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Our View: Land

Transaction benefits Lower Sioux community

The Dakota people will never be able to regain what was stolen from them as U.S. treaties were broken and their land and way of life were lost in the 1800s, but the state's recent return of 114 acres to the Lower Sioux Indian Community is welcome action.

Why it matters

Returning land to the Lower Sioux Indian Community benefits the Dakota and is an example of how to make amends.

The U.S. government established the Lower Sioux Agency in 1853 as an administrative center for the newly created Dakota reservation. Nine years later, the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862 occurred. As a result of losing the war and losing the land in nullified treaty agreements, the Dakota were denied access to millions of acres in southern Minnesota.

A visitor center at the agency near Morton explores the history of the area, its people, the war and what led up to it. Along with running the history center in more recent times, the Minnesota Historical Society bought area land in the 1960s and 1970s from private landowners. Those were the acres returned to the Indigenous community in mid-February.

Sensitivity to what was lost and acknowledgement of what can be gained by taking appropriate action are important steps to reconciliation. Down the road at the Jeffers Petroglyphs near Comfrey, Indigenous people are asking the state to take protection of the sacred site into consideration as a wind project asks for permission to build nearby.

For the Lower Sioux community, it's been a 20-year process to reclaim the land near the Lower Sioux Agency but worth the perseverance it took to complete. To again access land that truly belongs to them is no small thing and the transaction should be an example for other governments and land owners to recognize as progress.

What a joy it will be to add details of this land exchange to the museum's exhibit area, where every visitor can get a more complete picture of our state's history.

Other View

Welcome medicine

New York Daily News

Today will mark another step in defeating COVID as the FDA is expected to approve Johnson & Johnson's vaccine, giving America 100 million additional doses by this summer, another wonderful life-saving weapon against the deadly virus. Coming a day after President Biden celebrated the 50 millionth shot jabbed in an arm, victory seems near.

On the two principal goals, avoiding COVID hospitalizations and deaths, studies show that J&J is batting one thousand. If you have a chance to get a shot, take it. The same goes for the Moderna and Pfizer-BioNtech vaccines.

Besides adding a third option to our arsenal, the J&J vaccine is much more convenient than the other two. It is a single dose, and doesn't require ultra-cold storage, making it much easier to handle than the Moderna and Pfizer shots. Those both require two shots, administered weeks apart, to be fully effective. Pfizer's ultra-cold storage requirements, which the FDA relaxed this week, limited where shots could be kept and used, restricting distribution sites to places like hospitals with costly refrigerators capable of maintaining the negative 70 degrees Celsius temperature required to keep the Pfizer shots viable.

The Johnson & Johnson shot's future availability should turbocharge efforts in New York and around the country to get more shots delivered to more places — to churches, doctors, nonprofits and healthcare clinics that have established relationships with hard-to-reach but vulnerable people — the elderly, nonwhite, non-English speaking residents whose biggest obstacle to getting a shot at this point isn't vaccine hesitancy but difficulties they face getting an appointment. For example, Manhattan's 125 available vaccine sites are nearly double the 69 locations to get shots in the Bronx, despite the boroughs' similar-size populations.

Difficulty finding doses, trusting the dose-givers, and getting to where shots are given has meant just 15% of eligible elderly Black New Yorkers had gotten vaccinated as of earlier this week, compared to 30% of eligible elderly white New Yorkers.

We've got the tools we need. Get shots into the arms that need them, now.

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The Free Press

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Unprecedented, untargeted 'stimulus'

GEORGE WILL
Washington Post

WASHINGTON — When Andrew Jackson became president in 1829, the national debt was $58.4 million, and Old Hickory was as frugal as he was disagreeable — very — so his Treasury Department announced that on Jan. 1, 1835, the debt would be zero. Almost: It was $33,733.05.

In today's dollars, that would be about $1 million, which is what the federal government this fiscal year will pay in interest on the national debt every 1.4 seconds. If the government were not paying near-zero interest rates on its borrowing, then rolling over the $21.8 trillion national debt, which recently rose above 100% of GDP, might be a severe challenge. At whatever interest rate, the debt threatens to crowd out crucial spending for national defense, science, etc. But perhaps today's low rates are not just the new normal. Perhaps they are going to be, unlike the Roman Empire and every other human contrivance, eternal. Perhaps.

The numbers involved in the federal government's finances have suddenly become radically unlike anything in the nation's prior peacetime experience. The Manhattan Institute's Brian Riedl notes that in combating the Depression after the stock market crash of October 1929, presidents Herbert Hoover and Franklin D. Roosevelt increased federal spending between 1930 and 1940 by 6% of GDP. In recessions between 1945 and 2008, Riedl says, "stimulus legislation typically approximated 1 percent of GDP." Between 2008 and 2013, the cumulative $1.7 trillion in stimulus measures was approximately 3% of the multiyear GDP. Today, if Congress adds, as Democrats desire, another $1.9 trillion to the $3.4 trillion already passed, this spending would amount to 26% of GDP in just 12 months. And one-fifth of the national debt accumulated in the 186 years since the debt was almost eliminated will have been added in 12 months.

Riedl, a student of ancient (or so it suddenly seems) U.S. fiscal history, remembers that the 2009 stimulus included a $25 addition to weekly unemployment checks. In 2020, Democrats wanted $600 bonuses, and Republicans were considered skinflints because they favored only $300 — 12 times the 2009 sum. During the Great Recession, the typical family of four (a family with income below the $150,000 threshold where the phaseout begins) received tax rebates of $2,600 ($1,800 in 2008 and $800 in 2009). If legislation the Biden administration wants and the House of Representatives has passed becomes law, a typical family of four will have received $11,400 in 12 months. In previous deep recessions, state and local governments received up to $200 billion in federal aid. Today Democrats want to add $350 billion to the $360 billion approved last year.

