

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.

The city is born, but mistakes were made; can we regroup?



Anne Buckvold
Special to St. Cloud Times
USA TODAY NETWORK

The arrival of I-94 changed everything. “Do you accept the challenge of development? Or let someone else do it?” These thoughts ran through Jerry Weyren’s head as he watched the 460-acre family farm take its first beating. As the highway department surveyed the west end of the farm, Jerry surveyed that whole situation. Realizing he could continue in agriculture or accept the challenge, he decided to get things organized.

“I almost got run out of the building! They wanted to know who that young punk was that wanted to set up a zoning ordinance in St. Cloud Township.” Jerry didn’t gain township support in 1957, but he did that following year. Tony Volkman, an older gentleman, had sway with the council. As two members began to balk at Jerry’s request, Tony broke in: “This young man knows what he’s talking about, you should listen to him.”

The room turned to Jerry, and by night’s end he had all the votes. The township gained rights to orderly development: zoning ordinances and a planning commission. The city of St. Cloud was born.

Transportation spurred development, and development created demand for transportation planning. Jerry kept moving. He knew organizing local municipalities was the key to leveraging federal dollars.

“We don’t have any problems other than the fact we’re here,” Mayor Al Ringsmuth’s complained at the first meeting of what would eventually become today’s St. Cloud Area Planning Organization (APO). Jerry Weyrens, graciously told Al it was OK to leave, and he was welcome to return at any time he felt it was in Waite Park’s interest to do so. Ringsmuth left, but within 6 months he was back to stay.

Currently, the APO’s annual budget is around \$1 million, 80% in federal funds and 20% from local municipalities. The organization ensures local leaders agree on how to spend federal dollars before they receive them.

Highway 15 took another 60 acres of Weyren’s farm. Ringsmuth bucked the elevated highway through St. Cloud and got his way. Instead of an efficient south-north connection from Kimball to U.S. Highway 10, a string of intersections were put in. Today, these intersections experience more than their fair share of accidents, according to state data.

Currently, the APO has three solutions on the table to address the issue; the original envisioned elevated highway is one of them. Mayor Rick Miller groaned when asked about it. “Oh, I wish we could go back 50 years and get it right the first time.” I empathize. Commissioner Joe Perske has served 13 years on the APO and is currently its chair. He quickly connects ideas about Hwy. 15 to other APO priorities: the ring road, a Clear-water bridge, etc. He wants the bridge. Mayor Rick Schultz of St. Joseph, another long-term member, relays he doesn’t like the available options and is looking into others. There’s consensus on the problem, not on the solution.

The clock ticks, the cars stall and out in D.C., Biden’s team is putting together a \$2.7 trillion infrastructure plan. I imagine planning bodies across the country, eager to get their hands on that money. I wonder how organized we are comparatively. Will we be an attractive investment for lawmakers? Do we have vision? The political appetite to make anything happen?

