

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.



Dan Johnson
Times Writers Group
St. Cloud Times
USA TODAY NETWORK

Resist attempts to divide us over vaccine status

Our nation has become obsessed with defining subgroups for its citizens. Whether it be income level, skin color, sex or religion, our government and media have become experts at dividing us while assigning victims and villains.

In 2021, new subgroups were created called the “vaxxed and anti-vaxx.” The assigned victims are the vaxxed, who believe they are recklessly being put at risk by the science-denying anti-vaxxed.

Government increasingly suggests the vaxxed associate only with other vaxxed individuals, even within families. The argue the anti-vaxxed people, due to their careless refusal to follow the accepted science, are considered too dangerous to work, shop, eat, or socialize in public places. From their perspective, poor choices are forcing government to require vaccination. The vaccinated are the educated elite of society, the unvaccinated ignorantly inattentive to the illness caused around them.

It doesn't matter why someone is unvaxxed, the logic goes, they are all equally selfish. The vaxxed are frustrated, why will they not just get the dang shot? The vaxxed blame the un-vaxxed for the vaccine not ending the pandemic and allowing it to mutate. Why are they promoting individual freedom over the collective good?

The anti-vaxx group does not typically pass judgement on those who get vaccinated. Nothing any official can say will change their mind on the vaccine. The harder government is trying to force them to get the shot, the more deeply convicted they become not to. They know the science, but they do not trust a vaccine based on new technology getting injected into their body. They trust their own immune system.

On social media, many of these people have back-up Facebook pages for when they get put in “Facebook jail” sharing articles questioning the official position.

Ironically, the anti-vaxx are not generally against vaccines as the name implies. This subgroup is composed of people with various concerns about mainly these COVID vaccines only from religious, health or governmental overreach concerns. Many of these people have already recovered from COVID and correctly believe they have some level of natural immunity.

There is a third, rarely mentioned subgroup government and media tend to ignore. It is the “I don't care what your vaccine status is” group. People in this subgroup do not waste a second of their already busy day concerning themselves with others' vaccine status. They include both vaccinated and unvaccinated individuals, yet somehow manage to not fight among themselves. These people live their lives as they did prior to the pandemic, enjoying holidays with family and socializing publicly. When the subject of vaccination status comes up, they do not think poorly of anyone regardless of status.

All of us should strive to become members of this group.

The reality is data supports multiple points of view. The vaccine is not, nor was it ever going to end the pandemic. Minnesota alone reports over 140K infections, 5,500 hospitalizations, and 1,000 deaths among fully vaccinated individuals. Long-term safety concerns are very reasonable for a vaccine only safety tested in the short term.

At the same time, vaccines have proven effective in decreasing hospitalizations among the highest risk age groups. All these facts can be true at the same time.

Last Tuesday, President Biden urged the parents of children too young to vaccinate to only surround them with people who are vaccinated. He also said this continues to be a pandemic of the unvaccinated. This as data confirms the new omicron variant can infect fully vaccinated people as most recently demonstrated by Gov. Walz testing positive despite being fully vaccinated and boosted.

Our society cannot tolerate this level of division from leadership. If the vaccine is as effective as stated it should not matter who socializes with who. Let's reconnect friends and families, not create new indefinite divisions among loved ones based on vaccine preference.

This is the opinion of Times Writers Group member Dan Johnson, a Sauk Rapids resident and chairman of the Benton County Republican Party. His column is published the first Thursday of the month. He can be contacted at bentongopchair@yahoo.com.

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LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Editorial Board wrong on insurrection; GOP carries blame alone

The Times Editorial Board published a piece on Saturday criticizing the harmful politics of division that led to the Jan. 6, 2021, insurrection on the Capitol (“On Jan. 7, we’ll already have done better”). The board failed to note that the insurrection was instigated solely by President Donald Trump’s fanatics and that the attack was the result of months of baseless election integrity complaints by the President and his administration.

I do not share the board’s assessment that 2022 will be better, or that the frightening us-versus-them politics of the Republican Party can be mollified by “critical thinking” or “choosing the high road,” as they suggest. In a recent debate, five of the Minnesota Republicans currently running for governor refused to acknowledge President Biden’s legitimate election win. Former state senator Scott Jensen, a serious contender for the Republican nomination, is

particularly eager to spread election misinformation.

