

OPINION

The First 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.



Your Turn
Paul Bugbee
Guest columnist

Homage to a mentor, a journalist's journalist

Six years ago, I began writing opinion pieces for the St. Cloud Times; one of the most fulfilling and rewarding chapters of my life. Thank you very much!

I was completing a six-month stint as a citizen representative on the Times editorial board, having had the unique opportunity of meeting weekly with the former publisher Melinda Vonderahe, editor John Bodette (now retired) and Randy Krebs, the Times' community engagement editor.

One or two other community representatives were slated to participate as well, but for whatever the reason, didn't or couldn't.

Our small group talked about politics, current events and newsworthy happenings in and around the St. Cloud area. We tried to take an objective view of the news, weighing all sides of an issue, sorting fact from fiction and establishing relevance. It was our job, per se, to formulate opinion.

It was Randy's job to condense our thoughts into a Times Board editorial, frequently for publication the following day.

Three weeks ago, Randy Krebs – along with other formidable journalists across the country – accepted voluntary severance offers from Gannett, the parent company of the St. Cloud Times. He will be sorely missed!

Here is where I get to tell you what a great guy Randy Krebs is. I can tell you that he was awarded the Herman Roe Editorial Writing Award by the Minnesota Newspaper Association four times over the last 20 years; as well as the Frank Premack Award for Excellence in Opinion Journalism, presented by the Minnesota Journalism Center in 2010.

I can tell you that he has been a pillar of the St. Cloud Times newsroom since 1987, with significant contributions in news and sports reporting, community events, and, of course, the opinion pages. He is a former Rotarian and enthusiastic fisherman, hunter and outdoorsman. He's also a very proud former Sauk Rapids Storm sports dad.

These are the things that look good in a resume.

In my mind, however, it's the character of the individual that really matters. To me, it's the non-assuming, yet brilliant nature of this man, this journalist, who has the audacity to tell it like it is – with compassion, understanding and ethical oversight.

It's the attention to detail, the loyalty, passion and persistence – day in and day out, deadline after deadline, publication after publication – that makes a great journalist.

It's putting content and credibility above all else; damn the nay-sayers, damn the critics ... damn those who compromise principle for the sake of profit.

I suspect that after so many years of being a journalist, Randy Krebs has just about seen all there is to see. He's reported on the best and the worst of humanity, he's shared the good and the bad, the joys and the sorrows of mankind, and he's probably heard every story that's ever been told – truth or lie – be it politician or pauper.

He's a journalist's journalist.

Randy Krebs was my teacher, my mentor and my hero. He saw something in me that I couldn't see myself.

He probably disagreed with most of what I had to say, and most likely cringed at the way I said it, but he taught me, pushed me and encouraged me every step of the way.

He believed in me! What more can a person ask for?

Thank you.

This is the opinion of Paul Bugbee, a Central Minnesota resort owner. His column is published the third Thursday of the month.



LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Trump has lost. It's time to move on

The election is over; Trump lost. The majority of voters voted him out of the Peoples' House. For the trumpsters who still believe in the lies, i.e., rigged elections, hoaxes, conspiracy theories and disregard of rule of law, once again, he lost.

The past four years have shown

how dangerous a narcissist with power can be. Trump hijacked the Republican Party and took its members down the rabbit hole with him. That hole is so deep that the Republican senators and members of Congress are unwilling to speak up against the narcissist for fear of never being able to get out of the rab-

bit hole.

These last four years have been an anomaly and a horror show that the United States has never seen before. So please, for those of you who have Trump/Pence placards in your yard or in your trees, please remove them. He lost.

Jeff Bulka, St. Cloud

My annual performance review and a mea culpa



Kathleen Parker
Columnist

It is customary this time of year for opinion columnists to review their performance and offer a mea culpa where appropriate. My list is long enough that I thought I'd get an early start.

