

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

Ignoring sulfate pollution

Who really stands to benefit when our region's water quality suffers?

Writer and political activist Upton Sinclair famously wrote, "It is difficult to get a man to understand something when his salary depends upon his not understanding it." And the truth of that statement is evident in the continuing failure of the Iron Range's political establishment to address the issue of sulfate pollution from the region's taconite mines.

We recognize that plenty of good salaries depend on the continuation of taconite mining, which is undoubtedly why so many in our region appear so willing to simply pretend that the pollution that emanates from facilities like the Minntac tailings basin doesn't exist, or that its impacts are minor.

While the current focus on sulfate pollution centers on its impact on wild rice, sulfate is also linked to the conversion of elemental mercury to methyl mercury in our area lakes. Methyl mercury is a particularly toxic form of mercury that bioaccumulates in fish. Under natural conditions, sulfate levels in northeastern Minnesota waters are very low, which limits the creation of methyl mercury. But when elevated, even a little, from sulfate discharges, the production of methyl mercury can jump sharply, leading to more mercury in the fish we eat. That's another inconvenient fact that we choose to pretend doesn't have a connection to the way in which many folks in our region earn a living.

Lest there be any misunderstanding, we believe that we can have taconite mining and clean water, but achieving that will take political courage from those who have chosen for years to bury their heads in the sand. As we reported earlier this year, an analysis by the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency found that the taconite industry has the financial resources to clean up its pollution. But as long as mining companies know that the politicians, local unions, and the rest of the political establishment in our region are willing to carry their sulfate-tainted water on this issue, they have little need to fear enforcement of the state's water quality standards.

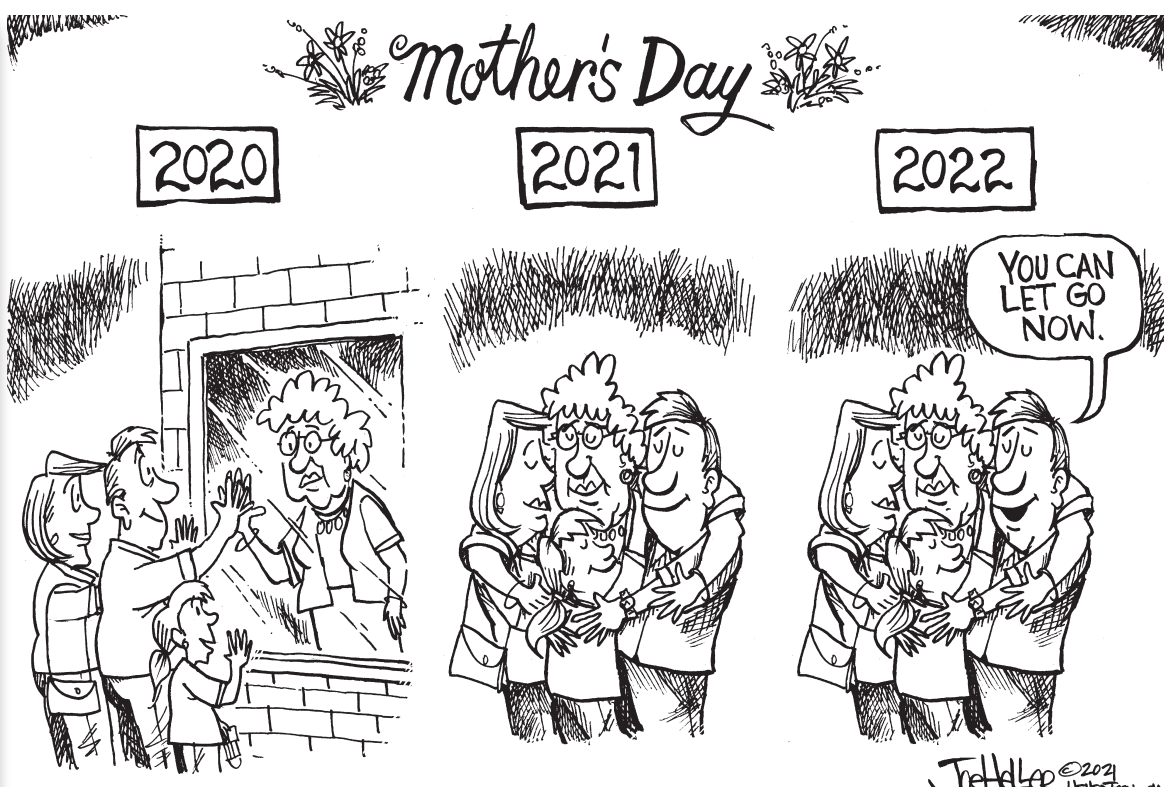
The connection between the Minntac tailings basin and sulfate discharges is indisputable. As the data released this past week by the Environmental Protection Agency shows, the closer a downstream water body is to the basin, the higher the concentration of sulfate. While the concentrations are lower by the time the water reaches Lake Vermilion, the EPA still