It has been one year since the attack on the Capitol. None of the Trump administration officials or members of Congress who supported the attack have been indicted regarding their role in the insurrection. They have faced zero repercussions for trying to violently stop the certification of the election, and there is no reason to believe they won’t try again.

The board must recognize the unique threat posed by the Republican Party. Republican Party politicians simply no longer believe in democracy; they now falsely claim any election they lose has been stolen by Democrats. This is not a “both sides” issue, as the board suggests. The anti-democratic rot lies within the Republican Party, and the Republican Party alone. The board’s inability to clearly state that fact is troubling and calls into question their understanding of the severity of last year’s attack on our democracy and what it means for American democracy.

Jacob Devine, Edwardsville, Illinois, formerly of Little Falls

We were lucky more weren’t killed on Jan. 6



Kathleen Parker
Columnist

Where were you when the Capitol was attacked? My answer: glued to the television, with eyes wide and mouth open.

How could this possibly be happening in our country, I asked myself as I watched horrified and dumbfounded. I’m sure millions of others were asking the same question. The idea that a sitting president would deny his opponent’s election victory and encourage his own supporters to stop the vote-certification process was beyond imagining, except to those ramming the doors, assaulting the cops, breaking the windows and running down hallways, taunting lawmakers and staff with threats of violence.

They looked – and acted – like animals. Who were these beasts – and how dare they?

To the list of infamous days, from Pearl Harbor to 9/11, we now have Jan. 6 – or J6, as right-wing activists have dubbed the insurrection.

Turns out the majority of those arrested and charged were what might be called regular folks, who weren’t part of an organized wing-nut cult. Some of those groups, such as the Proud Boys and neo-Nazis, were represented to be sure. But studies have shown that most of those charged or arrested were plain old, unaffiliated, random Americans from big cities, often blue states, who came to support Donald Trump. Many were business owners; a notable portion had financial trouble. There was an Olympic gold medalist among them.

And look what happened. And what might have happened if the really bad guys had shown up? My guess is there are some pro-Trump, anti-government folks out there who are sorry they missed the events that day. FOMO – fear of missing out – is not limited to the younger generation. That another uprising could occur thus seems not beyond the realm of possibilities. And though the Capitol Police Department says it’s prepared this time, it also reports threat levels that are “exponentially higher” than last year.

Needless to say, Trump had for a time planned to insert himself into the anniversary. But earlier this week he canceled his Jan. 6 news conference in Palm Beach, Fla., and said he would instead hold a rally in Arizona on Jan 15. There, he will likely continue his pathological attachment to the absurd fiction that he

won the 2020 campaign. He didn’t, as courts, counters and capable election officials have repeatedly confirmed.

But Trump, as we know, abides by his own reality. We’ve recently learned more about what he was doing during the rioting. Throughout, he was riveted to the TV screen, watching his most glorious moment and ignoring pleas from, among others, his daughter Ivanka and House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy to stop the violence.

Why would Trump want to interrupt his dream-scape of loyalists taking over the government to reverse his defeat? The guy who has only ever cared about winning wasn’t about to end that show.

We all know enough about mobs and combustible crowds to understand that it takes only one impatient troublemaker to turn a normal customer waiting line into a stampede or a peaceful gathering into a mob. Something clicks in one person’s brain, a shout goes out, a fever sets in, and the barbarians storm the gates.

Once contagion catches, there’s almost no turning back. At a certain point, even the angry become afraid, stimulating their fight or flight response and flooding all systems with adrenaline. Five people died as a result of Jan. 6, not counting the four officers who subsequently died by suicide. I think we all know we were lucky the number wasn’t higher.

I say it again: The president of the United States watched with delight what the rest of the nation watched with horror. And, still, they want him back?

Not so long ago, Americans shared a common understanding of how things should be. We understood – no, we believed as a first principle – that our problems could be fixed with elections. Yet today, 68% of Republicans think the 2020 election was rigged. We celebrated our democratic traditions and the peaceful transfer of power. Now, a third of Americans think violence against the government is sometimes justified.

Something has happened to us, and we need to figure it out – now.

Authoritarian leaders rarely do their own dirty work. They get other people to do that for them. Walk down the street to the Capitol, Trump said, and off the mob went. Trump went back to the White House to watch how his minions fared.