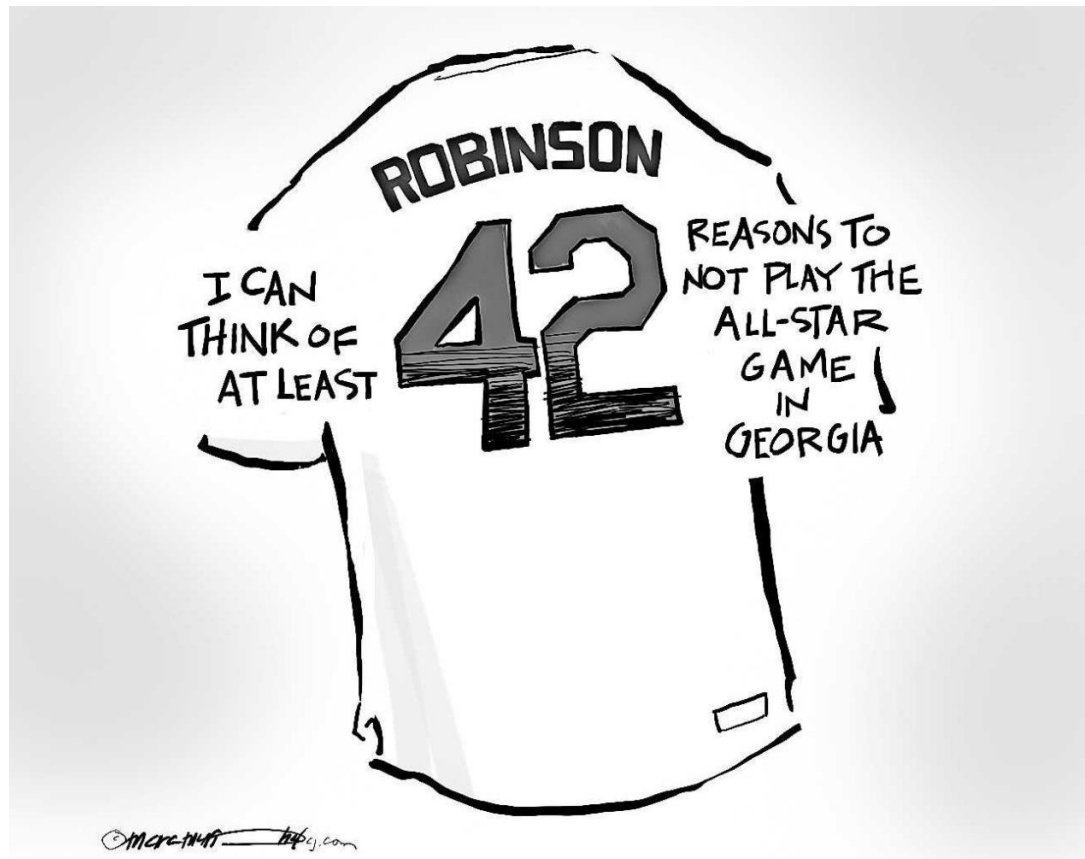
The mighty Mississippi rages past us, yet I sense stillness in the water all the same.

Nearly a decade ago I instructed my husband to take a specific route to the St. Cloud Hospital, avoiding the worst intersections along Hwy. 15. It was my third pregnancy, this time two babies were on their way and I knew how these things could go. *Won’t that take longer?* he asked. *Better to be in motion, than stuck in traffic,* I assured him.

Mayor Miller wishes to go back 50 years, Perske’s focus is 50 ahead. I recall Jerry’s voice on that tape, “When you build a bridge, you build it for 100 years from now...”

If I could have a cup of coffee with anyone right now, I’d take it with Jerry. I don’t need to see any major developments in my lifetime, but I’d sure like to make them happen. I’m pretty sure Jerry felt the same.

— Anne Buckvold is the newest member of the Times Writers’ Group. She is a social worker, organizer and artist who lives in St. Joseph with her family. Her column appears on the second Thursday of the month.



LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Calling on Emmer to back carbon bill

Eve Wallinga, Gary Wallinga, Bruce Anderson, Lee Morgan
St. Cloud

To the Editor:

Mitigating global warming and the devastation that climate change is wreaking on Minnesota is moving to the front burner with the release of Biden’s latest infrastructure initiative. There are a lot of individual bills involved in this process.

One proposal that has been added to the mix is the Energy Innovation and Carbon Dividend Act of 2021 with 28 co-sponsors. This bill would put a monthly

check into everyone’s pocket and reduce carbon emissions by 30% in the first five years. This is accomplished with a carbon “fee” which will unleash creativity to find lower-carbon ways of doing everything we have come to enjoy.

A market-based approach to reducing carbon emissions is endorsed by a huge range of supporters from the U.S. Chamber of Commerce to the American Petroleum Institute. In 2023 Europe will impose a carbon fee adjustment at their border on countries with no carbon fee, like the U.S. This is the year to level the playing field for our exporters. Scientists agree that we must reduce

carbon emissions. Economists agree that a price on carbon is the most impactful way to do this. Politicians agree that it should be bipartisan so that it is not vulnerable to political whims.

This is a time for our representative, Tom Emmer, to tackle climate change. From an agricultural perspective this bill exempts farmers and even provides a credit for carbon sequestration in the manufacture of biofuels.

Let’s get this done. Our time is running out.

Eve Wallinga, Gary Wallinga, Bruce Anderson and Lee Morgan
St. Cloud

In Georgia, Republicans are keeping the Big Lie alive



Kathleen Parker
COLUMNIST

It wasn’t so long ago that disenfranchised Blacks and activist Whites were beaten and killed for attempting to secure the right to vote.