Just 13 years ago, President George W. Bush, who was not notably averse to spending, vetoed a farm bill because it increased spending by $20 billion. Today, Republican frugality is expressed in wanting to add only $600 billion to the $3.4 trillion enacted last year.

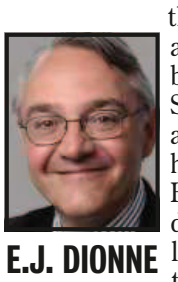
Writing in the Wall Street Journal, John Greenwood, chief economist at Invesco in London, and Steve H. Hanke, professor of applied economics at Johns Hopkins University, note that by the Federal Reserve's broadest measure of the quantity of money, the annual growth of the money supply averaged 5.8% over the 10 years from 2010 to 2019. Since last February, however, the quantity of money has increased 26%. And, they say, "we already know that the money supply will likely increase by at least another $2.3 trillion over the current year" — nearly 12%, which is twice as fast as the 2010-2019 average.

Should we call all this "stimulus"? The economy's problem is not inadequate aggregate demand. The surge in the saving rate signals pent-up demand poised to erupt when vaccinations allow the economy to open up and begin supplying demands, from restaurant meals to airplane tickets. A letter writer to the Wall Street Journal illustrates the folly of a gusher of untargeted government spending:

"How can sending checks to a retired couple whose combined income has remained steady at $150,000 a year in any way address the problems we currently are facing? A household with school-age children and adults who are now working at home and drawing the same (if not higher) salaries they did in 2019 would be much better served by programs aimed at getting schools reopened rather than receiving a stimulus check."

A trillion seconds ago was 31,710 years ago, which was 31,709 years before Congress decided that it is safe to increase federal spending in trillion-dollar tranches. Remember Ernest Hemingway's last line of "The Sun Also Rises": "Isn't it pretty to think so?"

Neera Tanden is a lot more than her tweets



E.J. DIONNE
Washington Post

WASHINGTON — What if Neera Tanden is not who many Republicans seem to think she is? What if her caustic tweets are not the whole story?

There's a side of Tanden, President Joe Biden's embattled nominee to head the Office of Management and Budget, that Republican senators deciding her fate should ponder. Doing so would encourage them to take what will certainly be a politically tough vote on her behalf.

Tanden is a loyal and, yes, sometimes combative Democrat, but she cares far more about policy than politics. And she knows and admires Republicans who feel the same way.

Never was this side of her more dramatically on display than in July 2017, when the Senate faced a vote that would determine whether the Affordable Care Act would live or die.

I was on the phone a lot with Tanden during that battle because she was as invested as anyone in getting health insurance to as many Americans as possible. She had worked on the issue as a young staffer in the Clinton administration and again in the Obama administration.

By the way, it was a sign of the respect around Washington for Tanden's policy chops that even though she had been passionately committed to Hillary Clinton's presidential campaign during the bitter Democratic primary in 2008, she was one of the very first Clinton campaign staff members that Barack Obama asked to join his general election effort. Obama saw in her what I hope some Republicans will see: a gifted and practical thinker about policy and how to make government work.

Things did not look good for Obamacare that July. The House had already passed a repeal bill and the Senate seemed on the verge of doing the same. On a critical procedural vote about whether to let the bill move forward, Republican Sens. Susan Collins (Maine) and Lisa Murkowski (Alaska) had the courage to vote "no." But Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., disappointed supporters of the law by voting "yes" to continue the debate while giving a heartfelt and acidic speech about the shortcomings of congressional politics.

It was a dramatic moment because McCain returned to the floor after being diagnosed with brain cancer — and McCain's was the decisive vote. It looked like Obamacare was dead, and McCain came in for some very tough criticism from liberals and the left.

But not from Tanden. When I called her that day, she said she thought the attacks on McCain were wrong. He had not made up his mind on whether to vote for repeal itself, she insisted. She spoke of her respect for McCain and her belief that, in the end, he would save Obamacare.

I trusted Tanden's judgment, partly because of my own long-standing admiration for McCain but also because I knew from experience that she was a shrewd reader of Congress who called things as she saw them.

So when I wrote that day, I resisted the temptation to assail McCain, using the mild word "disappointing" to describe his vote. Then I added: "But McCain could yet advance the vision of the Senate he outlined in his floor speech and rebuke 'the bombastic loudmouths' he condemned by casting a 'No' vote at the crucial moment. Here's hoping this war hero will ultimately choose to strike a blow against everything he said is wrong with Congress."

And ultimately, that's exactly what McCain did. With a famous thumbs-down on the final vote, he saved Obamacare.

I have always been grateful to Tanden not only for journalistic reasons — her information helped me write something that looks, well, pretty good in retrospect — but also, and more important, because she encouraged me to think the best of McCain.

Which is to say that Tanden is anything but a blind partisan.

And in all the talk about Tanden's prolific tweeting, no one is discussing the tweets she sent after Murkowski, Collins and McCain preserved health coverage for tens of millions of Americans. One of them read: "We are all cynical but some times political leaders do the right thing. Thank you @SenJohnMcCain, @lisamurkowski @SenatorCollins."

Tanden specifically praised Murkowski in another tweet before the vote. "On @lisamurkowski, members of the GOP threatened her state and threatened her directly. I don't believe she will fold." Tanden was right about this, too.

I'd like to hope that fair-minded Republican senators — some, including Murkowski, are still undecided as I write — will examine Tanden's whole record and realize that she is a lot more than the sum of her tweets. At a critical moment, she gave a great Republican senator the benefit of the doubt. That's what I think she deserves this time around.