With luck and justice, Trump will be held accountable for failing to honor his presidential vow to protect the U.S. Constitution. He didn’t, and he should pay for that. At the very least, he should never be allowed to hold public office again. Then, maybe the rest of us could get back to work pursuing and fulfilling the dream we once shared.

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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Barbara Banaian
Times Writers Group
St. Cloud Times
USA TODAY NETWORK

Shanghai lockdown shows need for better care, control

As the mask mandate loosens, there is trouble across the sea. What is going on in China?

Shanghai is the leading seaport of China, a beautiful city of 25 million people and a financial hub of Asia. But you would not be able to tell from looking at its streets. After an increase in COVID-19 cases in March, the government instituted a lockdown by shuttering businesses and making most people stay at home. A lack of food and access to medicine resulted, while positive cases were sent to quarantine centers.

The president of China, President Xi, has a goal of zero COVID, which is impressive but costly. People under the lockdown are confined to homes or compounds with a great deal of enforcement. Buildings have been sealed off so people cannot leave. Most stores and other venues are closed. COVID-19 tests are conducted daily. Even with all their actions, the seven-day tally of new cases surged from 48 on March 28 (the day lockdowns were imposed) to 3,028 on April 19, according to data from Johns Hopkins University. Lockdowns were imposed over the entire period.

It reminds me of the saying, “The hardest part of a five-day lock-down are the first six weeks”.

The benefits of lockdowns are notable. Deaths in Shanghai from COVID-19 since the outbreak are officially at 190 persons as of April 26, 2022, far less than in the U.S.. But the costs are quite severe. After growing slower than the U.S. in 2021 (5.5% vs 4%), Xi wants China to grow faster than the U.S. as it had for the 19 years before 2021. And a slowdown in activity in Shanghai makes that goal harder to reach.

Shanghai has shut down most of its manufacturing, and unfilled orders are stuck in central China where shutdowns are stalling inventory. These delays are adding to inflationary pressure, already very high.

Supply chains are at risk if the lockdown continues in Shanghai. Two years of shipping disruptions (from Shanghai) seem to be getting worse. Shanghai ports and suppliers are an important connection to tech companies and automakers. According to an analysis by Nikkei Asia, “half of Apple’s 200 top suppliers have facilities in and around Shanghai, where COVID-related lockdowns and traffic restrictions are disrupting a wide swath of business activities.”

See **LOCKDOWN**, Page 11A

EDITORIAL ST. CLOUD TIMES



Minnesota Department of Human Rights Commissioner Rebecca Lucero speaks during a press conference Wednesday in St. Paul, Minn. A state investigation launched after George Floyd was killed by a Minneapolis police officer has determined that the Minneapolis Police Department has engaged in a pattern of race discrimination.

DAVID JOLAS/AP

Investigation confirms Minneapolis police bias, unsurprisingly

The findings of a Minnesota Department of Human Rights investigation into the practices of the Minneapolis Police Department didn't come as much of a surprise, unfortunately. The state investigation into the troubled department largely found what civilian onlookers had been saying for years: Statistically, Minneapolis police treat people of color differently than white people.

Certainly not all Minneapolis officers, and certainly white people have been mistreated as well, as if that must be said. The report's findings, however, are clear and consistent with what communities of color and their allies have voiced repeatedly: White people are safer around Minneapolis police, statistically, than other residents.

The state's investigation found non-white drivers are pulled over by Minneapolis police significantly more often for minor or questionable offenses. Once pulled over, BI-POC people are far more likely to be asked if they have guns or drugs, they are far more likely to have their vehicle searched than a white driver and they are far more likely to experience excessive use of force.

The numbers: 13 of the 14 people killed by Minneapolis officers since 2010 (note: that's more than one per year) were people of color or Indigenous. Those groups comprise about 42% of Minneapolis, but they account for 93% of the city's officer-in-

The Editorial Board

Our View represents the Times Editorial Board, whose members seek to provide opinion, information and leadership that promote public discussion and build a better community.

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involved deaths. While about 19% of Minneapolis residents are Black, 63% of all Minneapolis police use-of-force actions were against Black people, the state study found.

It would be naive to expect police actions to match a community's racial makeup precisely, of course. But the message in the state report is clear: We can no longer deny or brush aside the problem. It's time — long past time, actually — to believe the community and the investigators and move on to solutions.