includes Vermilion on the list of 30 water bodies in the state impaired by sulfate pollution. The levels now reported in Lake Vermilion are high enough to impact wild rice as well as jump start the conversion of elemental mercury to methyl mercury. That should be a concern to everyone who consumes fish from the lake.

The state's historic failure to clean up pollution from taconite mines strongly suggests the state's regulators can't be trusted to keep a check on pollution from proposed copper-nickel mines, which involves sulfide ore, a far more environmentally hazardous type of rock than is the case with taconite. Actions matter more than words. Our region's political class may say that sulfide-based mining can be done safely, but if it isn't (as is likely), the evidence suggests they'll do nothing to fix it. As long as salaries depend on continuing to ignore the problem, the problem is likely to continue to be ignored, or even defended with the usual spin about how our region's water is cleaner than the rest of the state.

The truth is that the impacts of mining pollution are only felt in downstream waters. The lakes and rivers in the region that don't receive pollution discharge are, in fact, notably clean, mostly because their watersheds remain relatively undeveloped compared to other parts of the state. Yet, citing the water quality of lakes that aren't affected by mining discharge to defend the pollution of lakes that are, is the kind of logical fallacy we suspect Upton Sinclair had in mind when he penned his famous quote on the occasional failings of human nature.

Perhaps it's best in this case to consider whose salaries are really at risk. As the MPCA has already concluded, the mining companies have sufficient resources to clean up their act. In other words, they can reduce their discharges and still maintain the salaries that sustain many Iron Range families. It is corporate profits— i.e. the size of the salaries of the boys in the Pittsburgh suites— that are potentially diminished if funds are diverted to clean up water here in northeastern Minnesota. So, when we hear our politicians talking about mining pollution clean-up as a threat to someone's way of life, at least we know who they're really talking about. And it's not the working folks here on the Range.



More progress needed on pay equity

In 2017, with the Eighth Congressional District experiencing Minnesota's largest average gap in pay (women were making an average of 27 percent less than men working in the same jobs), AAUW and Rotary joined forces to begin canvassing every business in Ely, asking them to sign an "Equal Pay Affirmation"—stating they would pay women and men equally for the same work. The goal was to bring awareness of the pay gap in our region and make Ely the first city in our state to have 100 percent of businesses sign the affirmation. Today, our congressional district ranks sixth in Minnesota with a pay gap that has narrowed to 21.6 percent. The U.S. House has passed the Paycheck Fairness Act, providing protections to the Equal Pay Act of 1963. Encourage our senators, Tina Smith and Amy Klobuchar, to support the bill as it works its way through the U.S. Senate. The list of businesses that signed the pledge can be found in the newspaper today. Thank them, support them, for making the commitment to make Ely an equal pay community.

Mary Setterholm
AAUW Public
Policy Committee
Ely

Santorum and his backers seek a theocracy

Kudos to David Colburn for his well-crafted and incisive essay about the rock-bottom ignorance and bigotry of Rick Santorum. The faction of politically regressive Christianity that Santorum represents employs "religious liberty" as a code phrase and stalking horse for what they actually desire: a theocracy. Not only is such unconstitutional and antithetical to American values, it would also mean the destruction of liberty itself. All are free to believe and worship (or not)

as they will. None are free to impose their religion on others. It's sad but necessary that such a basic American principle must be constantly defended in every generation.

