

## OUR VIEW

### Technology can help connect and inform

For the past 15 months, meeting in person, gathering in large groups and holding or attending live events fell victim to the pandemic. With most restrictions now lifted, we are getting a glimpse into what life was like before COVID-19. Thank goodness. Yet, many things that became the norm during the pandemic will be with us for a very long time. Video conferencing and Zoom meetings infiltrated our personal and professional lives. For many, these services were lifesavers. They provided a way to stay in touch with family, conduct business and participate in activities that otherwise wouldn't have been possible. Today, the word livestream – the technology that allows us to watch, create and share videos in real-time – rolls off our tongues with ease. That, too, isn't all bad.

The world has changed, and in some respects, we will find it very difficult to toss out the very things that helped us survive the world of social distancing, masks and shutdowns. Take the use of livestreaming or providing video-conference access to public meetings. Cities, schools and counties relied on this technology throughout the pandemic. Many limited in-person attendance at public meetings to protect elected officials and the public. Rather than allowing people inside, they offered ways to submit public comments electronically, conference lines and livestreaming – all modern-day attempts at transparency. Yet, some only permitted the public to view their actions from afar. And that isn't allowed under Minnesota's open meeting law, according to an April 2021 advisory opinion released from the Minnesota Department of Administration Data Practices Office (DPO). That determination found that local governments cannot meet in person while only allowing community members to view meetings electronically. As more and more government entities return to in-person meetings, the question remains. Should they do away with the technological services that helped keep the public informed when in-person attendance at meetings was prohibited? We think not.

Instead, we urge elected officials – at all levels of government – to continue to use every tool available to help keep the public informed and as engaged as possible in the public's business. Resume in-person meetings; Allow phone attendance; Livestream meetings and work sessions; Provide access via video-conferencing. Greater access helps ensure an informed electorate. As Thomas Jefferson said: "Whenever the people are well informed, they can be trusted with their own government; that whenever things get so far wrong as to attract their notice, they may be relied on to set them to rights."

## YOUR VIEW

### Stop stealing from the dead and their living loved ones

**To-the-Editor:** I sincerely don't understand why people choose to damage or steal flowers and flags from cemetery graves. In the last couple of weeks, I have heard of multiple incidents at our local Blooming Prairie Cemetery. Like a lot of issues, we don't always speak out against wrong, until it affects us directly. That is what happened to Paul and I when someone took the beautiful silk flower arrangement off of our daughter Katie's grave. For 12 years, I have been placing flowers on her grave that would reflect the joy and color she brought to our lives, as well as so many others in her 29 years on earth. Now that arrangement is gone, probably just tossed away and discarded. Decoration Day or Memorial Day started as a tribute to soldiers that lost their lives after the Civil War and then it moved to also include anyone's loved ones that had died and were missed. I am so glad for the expansion of Memorial Day because ALL lives lost from this earth are important! When a

loved one dies, they are missed every day and we are left behind with just memories and wanting to make a difference in their honor. When we place flowers on those special peoples' graves, we keep a little piece of them alive and show them they are not forgotten. I am sure whoever did and continues to do damages to cemeteries probably don't read Letters to the Editors, but maybe someone that may suspect them or know them does. Maybe you can find out the "why" and help them turn their poor behavior into amazingly kind behavior, like watering a few live plants every time they go by a cemetery. I guarantee you that their feeling of pride will far outweigh the feeling they experienced from their cowardly acts. Life is short and no one knows when their last day will be on this earth to make a "memorable" difference. It is never too late to do the right thing and at the end of your life being the kind of person, others will want to lay flowers on your grave. **Shirley Nelson Blooming Prairie**