Among the solutions recommended in the state report:

- Reform police training priorities from an emphasis on paramilitary-style training which, the study found, “results in officers unnecessarily escalating encounters or using inappropriate levels of force.” The state instead recom-

mends emphasizing professional training in community service and de-escalation to keep residents and officers safer. Because, without a doubt, officers are safer when fewer people see them as dangerous or hostile. To be clear, officers still need to be trained to respond to dangerous situations and defend themselves. But the emphasis can and should shift away from the militarization of police forces of all sizes that has burgeoned in the past 25 years.

- The report also emphasized that police must “communicate honestly” with the public when crises occur. The flatly false news release issued after George Floyd's murder, stating that he died after a medical crisis, undermined trust in honest officers and endangered police across Minnesota and the nation as a result. Why? Because the good guys aren't supposed to lie, obfuscate, fib or misdirect to protect their own or hide their mistakes. Leaders step up. Leaders speak the truth, even when — especially when — it's an uncomfortable truth.

- The report also recommends better systems of accountability, more effective investigations when officer misconduct is reported and reformed performance expectations for police. For those measures to have real-world impact in the Min-

See **BIAS**, Page 11A

What's in store for final weeks of 2022 legislative session



Rep. Lisa Demuth
House District 13A, Cold Spring

We began the 2022 legislative session on the last day of January with high hopes, a historic surplus, tax relief in mind and much room for improvement to make our state a safer place to live and visit.

Fast-forward nearly three months and those things all remain true, even if the window to these achievements is shrinking by the day. The Legislature is not set to adjourn until late May and, for better or for worse, it often is the 11th hour when headway is gained on resolving major headline issues.

In this year's case, much of our late-session work centers on the state's surplus of around \$10 billion. We should

note the state is fully funded for the biennium, so there is no threat of a state shutdown if an agreement is not in place prior to adjournment. With that in mind, there are stark differences between how the House and Senate majorities propose appropriating the surplus dollars.

Senate Republicans recently passed the largest tax cut in state history, at more than \$8 billion. This accounts for most of the budget surplus and includes eliminating the state's Social Security income tax and reducing income taxes. House Democrats, on the other hand, propose \$21 in new government spending for every \$1 in tax cuts. Overall, their proposal is for \$12.2 billion in new government spending, a 14% state spending increase.

Aside from the top-line numbers, there are notable omissions from the House majority's supplemental budget proposal. First, there are concerns

about a lack of long-term care funding in the health and human services section. Our nursing homes and long-term care industry in general were under serious duress even pre-pandemic and we need to make sure they are able to meet crucial needs for the people they serve.

Public safety is another area where we can ill-afford inaction this session. Violent crime has been historically high in our state and House Republicans put forth a package of “Safety in our Cities” bills earlier this session. Our three-pronged approach aimed at holding criminals responsible for their actions, helping recruit and retain peace officers, and providing transparency on prosecution and sentencing decisions.

Unfortunately, House Democrats continue to do little more than provide lip service to this subject. The majority made a big splash in the media over bills they authored, including for stronger penalties for carjacking, house arrest for

youth auto theft offenders and grant programs aimed at recruiting police officers. But, in reality, those Democrat public safety proposals have been completely ignored by the committee on public safety they control, left to shrivel on the vine. Furthermore, Democrat-backed proposals that failed to receive hearings recently were brought forward as amendments by House Republicans, only to have House Democrats vote down their own language.

The Legislature's deliberate pace sometimes can make it seem as though progress is out of reach at the Capitol, but we still have time to deliver on these issues and more. We are in session until May 23 and my hope is we will accomplish positive results on the session's most pressing issues.

— *Rep. Lisa Demuth, R-Cold Spring, is the assistant House minority leader. She represents District 13A.*

Lockdown

Continued from Page 10A

This threatens a supply chain fiasco for the global economy. The Chinese stock market is falling and influencing U.S. stock, too. While everyone is talking about the inflation, this bears watching too.