My biggest mistake is actually four years old, which can be explained but not, as it turns out, justified. On the eve of Election 2016, I wrote that we'd survive as a nation no matter who won, Donald Trump or Hillary Clinton. I did not say we'd be fine. Mere survival seemed a fairly safe bet and, so, I gambled all my chips on our system of checks and balances.

Writers often say they write the books – or columns – they need to read. Though I had been consistently critical of candidate Trump since the first rumor surfaced that he might run for president, I had become convinced six weeks before Election Day in 2016 that he was going to win. This insight was based upon my familiarity with his base – the folks Clinton fatefully called “deplorables.” But I thought we'd get through it OK. That proved to be a mistake.

Every time President Trump did something objectionable, which was more or less daily, Twitter would remind me of my earlier error. The checks and balances conceived by the creators of our republic and in which I had placed my faith weren't nearly as strong as I had believed. They've only

eroded further under Trump, leaving us at the end of his term, literally, *not* surviving.

No one could have predicted the coronavirus pandemic, which has taken nearly 295,000 American lives so far. In retrospect, it's not surprising that Trump mishandled matters during the early stages of the virus when swift, decisive actions might have made a difference. We now know that he is that bad a human being and that lousy a leader. We've come not to expect just worse from him but *the* worst. If once I thought that he'd be at least rational – or I viewed his rallies as harmless side-shows – I've been thoroughly disabused of such notions.

Not much could be worse than hosting superspreader events and refusing to wear a mask or urging people not to fear the virus because, after all, he caught it and was treated by the best doctors in the world. It isn't much of a leap from that kind of behavior to 49% of Americans saying they would not get the coronavirus vaccine if it were available today. This doesn't necessarily mean that all who are vaccine-resistant are Trump supporters. But I wouldn't be surprised if a Venn diagram showed a significant overlap. Trump's only modest shot for redemption for his performance on the virus is to get the vaccine in a very public way and encourage others to do the same. It's not too late to change minds and save lives.

In the meantime, as the physical health of the nation worsens, the bonds of trust between leaders and citizens are nearing an irrevocable breaking point. Trump's call to overthrow the 2020 election, which gained traction through a lawsuit filed by Texas Attor-

ney General Ken Paxton, R, against four swing states, has exposed the underbelly of the GOP. There's nothing some Republicans won't do to hold onto power, even at the expense of the country's dwindling chances to unite in common cause. Seventeen additional Republican attorneys general have joined Paxton's suit, while 126 Republican House members have signed an amicus brief supporting Paxton's request that the Supreme Court overturn President-elect Joe Biden's victory. (The suit filed by Paxton, by the way, comes just weeks after learning he was the subject of a federal investigation into allegations that he improperly used his office to help a political donor.)

It is utterly mind-boggling that we've reached this point. Republicans continue to stall essential covid-19 relief funding, while the amicus-brief signatories apparently would rather cling to a possible Trump run in 2024 than act with character and courage. Worst of all, people whose minds have been warped by lies, conspiracy theories and disinformation would rather risk death and/or harm to others and themselves than wear a mask for a few more weeks. For Pete's sake, people: What is wrong with you?

What's wrong is Trump, was Trump, forever-will-be Trump. His overthrow-campaign is almost certainly doomed because there simply is no evidence to support his claims of voter fraud. Facts still matter. But the mess he'll leave behind in less than 40 days won't be tidied up soon, if ever. I'd like to un-write that column. To anyone who may have read it and found solace in my words, I apologize.

Contact Kathleen Parker at kathleenparker@washpost.com.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letters to the editor should be the author's original work and credit other sources when appropriate. They should be typewritten, exclusive to this newspaper and no more than 300 words. Include your name, address and daytime phone number for verification. Letters are edited for length, clarity and grammar.

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YOUR TURN GUIDELINES

Columns should focus on timely local, national or international issues of concern to people in our community. State your opinion and use facts and well-reasoned arguments to support it. Be typewritten and about 600 words. Include a paragraph at the end explaining who you are. A photograph of the writer also is requested to accompany the article. Include your name, address and daytime phone number for verification. Some Your Turns may be edited for length, clarity and accuracy.