Peter M. Leschak
Side Lake

Birds regularly brighten our days

I enjoyed your article about the Evening Grosbeaks. We also have had them as almost daily visitors for a few months. For a while it seemed that a group of 5-8 males would be on our feeder at once, with maybe one female in the group. At other times, females would be in the majority, happily eating sunflower seeds. They contribute to emptying the feeder now, along with the other returnees, purple finches, juncos, white-throated sparrows, and pine siskins. Yesterday, I saw 11 species just while having an extended coffee time.

The Evening Grosbeaks used to be at our feeders pretty much year-round, but not in recent years, as many have noted. But we have had Rose-breasted Grosbeaks steadily all summer, obviously nesting somewhere close by, for at least 10 years. Before that, they only visited briefly at the beginning of summer.

For the winter of 2019-2020, we had Goldfinches daily, but none have been here for months. I hope they return.

Lois J. Garbisch
Cook

Native-influence is far-reaching in America

Mr. Colburn's column about the ignorance of a former senator on the inspiration, origins and adaptations of our nation's government was enlightening.

Unfortunately, many Americans get their "education and information" from social media, not from well-researched books or documentaries. The idea of having a government of states

banding together to make a strong federation came originally from the Iroquois Confederacy. Chief Canasatego, through an interpreter friend of Benjamin Franklin, made an impression on several of our founding fathers. While the Iroquois Confederacy was a strong unified force organized to deal with other native nations and the new colonies, each individual tribe retained its sovereignty in handling its own issues. That is why we today are still known as a republic, modeled after not only the democratic principles of Greece, but the practical Five Tribes form of governance.

In less philosophical terms, the practicality of First Nations influence is unmistakable. The Oneida tribe helped General Washington's troops with food and medical care during a long winter at Valley Forge. Sustenance crops like potatoes, tomatoes, squash and beans all were originally from sources on the North, Central, and South American continents cultivated by Native tribes.

Last, but certainly not least, is the versatile and economically vital corn plant (maize) and the billions of dollars it generates in the U.S. Of course, it has been altered in genetic selection by our breeders, but the germ plasm is from the sacred grain fostered by tribes of the Americas.

The senator, along with many Americans, also forgot about the Navajo Code Talkers of WWII who played a vital role in the war in the Pacific against the Japanese. Perhaps local school boards need to wake up and re-emphasize the importance of studying government, civics, and true history so that senators, house leaders, and presidents of the future can legislate with wisdom and not ignorance.

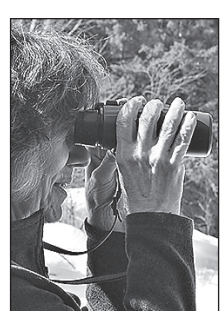
Mark Roalson
Hoyt Lakes

Where the
North Country
Sounds Off

Getting to the day we can say, "Yes!"

Everyone has a "growing up" story. Mine begins in an obscure township on the outskirts of Detroit, Mich. My parents' little asbestos-shingled bungalow sat amidst a hodgepodge of other small single-story dwellings on a dirt street called Linville.

I was lucky. Our lot had trees. This matters because at a very early age, I discovered the sense



**KATHLEEN
MCQUILLAN**

of shelter that only trees can provide. When things got crazy in my house, as they sometimes did, I could climb to the tops of those trees where thick branches of maple leaves or pine boughs provided privacy and protection from the chaos. Like some other children, I would occasionally dream of "running away." I remember the day I drummed up enough courage to actually announce it. I pulled my skate case from under my bed and headed toward the door. I was surprised when my mom, mildly disinterested, her hands still in dishwater, called to ask if I'd packed clean underwear. I never made it very far.