Among the better-known victims were civil rights workers James Chaney, Andrew Goodman and Michael Schwerner, three young men who were abducted, shot at close range and buried in an earthen Mississippi dam on June 21, 1964. Part of the Freedom Summer, the three had hoped to register Black voters and educate them so they could pass the literacy tests required to vote.

When their bodies were discovered nearly two months later, one of the dead men had red clay in his lungs and clenched in his fist, indicating he was probably still alive when buried. The perpetrators included members of the local Ku Klux Klan and the Neshoba County Sheriff’s Office.

This incident was but one of many leading up to the Civil Rights Act of 1964, but is illustrative of how bloody and hard-won the right to vote was. We’ve come a long way, as they say, but some people are still determined to make voting more, not less, difficult. Georgia’s recent 98-page voting reform legislation, signed into law on March 25 by Republican Gov. Brian Kemp, is a case in point. These red-clay legislators don’t require a literacy test, but they’ve created a host of new regulations that potentially make voting more difficult for minorities.

Contrary to President Joe Biden’s claims that voting hours have been reduced, they’ve actually been expanded, a misstatement that earned the president four Pinocchios from Post

fact-checker Glenn Kessler. It’s likely that Biden was briefed on one of 25 early versions of the bill, Kessler pointed out, but the misunderstanding gained traction when other provisions are more deserving of scrutiny.

Among those that will add to greater inconvenience: Absentee ballots are more difficult to obtain; drop boxes for mail ballots will become nearly nonexistent; photo-ID requirements are potentially prohibitive; Sunday voting hours are now left to local election boards to regulate (though Saturdays are expanded); and food and water can’t be offered to people standing in line waiting to vote.

While Republicans insist their efforts are aimed at enhancing voting “integrity,” they’re operating under the false premise, otherwise known as the Big Lie – that President Donald Trump lost the 2020 election because of massive election fraud. Although this is provably false, Republicans are bent on keeping Trump’s myth alive.

Why the rush to restrict the right to vote? In a word: Midterms. They’re around the corner and Republicans hope to flip one of the two Senate seats from Georgia that they lost in the January runoff. Sen. Raphael G. Warnock, a Democrat from Atlanta, is up for reelection, most likely against his former opponent, Kelly Loeffler, who is already busy registering and mobilizing Republicans. Her “Greater Georgia” counterpoint to Democrats’ “Fair Fight” carries a rather Karen-ish whiff of intricate irony, doesn’t it? A multimillionaire White woman playing voting-rights activist to a Black preacher from the “City Too Busy to Hate.”

The new law doesn’t ban Sunday voting but it does allow Georgia’s 159 counties to reduce or eliminate it. This is a maneuver that threatens to suppress the Black vote but it is done in a way that allows state legislators to put the blame somewhere else. Since at

least the 1990s, African Americans have often voted together, after church on the Sunday before Election Day, for reasons of safety and solidarity. The “souls to the polls” movement may have fewer adherents in cities these days, but the tradition is still strong among many rural congregations and communities.

The provision against providing food and water (ostensibly to prevent electioneering) is just cruel. Lines are long and can take hours in some precincts of some states, in part because state and county election officials have been active in recent years limiting the number of polling places – another backdoor way to diminish minority turnout. What are Republicans afraid of? That a Black person will receive a pamphlet with a sip of water and vote Democrat? Republicans could avert that outcome by supplying the water themselves.

Then again, they might fare better serving Coca-Cola now that the Atlanta-based beverage giant, under threat of nationwide boycott, has condemned the new voting law as unacceptable. Other Georgia-based companies, including Delta Air Lines, have done the same. For its part, Major League Baseball announced Friday it will move this year’s All-Star Game out of Atlanta. While Republicans may complain about these actions, boycotts are the legitimate offspring of capitalist parentage, and people sometimes vote their wallets for justice, not economics.

The KKK may be underground these days; state-sponsored terrorism is a relic of a shameful past; and some voting reforms may be needed. But Georgia’s stab is a wound to the heart and soul of a nation in recovery. They – and we – can do better, not least out of respect for those who died trying to be heard.

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