**Hot Pursuit**  
RICK BUSSLER

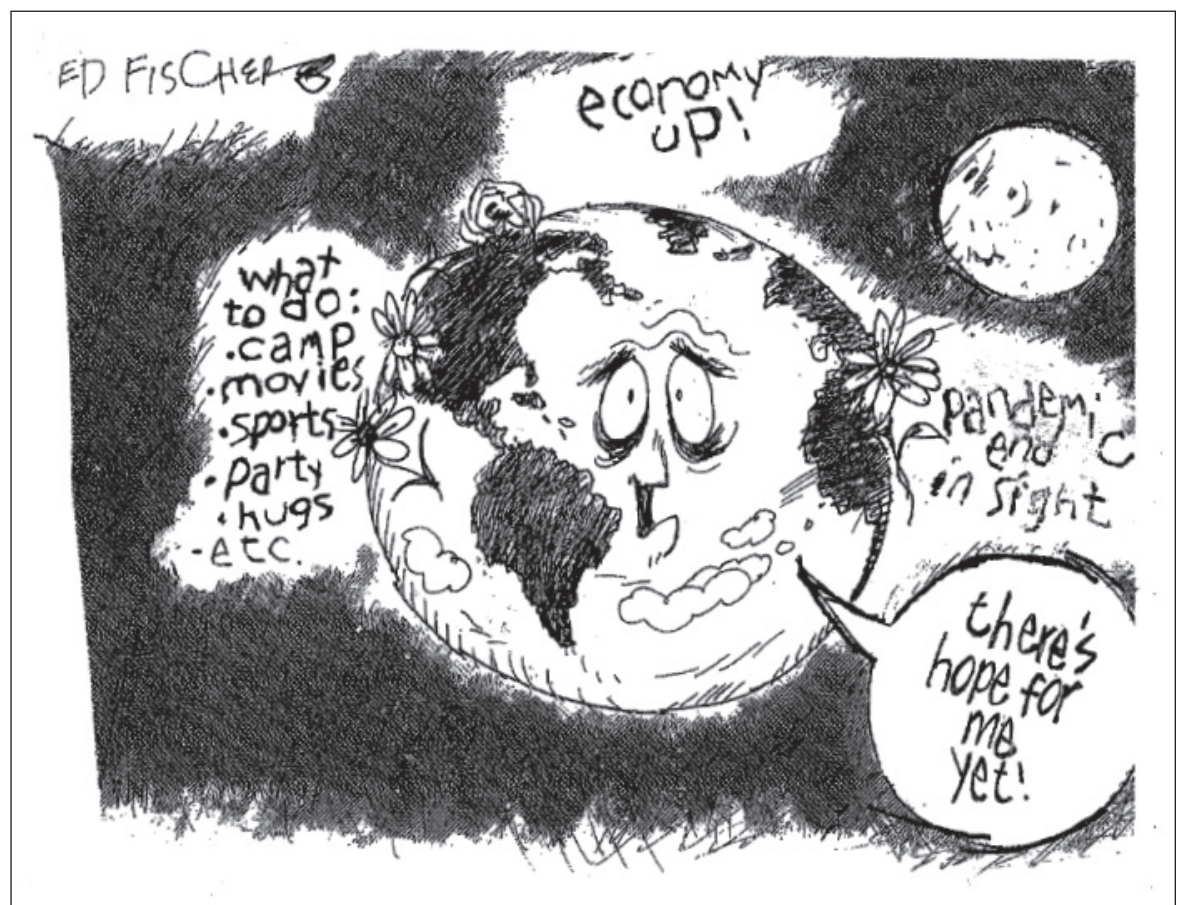
There probably aren't many people who can claim that they gave their mother a black eye for her 82nd birthday. I'm one of the unfortunate ones who can. Well, not really, depending on how you look at it. Rest assured, it isn't quite as bad as it sounds. At least, I don't think so. I need to keep telling myself that to make myself feel better. Last week, we celebrated my mom's birthday and my mom and dad's 62nd wedding anniversary (same day). I planned a special party with family in their honor at my house on Saturday. Earlier in the week, I had trimmed down some nagging tree branches that were hitting up against the

