me. Was it really Lee Harvey Oswald acting alone to kill Kennedy, or were there others? Was the CIA involved? How about the Russians or the Cubans or organized crime? If there's a new documentary that attempts to focus the latest in forensic technology on proving or disproving the "single bullet theory," I'm

going to tune in.

So why do conspiracy theories develop, why do they take root and flourish, particularly on the extreme left and right sides of the political spectrum? I personally chalk it up to two things: feeling powerless and being intellectually lazy.

Pick any conspiracy theory running rampant today and you're likely to find an element of power at its root, driven by either the belief that someone is trying to take power away from you or trying to keep you from having it. If I had a nickel for every Facebook meme I've seen touting a conspiracy with power at its root, I'd own Rupert

Murdoch's media empire instead of working at the *Timberjay*. Memes are proof positive that people have become intellectually lazy—people read them, and if they agree, they share them, without ever taking even 30 seconds to do a Google search for some fact-checking. Someone posted it, it must be true. For posts about coffee addiction, perhaps that's OK. For conspiracies, it's not.

As regards conspiracies surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic, some conspiracy theories have cost people livelihoods, health, and lives. That's not acceptable in any way. If one personally wants to believe in a conspiracy, that's their right, but

to turn that belief into actions that we now know can harm others is not.

When it comes to dealing with conspiracies, perhaps the best personal tool one can have to assess them is Occam's Razor. A problem-solving technique developed in the 14th century, it boils down to a simple phrase that most Facebook meme writers couldn't screw up: "The simplest explanation is most likely the right one."

Which is more simple: a) Democrats wanting to oust Trump from office have concocted a COVID-19 hoax that involves top-level officials in every state of the union, both Republican and Democrat, and

have enlisted the aid of doctors, nurses, first responders, and countless others to distort all the case and death numbers to outrageous levels; or b) we really do have an out-of-control virus that poses a serious health threat to millions of people? B is the most simple by far. Particularly because it amazes me that anyone could call Democrats "libtards" in one breath and accuse them of brilliantly masterminding a worldwide pandemic on the other.

"The simplest explanation is most likely the right one." Ancient advice for a modern-day crisis that should be contemplated by all. Conspiracy theories aren't exclusive to either party

VIRUS...Continued from page 3

MDH to change data reporting

The phone call to the governor's office apparently was forwarded to the Minnesota Department of Health. Julie Bartkey, MDH media relations specialist-COVID, told the *Timberjay* late Monday that indeed all coronavirus

data is currently tracked county-by-county but improvements are on the horizon.

"In the next week or two, our (COVID-19) tracking data will be presented by ZIP Code, and not by county," she said. "That will give you an opportunity to find out about Ely specifically. As of now we just can't get that granular in our data (reporting)."

Bartkey said she was surprised by the lack of information available locally.

"It is really unfortunate that your local public health has not been able to clarify anything. That really surprises me. Usually they are pretty good about that unless that don't have the information either," she said.

She said that one can assume

there would be an uptick in coronavirus cases in the Ely area. "That is just where it's going everywhere else in the state," Bartkey said. "But to actually point to a city, not unless it is tied into a workplace that has specific public health interests."

She added, "The message for your readers is the same thing we've been saying for a

very long time. Even though it is greater Minnesota, and people have the assumption that COVID isn't there, it is everywhere now and (is spread) by community transmission. Just taking our recommendations is going to help slow that down and mitigate it.