

THE OPINION PAGE

► In the Mail: letters@gfherald.com; Box 6008, Grand Forks, N.D. 58206

OUR OPINION

TIF proposals: Plant today for shade later

Herald editorial board

Here's a scenario to explain tax increment financing: A sunny patio on a hot summer day.

A big, sturdy shade tree would be nice, but first it must be planted. That will take some effort – digging the hole, buying the sapling, planting it, watering it and so forth.

The reward of the labor won't come for years, but when it does, the cool shade and aesthetic beauty will have been worth the sacrifice.

The same goes for tax increment financing proposals, which allow new development projects to avoid increases in property taxes for a set number of years. TIFs make projects more affordable for a developer, allowing them to get their project built and established before the higher tax structure kicks in. They still pay property taxes on the land's previously appraised value, but they won't pay on the new value for a predetermined number of years.

With TIFs, the sacrifice made in the initial years by the taxing entities – the school district, the city and the county – will be paid off later when the higher taxes kick in and remain in the decades that follow. Perhaps new jobs and business come with the projects, too.

This all is relevant as the Grand Forks School Board considers a series of TIF development projects that are hoping to move forward.

They include: Epic Companies' \$48.9 million plan to turn the now-defunct Townhouse Hotel into apartments, retail space, and a plaza; Burian & Associates' \$25 million plan to replace the university's Memorial Stadium with office space and apartments; a consortium of developers' \$7 million plan to renovate St. John's Block; and Northridge Construction's \$27.3 million plan to turn the Lyons Auto space, across from City Hall, into offices, retail and apartments.

A contingent of city leaders this week outlined the development projects and their hoped-for TIFs to the Grand Forks School Board. The city, the School Board and the County Commission all must approve the TIFs before the projects can move forward.

We urge all boards to give their blessing.

Think for a moment about Grand Forks' current property tax base. What is becoming of previously lucrative locations like Kmart? Or the Columbia Mall? The value of those locations is decaying, and the result will be fewer dollars coming to taxing entities.

TIFs can be controversial. Some believe TIFs are an unnecessary tax break, since many projects seeking TIFs would be built anyway, and thus would start paying higher taxes immediately. That would mean more dollars sooner for the city, district and county. To ease that concern, third-party analysis is added to the process to help determine if the TIF truly is needed.

Perhaps developers are getting used to asking for the tax break because councils, boards and commissions usually don't say no. It becomes – as Henry Kissinger in 1969 described troop involvement in Vietnam – like salted peanuts. "The more you eat, the more you want. And there will be no end to it."

But with TIFs, that's not necessarily a bad thing, since they mean more development, a more modern community and, later, a more stable and lucrative tax base.

VIEWPOINT

Help your family members get vaccinated

By Josh Deere and Joel Walz
Earlier this week, we announced a partnership with Grand Forks Public Health, the city of Grand Forks and Altru, to begin vaccinating people in Tier 1B. This is the first chance for the general public in our community to get the COVID-19 vaccine. Grand Forks Public Health and Altru will be following the tiers within the Phase 1B plan set-forth by the state of North Dakota, in order to deliver it to the people who need it most: our family, friends and neighbors over the age of 75.

Many of our seniors have been isolated during this pandemic. We know how horribly COVID-19 has affected this population. According to the Centers for Disease Control, adults aged 75 to 84 are eight times more likely to be hospitalized for COVID-19 if they are positive. The greatest risk for severe illness from COVID-19 is among those aged 85 or older. We also



Deere



Walz

know they may not easily see Facebook posts with the latest information. We're asking people in our community to help this population through the vaccination process.

If a loved one is interested in receiving the vaccine, please have this conversation with them. Anyone living in Grand Forks who is 75 and older can call the COVID Hotline at 701.780.6358. The nurses operating the phones will help determine who is eligible and secure a spot for them on the waiting list.

When a vaccine dose is available, we will be in contact. Vaccinations will be administered to the public by appointment only. We will not be able to vaccinate people without

appointments through the hotline.

As providers in this community, we chose to protect our patients, family and community by getting vaccinated. It was an easy decision to say "yes" due to all of the safety data we have regarding the vaccine. Pfizer and Moderna administered as many as 44,000 doses to clinical trial participants, showing an efficacy rate of 95%, more effective than the Chickenpox vaccine. We're hopeful the vaccine is the beginning of the end for the COVID pandemic.

The help you can provide your loved ones could help them get vaccinated quicker. In order to stop COVID-19 in Grand Forks, we will need the partnership between us all to share information. We will continue to provide weekly updates on the progress we are making as we aim to work together for the best outcome of our community.

Dr. Josh Deere is Medical Director of Primary Care at Altru. Dr. Joel Walz is the Grand Forks Health Officer.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

State, local officials must condemn attack

To the editor,
The attack on Capitol Hill was instigated by President Trump and needs to be condemned by all elected officials including local governments. The mayor of Grand Forks and City Council members along with the governor of North Dakota need to stand up and call on Sens. Hoven and Cramer and Rep. Armstrong to demand they do the right thing and impeach or remove Trump immediately. This was an insurrection on the very nature of our country and free elections and needs to be condemned by removing Trump.

Having local officials and Gov. Burgum stand up and speak out is required.

