

Our View

Afghanistan had better be ready to stand alone

In October 2001, following the horrific 9/11 terrorist attack on the U.S., American military forces invade Afghanistan to overthrow the Taliban regime that had harbored the Al-Qaida organization responsible for the attack. Our goal was not just to punish the Taliban, but to establish a free, self-sustaining government in that country.

Now, nearly 20 years later, President Joe Biden, the fourth president to serve during this war, is pulling all American troops out, ending our longest war. The question remains, is the Afghan government ready to stand alone? Is its military ready to withstand the Taliban forces who have been maintaining an insurgency ever since the invasion?

After 20 years, they had better be. Afghanistan has had ample time to create a government and build a military force. America has done all it is willing to do militarily. It is time for Afghanistan to assume responsibility for its own future.

What form that future takes depends on them. Of course, we don't want to see the Afghan government collapse and the Taliban roll back into power. America should be ready to support Afghanistan with arms and supplies against the Taliban, but it is time for the Afghans to prove they are made of the same stern stuff as their Taliban foes.

Letters

Medical and mental health services within the prison system: A civil rights issue

To the editor:

Each day, men, women, and children behind bars suffer needlessly from lack of adequate medical and medical health care. Chronic illnesses go untreated, emergencies are ignored, and people with serious mental illness fail to receive necessary care. For some people, poor medical care turns a minor sentence into a death sentence.

The failure to provide prisoners with access to needed health care too often results in tragedy. It also violates the U.S. Constitution. Forty-five years ago, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in *Estelle v. Gamble* that ignoring a prisoner's serious medical needs can amount to cruel and unusual punishment, noting that "[a]n inmate must rely on prison authorities to treat their medical needs; if the authorities fail to do so, those needs will not be met. In the worst

cases, such failures may actually produce physical torture or a lingering death[.]... In less serious cases, denial of medical care may result in pain and suffering, which no one suggests would serve any penological purpose."

The overwhelming majority of people behind bars will someday be released. Providing prisoners with care today means having healthier neighbors who will be contributing members of their community in the future.

Now, it's your turn! I would like to hear of your experiences and/or concerns regarding the treatment of people with mental health issues and the lack of medical and/or mental health services while incarcerated. I may be reached at: gottahavehope38@gmail.com
Mark Jacobson
Peer Support Specialist
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Letters

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Earmarks grease the congressional gears

By George F. Will

WASHINGTON -- The wary and partial revival of earmarks by congressional Republicans is, on balance, welcome. This is so partly because it illustrates how coping with the transaction costs of democracy is often a matter of balancing the admirable with the regrettable.

For those of you who sometimes forget things that once seemed unforgettable, long ago -- about a decade ago -- many in Congress, especially conservatives, decided that earmarks were a scandal, the elimination of which would make a mighty improvement in national governance. Earmarks are spending items directed by individual members of Congress to particular state or local projects.

Members became promiscuous with this practice, until it became notorious, thanks to one such project, the 2005 "bridge to nowhere," which would have connected, at a cost of \$223 million, an Alaskan community of 8,900 to its airport on a nearby island with a population of 50, thereby sparing fliers a 15-minute commute by ferry and a cost of \$6 per car. Five years later, members of the tea party faction -- speaking of forgotten phenomena -- made the elimination of earmarks central to their quixotic crusade to shrink the cost of the federal government without touching actually important sources of federal spending, the entitlement programs -- Social Security, Medicare, etc. -- that are inconveniently popular.

Like problem drinkers foreswearing demon rum, Republicans banned earmarks. Bemused Democrats lacked enthusiasm for this political version of Prohibition: They argued, plausibly,

that members of Congress know better than executive branch agencies do their states' or districts' needs. Besides, earmarks help incumbents ingratiate themselves with constituents. When critics of earmarks threatened to "expose" earmarkers by publicizing the bacon they bring home, the earmarkers exclaimed, like Br'er Rabbit, "Please don't throw me into the briar patch."

Since then, many Republicans have regretted their unilateral disarmament. Some of them reason, correctly, that banning earmarks has exacerbated the aggrandizement of the executive branch and the marginalization of Congress. When a political course-correction is deemed necessary, a language modification often seems prudent, so earmarks have been re-branded as "community-focused grants."

House Republicans recently voted 102-84 to restore renamed earmarks. It will be interesting to see how many of the 84 stick to abstinence while the majority of their caucus returns to sinning. The Senate Republican caucus has voted to continue the ban on earmarks. The ban is, however, oxymoronic -- a permissive prohibition: It is non-binding, and some Republican senators say they will begin requesting earmarks.

The kerfuffle about earmarks has supposedly been about controlling spending, concerning which it will have no noticeable effect. Rep. Tom Cole, an Oklahoma Republican who supports earmarks, notes that at its peak in the first decade of this century, the practice involved 1.3% of federal spending. He says that restoring earmarks is a "carve out" that will not increase spending because earmarks do not raise the cap on discretionary spending, which is only about 30% of the budget.

Cole, who studied at the University

of London, and who has a Yale master's degree and a PhD in British history from the University of Oklahoma, also has had the education that comes from 10 terms in the House. There he has seen how earmarks facilitate the lawmaking process. Legislative bargaining is additive: If you support my projects A and B, I will support your projects C and D. You might regret that this is a permanent driver of government growth, but you might as well regret the law of gravity. Furthermore, Cole says that earmarks embedded in important legislation can give members parochial incentives to cast difficult votes for measures that are in the national interest.

It is an axiom of moral seriousness: If you will an end, you must will the means to that end. So, if you desire a less polarized Congress, one with a more collaborative and transactional ethos, you should at least tolerate earmarks as grease that lubricates congressional gears.

Sen. Josh Hawley, a Missouri Republican, opposes earmarks for an impeccably populist reason: "Voters hate them." He means, presumably, that voters hate earmarks that benefit voters other than themselves. When the steel tariffs imposed in 2018 by Hawley's hero, the previous president, injured Missouri's Mid Continent Nail Corp., Hawley told that company's parent that he was seeking for Mid Continent an exemption from the national tariff policy: "I continue to urge the Department of Commerce to grant it quickly." The ethical distinction between this request for special treatment and a request for an earmark is perhaps clear to Hawley.

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What's On Your Mind?

When do you think COVID regulations will end and things will get back to normal?



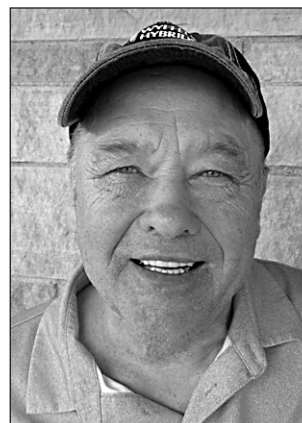
Marie Hoffmann of New Ulm: "May 2022"



Monica Clayton of Colorado Springs, CO: "November 2021"



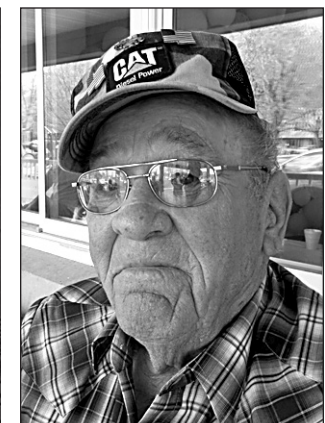
Martha Anderson of Albert Lea: "September 2021"



Mike Seifert of Sleepy Eye: "August 2021"



Teresa Wenisch of Lambert: "I think it will always be with us. It could linger on like small pox."



Gerald "Snork" Seifert of Sleepy Eye: "We could still be wearing mask by Christmas."