In my innocent ignorance as a young

girl, I paid no attention to the fact that everyone in my neighborhood was white. One day, someone pointed out that most of my friends' families had come to Michigan in search of work and the dream of a better life. They spoke a little different from us because they came from "down south"—places called Kentucky, Tennessee, Alabama and Mississippi. Detroit was known as a place of opportunity.

One summer day, my grandmother took her grandchildren to tour the Henry Ford Museum. It was one of my earliest history lessons. Our grandfather worked on the assembly line at Ford and according to Grandma, the company had "saved our family" during the Great Depression.

Assembly lines were revolutionary—mass producing cars for a "new middle class." A lot of people were needed to run those lines. They came in droves from far-away places. Henry Ford provided steady work, lifting many people out of poverty, while he became an extremely wealthy man.

It was my grade school classrooms where I first met people of many shades of color. It was a curiosity for me. That's when the discussion about "race" began.

My parents were good people. Young and aware of their own heritage. My mother's father fled Greece to escape civil conflict. He sought refuge and prosperity.

See RACE...pg. 5

Letters from Readers

A book that has generated critical thinking

I read Micah Larson's (a student at Ely Memorial) comments and opinions in last week's paper about Austin Channing Brown's memoir "I'm Still Here: Black Dignity in a World Made for Whiteness" and thought about the fact that this is exactly what one wants to occur in the classroom when students respond to a book.

Students think, reflect, express opinions, examine thoughts, and grow and learn as a result. The book, "I'm Still Here" is a memoir. It is an account of the author's personal experiences as a young black woman. It is her story.

Micah felt that the book presented Brown's personal experience as if it were a universal experience for all

black people. This would be a point to examine more carefully. What passages in the book did Micah feel convey this? When I read Micah's comment, I thought how meaningful it would be to explore further. Read additional memoirs and stories from black and brown people. Connect with black and brown students in other classrooms with regular Zoom meetings. Get to know each other. Ask questions. Listen to the experiences and stories of those "not like us." So much is possible in today's world of technology.

Micah suggested that, to him, Austin Channing Brown's tone was condescending and patronizing. This would be another point to examine and discuss. What passages seemed to be condescending and patronizing? The class could then examine those passages and

reflect on their interpretation of the author's intent and meaning.

I agree with Micah that the point of education is NOT to create robots. The point of education is to develop critical thinking skills and the ability for each student to engage in serious, meaningful discussions about timely topics. The point of education is to see the multiple sides to any issue. The point of education is to expand and grow. Nothing is more effective in reaching that goal than to read books, especially those written by those "not like us." As educators, we have strived to move away from rote learning and memorizing facts to deeper levels of understanding. Instead of one text, multiple texts, books, and resources are utilized to make learning meaningful.

Micah's letter was an

excellent example of what students do in the classroom when they respond to books. They think, respond, reflect, listen, ponder, and in the end, hopefully grow in their awareness and understanding of those others, those "not like us."

**Ellie Larmouth
Tower**

Religious freedom also means freedom from religion

I read David Colburn's piece titled "Native Americans, religious liberty and Rick Santorum" in the April 30 issue.

Not only was it written well, but was truthful to its end. I heard Santorum's entire speech, and came across the same ideas Mr. Colburn did. Somehow religion just keeps sticking

its corrupted views onto others, as an excuse to push forward a twisted agenda when it satisfies them.

One thing I feel always gets left out of the "freedom of religion" rant, is the fact it not only is for freedom of a religion of your choice, BUT ALSO FREEDOM FROM IT, IF YOU SO DESIRE.

**Barry W. Tungseth
Ely**

"I'm Still Here," appears to have met its objective

"I'm Still Here," appears to have met its objective

In last week's letters, Micah Larson expressed his belief that Austin Channing Brown's memoir, "I'm Still Here, Black Dignity for a World Made for Whiteness," was a poor

selection for school-required reading because he disagrees with the author's views and perceptions. He argues that the goal of education is to create critical thinkers who are free to express how they feel and think (a luxury he apparently believes shouldn't be extended to the book's author), rather than staying mute and complying with whatever they are taught. By his own measures, then this book has checked all his boxes in doing what education should. Only books that force you out of your comfort zone inspire the type of thoughtful critique and reasoned opinion that Ms. Brown's book elicited from Mr. Larson.