Steve Johnson
Grand Forks

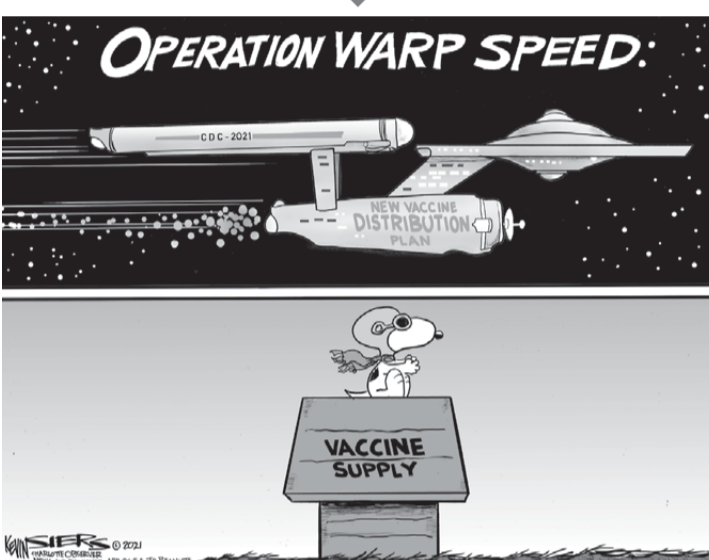
We all deserve better than this

To the editor,
The president, commander and chief of our nation, used language to incite the crowd to action from Nov. 3 through Jan. 6, much like commanders of the armed services do just prior to a battle or military action.

The GOP are pushing for no consequences? Even in one's satellite orbit – the immediate family core – when someone does something wrong there are consequences. It might be loss of phone/driving privileges, additional chores, sitting in a corner, etc. Sometimes the actions even bring legal consequences – money, jail time, etc.

In his position at the head of our country because of a DOJ policy, *nothing* has happened when he has said, encouraged or even committed actions that would bring "family" repercussions. The last time any actual action, it was a slap on the wrist (he was impeached, not convicted), and "he has learned his lesson."

Once again his "family" – the GOP – are being called upon to actually act and what is being heard is "oh let it go." This was an attack on the Capitol itself in which not only was there physical damage but five lost their lives, many were injured or threatened. Sen. John Hoeven, Sen.



Kevin Cramer and Rep. Kelly Armstrong were targets of the more violent protesters (they had chosen to uphold their constitutional oath and certify the election, which is not what the president or his protesters/insurrectionists wanted). Are our delegates really going to continue the travesty of "I'm serving the country and the citizens especially of North Dakota" by just turning their heads or maybe lowering them, and ask for no consequences? Re-election is more important than doing what is right?

We and all true Americans who support democracy and our constitution deserve better than that.

Judy Hager
Grand Forks

Trump first is not "America First"

To the editor,
Trump sold half the country on a claim that he values "America First." He's also sold a book describing how to effectively and casually lie. He is very clearly utilizing his lying skills about his America First priorities.

He says he wants citizens to have higher stimulus checks, but hasn't made a single call to Republican leaders negotiating such an important deal. Instead Trump made calls to election officials to "find 11,780 votes" for him, one more than what's needed to win. He also repeated conspiracy theories that have been widely disproven or brought without evidence, in court. Additionally, he refuses to promote a peaceful transition of power, which enables aggressive, divisive, and vio-

lent situations forthcoming. The U.S. experienced the largest cyberattack in our nation's history, but Trump has yet to hold accountable or even acknowledge the guilty party – Russia. It's been confirmed by Trump's own Secretary of State and Department of Justice, but he refuses to take any action.

A suicide bomber leveled an entire city block on Christmas day, and Trump says nothing about it. He instead tweets about how the Wall Street Journal is unfair to him. He has yet to acknowledge the terrorist attack.

Recordings were released of him admitting he's been intentionally misleading the American public about how dangerous the Coronavirus is, and that he wants to continue to downplay it. The U.S. still has the highest share of deaths worldwide.

Last year, Trump was found to have pressured a foreign official to smear his political opponent, while withholding vital foreign aid. This was done to benefit him personally, using his private lawyer.

None of this continued behavior is "America First." It's Trump first. But I guess that's the "Art of the Deal," which costs \$8 and the future of our democracy.

Ryan Hilmoe
Grand Forks

More recovery aid vital for families

To the editor,
A Dec. 21 article published in the Herald showed data from the North Dakota Kids Count report that warned of a "Looming food, housing catastrophe awaits because of the coronavirus

pandemic." As we approach the end of January, families are being pushed closer and closer to the cliff.

The bipartisan COVID relief agreement passed by Congress in December provides substantial, urgently needed relief to help struggling American families get through the next few months. It also includes a landmark \$4 billion investment in global vaccines. But these measures are temporary. Soon millions of American families will be back in jeopardy again, struggling to pay rent and put food on the table, and the pandemic will continue to claim victims worldwide.

To address the crisis in our country, I call on the North Dakota Congressional delegation to join with their colleagues in a bipartisan effort to craft another COVID recovery package. It should include help for renters struggling to avoid eviction, boost food assistance via SNAP and shift tax policies to focus on low-income workers and families by expanding the EITC and Child Tax Credit. Also, deadlines must be extended, so the eviction moratorium will continue beyond January 31st, and increased SNAP benefits past June.

According to a report from the United Nations food agencies, 690 million people regularly go to bed hungry. UNICEF estimates 80 million children are at risk of preventable diseases like measles and polio. AIDS, TB and malaria deaths are projected to rise to levels we haven't seen in years. To prevent this catastrophe, the US should provide \$20 billion in funding for health and nutrition in lower-income countries and \$4 billion for AIDS, TB, and malaria.

Let's encourage Senators John Hoeven and Kevin Cramer and Rep. Kelly Armstrong to join with the new Congress to act swiftly in early 2021 to meet the needs inadequately addressed by the current package. Further relief for struggling families, our economy and victims of the pandemic worldwide is needed desperately. Time is of the essence.

Kathleen Ness
Grand Forks

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All letters are subject to editing for grammar, length, accuracy and clarity.

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