## Giving mom a black eye for her birthday

house. I created a pretty good size pile of brush in the front yard. My mom and dad caught wind of it, and dad decided he would bring his chainsaw over a few hours before the party. Big mistake. They showed up early with the chainsaw in hand. My dad was ready to cut some branches. Of course, I was running behind getting everything ready for the party. I told him he could trim away but that I wouldn't be able to help. I figured food and nourishments were a bigger priority. A short time later, I heard the chainsaw ripping away. I actually kind of lost track of what was going on outside because I was so focused on making everything just right for the party. With dad buzzing away and cutting up tree branches, mom decided she should help out. Bless her

heart; she is always willing to help with whatever needs to be done. Things were going right along when I caught wind that she had a bloody cut on her forehead. I initially didn't think much of it, assuming a branch caught her on the head. But it was worse. She lost her balance picking up branches and fell flat on her face. After getting all the branches picked up, mom came into the house to get cleaned up for the party. She had a small cut on her forehead. But as time went on, things started darkening and she ended up with a black eye. By Sunday morning, when she went to church, she had a full-blown black eye. It looked like she had been sucker-punched in a barroom brawl. I keep telling mom to lay low on the Summer Shandy.

Boy, the story she had to tell the pastor. We had warned her she better come up with a great story to share. We suggested saying she tried to take on a bear in the back 40. Not sure what the pastor ended up hearing. Thankfully, my mom kept her sense of humor through it all. She texted me a photo Sunday morning saying, "I have such beautiful makeup today!" In the end, I felt terrible about what happened to mom. I'm guessing not many 80-plus-year-olds can say they got a black eye for their birthday. Leave it to me to make that happen for mom. Life is always full of surprises around our house. Now, it's time to go in hot pursuit of finding the next adventure. Let's hope it doesn't involve what appears to be a hint of physical violence from yours truly.



## GUEST COLUMN

### Governor needs to step back from emergency powers

**BY GENE DORNINK**

I hope you have been enjoying the new summer weather! I know I have certainly enjoyed being back home, spending time with my family and getting to meet up with some of you in the community! While the summer is here, our work in St. Paul will continue. With the regular 2021 Session ending on May 17, we are still working to find common ground with the House and pass a balanced budget for the next two years. Aside from the budget, we are also working diligently to get Governor Walz to give up the powers the constitution allows only for emergencies. Last week, Republi-

can leaders proposed an off-ramp to Walz's emergency powers that have been in place for over 15 months now. This would be a great compromise to give faith back to Minnesotans that they oversee their own lives while allowing the governor to oversee testing and vaccination efforts. With the way vaccination rates are going up and cases and hospitalizations going down rapidly, the emergency is over. It is time for Governor Walz to let go of emergency powers. We need to return to the normal Legislative process of the House and Senate passing laws and providing oversight. Another item we are pushing at the Capitol is school choice in Minnesota. Our

education system has been slipping and we must take immediate steps to close the state's historic and persistent achievement gap. At a press conference last week, a diverse group of parents and education advocates came to plead to state leaders to give parents and families the option of Education Savings Accounts (ESAs), a proposal included in the budget that is currently being negotiated with the House and Governor Walz. The goal of this program is to ensure that the state is funding the student, not the system. We are focused on helping our teachers, students, and families. As we go back for Special Session, I am excited to finalize a

good, strong budget for the great state of Minnesota. I will advocate for our district needs, encourage others to prioritize rural projects, and stand strong against any bad-governance policy that may be thrown in at the last minute. As always, I am here for you if you have any comments, questions, or concerns. Please feel free to reach out to me by email at Sen.Gene.Dornink@Senate.mn or call me at 651-296-5240. **Gene Dornink is a Minnesota senator for District 27, which includes the City of Blooming Prairie, southern Dodge County, and most of Freeborn and Mower counties. He lives in rural Hayfield.**

**STEELE COUNTY Times**  
Founded in 1893  
Bussler Publishing, Inc.  
www.SteeleCountyTimes.com  
Email: bptimes@frontiernet.net

USPS 058-340  
Published weekly on Wednesdays  
Postmaster: Send address changes to:  
Steele County Times  
P.O. Box 247  
Blooming Prairie, MN 55917  
Phone: 507-583-4431

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News: Noon Fridays.  
Web: 11 p.m. (Daily)  
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