**Steve Wilson
Tower**

COVID...Continued from page 3

number of cases we have seen in middle and high school-aged kids recently, this expansion would be a really welcomed development and a significant step forward to make it that much harder for this virus to continue circulating and infecting people," she said.

Those 19-and-under represent 26 percent of new COVID cases identified since April 1, the day after vaccine eligibility was expanded.

"We've seen the increase in variants of concern circulating in

Minnesota, and some of the initial activity was seen associated with youth activities with our sports ecosystem," Ehresmann said. "That allowed for the transmission of a variant that was known to be easier to spread within that population. The Pfizer vaccine is available for individuals 16 and older, and we really want to encourage that age group to take advantage of that vaccine."

Variant concerns

Ehresmann pointed to the crisis conditions in India

with COVID infections and deaths as she cautioned people about travel and its role in allowing the spread of coronavirus variants that can be more infectious and possibly more resistant to vaccinations.

"The unfortunate pattern we've seen is that variants developing elsewhere in the world tend to spread to new locations when people travel, and then these variants gain a foothold in our communities. Minnesota is no exception," she said.

Just in the last week, 65

cases have been identified involving a variant first identified in Brazil. The UK variant has been acknowledged as the source for 60 to 65 percent of recent infections in the state. Ehresmann mentioned a recent cluster of cases associated with travel to Mexico.

"Given that Mexico is a favorite destination for many in the upper Midwest, we need to reiterate that it remains a high-risk location," Ehresmann said.

Regional data

A recent surge of cases on the Bois Forte Reservation appears to be on the decline, according to recent health updates posted to the tribe's website. Only three new COVID cases have been reported, each on separate days, over the past week.

Due to differences in reporting practices, a surge of 12 cases in the Tower zip code reported on April 29 was anticipated, reflecting cases already diagnosed in the Vermilion sector of the Bois Forte Reservation.

Seven new cases were identified in Ely and four in Embarrass, while Cook saw one additional case.

The numbers align with county and state-wide patterns of declining COVID infections in recent weeks, although the seven-day daily case average for northern St. Louis County remains in the escalating community spread category at 19.5, just slightly higher than the 18.8 mark for the county as a whole.

EDA...Continued from page 3

ening of the regulations in rural areas.

"I'm in full support of pursuing this," he added. "Maybe we can have a forum in chambers to gather those interested in working on this to develop a plan to keep putting pressure on our legislators. We need to identify our needs. How many parents want

daycare? How many here aren't working because they can't get daycare here? It would be nice to have those metrics to make a solid argument."

Petersen added, "There are dozens of possible options that we could look at, and that's why we need to have a committee to gather this kind of informa-

tion." He welcomed federal money coming to northern Minnesota to address the daycare dilemma.

Ely Economic Advisor John Fedo warned of the thin profit margins that most daycare operations endure.

"Put unions and wages in the mix, and how can anybody afford good quality daycare? And as

the mayor points out, there are all the rules and regulations. That makes it even more difficult. Maybe we want to approach this as a hybrid or non-profit solution that addresses the needs. We might stand a chance if we carve out something unique," he said. "It wouldn't be the first time that Ely solved a

problem unique to its own approach."

EEDA members charged Clerk-Treasurer Harold Langowski to work with Petersen to form a subcommittee to begin discussions and fact-gath-

ering on the issue. The first meeting will be held at 5 p.m. on Monday, May 10, in Council Chambers.

RACE...Continued from page 4

I'm sure he endured many episodes of discrimination. My father's family were Irish immigrants escaping famine. America would be their "land of plenty." But instead, they found signs reading "No Irish need apply." My parents carried a strong value for justice and compassion for people who struggled, not to mention a sense of gratitude for the opportunities afforded to them. Their messages in a nutshell were, "Don't forget your roots." and "Stand up for the underdog." That meant, "people who were rejected just for being different." We got strict orders that we were to defend their rights to equal respect and fair treatment, and never were we to refer to Negroes as we heard others call them. This was the early 1960s. Because of their guidance, I felt no hesitancy to befriend kids, regardless of their background or color, if they were friendly back to me. And for most of my youth, that system seemed to work.

It was in 1965 that my recently-widowed mother was offered a decent paying job as a librarian's assistant at the General Motors Company, an hour's drive across Detroit. She moved us to the "east side" which was like moving to a foreign country. Detroit was comprised of distinct ethnic neighborhoods, where clusters of people shared customs and cuisine. It wasn't unusual in initial introductions to be asked

about your "nationality." My last name identified me immediately as an "outsider" in my new neighborhood, made up of folks primarily of Polish and German descent.

Detroit was defined by its "neighborhoods", and then there was "the ghetto." Gradually, parts of the inner city neighborhoods became "mixed" which triggered a phenomenon called "white flight." This led to the development of strictly white suburbs. Over time, larger all-black neighborhoods grew, much to the dismay of many racist Detroiters. Like many other major American cities, it instituted a system called "red-lining" into its real estate industry. The goal was to keep people racially segregated.

When kept apart, we were deprived of "getting to know one another," experiencing our common humanity by sharing our histories and cultural traditions. This made it nearly impossible to develop mutual understanding and respect. That move introduced me to the ugly face of racism and my innocence quickly shattered. Not one black family lived in our town. Not one black student attended my school. Overt expressions of disgust for people of color were constant. It literally made me ill. A short bike ride away was the boundary line dividing blacks from whites. The signs of disparity overwhelmed me.

I was a teenager in 1967 when a racial uprising swept Detroit. My teachers openly preached that "blacks were coming to invade our neighborhoods." I couldn't believe my ears. I remember the day I walked out of class and headed for home. I felt nauseous from rage. That evening, my mother looked into my eyes and gave me a warning. In her scolding voice, she told me that I must "learn to ignore those remarks." She gave me reasons that only made me feel worse. And then she added, "I'm telling you this because I love you." Those words made me heartsick.

That year, I joined a local chapter of "People Against Racism," a group of black, brown and white people, committed to understanding and exploring ways to heal our "war-torn" community. But nothing seemed to offer real hope. Tired of feeling helpless in the midst of hate, at eighteen I left home.

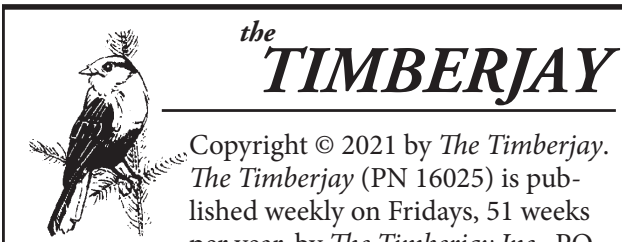
Looking at today's headlines, it may seem that we've made little progress. But I don't believe that's true. Since 1967, we can find many signs of change. Popular culture is more diverse than ever before and even relies on the creative input of our racially diverse population. Our ideas regarding intelligence, beauty and creativity have broadened as we increasingly experience our diversity in a slowly-growing more equitable society.

But no doubt, we've a long way to go to reach that "more perfect union."

We still lack assurances of safety and security for people of color so they can live their daily lives freely and fully. Their voices are still not equally heard and valued, not yet integral to the fabric and "doings" of American society. We do not yet truly honor their diverse histories, their essential role in birthing this nation, nor their inordinate contributions of labor spent building America's infrastructure and economic success.

Honest self-assessment is never easy. Ending entrenched systems of racial injustice will be even harder. But each are necessary if we are ever going to be the "exceptional" country we claim to be. We have so much yet to learn. And it is with and through the eyes of people of color that we will succeed.

Our work is far from done, but we mustn't be overwhelmed. We're not at the "beginning" but rather at a critical juncture on a long journey. Many agree that we've lived divided long enough. And now is the time to commit to "real change." The movement has already begun. We're being called to cast our fears aside. I want to believe it's a brand-new day, and voice a triumphant, "Yes!"



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