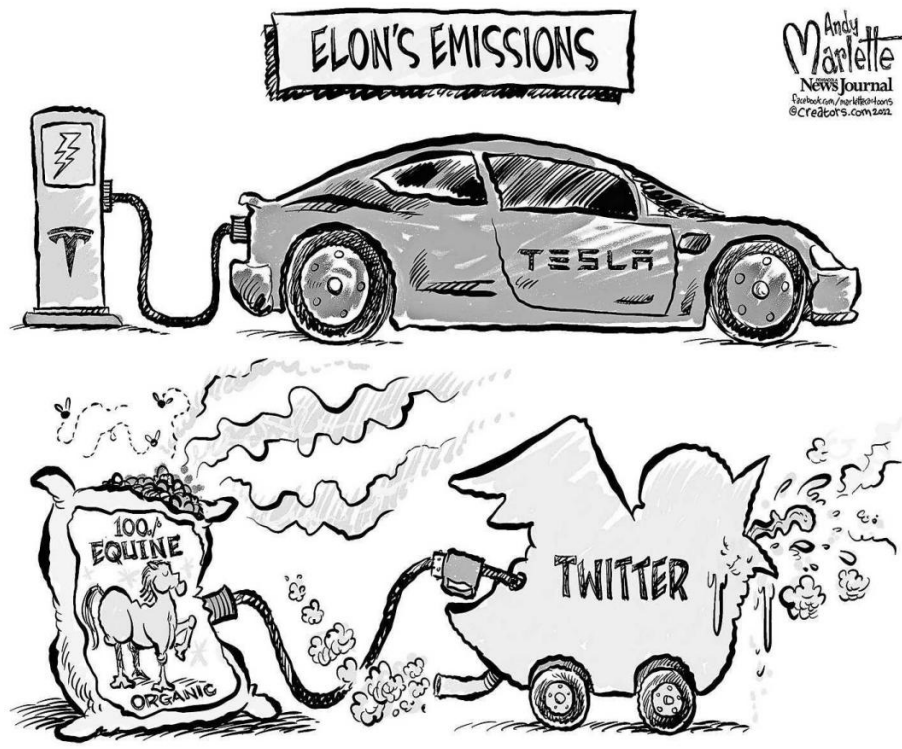
It seems that no single country should be able to control the global economy. But our countries are too interconnected and bringing production back to the U.S. or even taking it to a third country will raise costs. And do we know whether the next place we choose to produce from will be spared from infection?

Even though the goal is zero cases, a better objective, I think, would be more resilience to disease. Also, to give greater care to those with weakened immune systems. Clearly a focus needs to be more vaccination of the elderly, perhaps with more effective vaccines. Part of the problem is that the Chinese-made vaccine is less than 50 percent effective.

The damage may already be done in Shanghai. Last Wednesday, 4 million people were allowed out of their homes as a health official determined the virus was under effective control. But reports indicate that expatriates there have had enough and are looking to leave China. And some feel the next lockdown may be in Beijing, a city of 22 million people, where there is an increasing number of COVID cases.

My heart goes out to all. May it soon be overcome and life returned to normal.

This is the opinion of Times Writers Group member Barbara Banaian, a professional pianist who lives in the St. Cloud area. Her column is published the first Sunday of the month.



Bias

Continued from Page 10A

neapolis police department, outside oversight will be required, we believe.

The report said what many community members of all races have been saying for a long while. It's time to accept that and focus on effective law enforcement, regardless of race. That's what we all want. It's what the people of Minneapolis do not have.

It's time to accept reality and pledge to move forward equitably for all citizens, more safely for all officers, and in a way that can make Minnesota proud again.

It's time to accept reality and pledge to move forward equitably for all citizens, more safely for all officers, and in a way that can make Minnesota proud again.

— This is the opinion of the St. Cloud Times Editorial Board, which includes Editor Lisa Schwarz and Content Coach Anna Haecherl.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Prevention of homelessness is better for all

To the editor:

Sincere thanks for your editorial in Sunday, April 24 St. Cloud Times relative to the Lincoln Center. ["Our View: Lincoln Center proposals could make the change neighbors want"]

I support the first of your outlined choices: "A society can work the prevention side...."

I agree that with proper execution and community response ... lives could be changed for the better.

We are all better when we are all better!

Peace!

Eunice Antony OSB, St. Joseph



Your Turn

Tarryl Clark
Guest columnist

Urge your Legislature to dedicate auto parts taxes to our roads

In 2021 we lost 502 Minnesotans to traffic crashes. That startling number represents mothers, fathers, children, brothers and sisters who just never made it home. Improving safety on our roads and modernizing our transportation system is a responsibility that the Legislature needs to take on before the 2022 session adjourns.

Issues like fixing infrastructure struggle for attention and resources, but our infrastructure forms the backbone of our economy and impacts all of us every day. Whether we need to get to work, to school, to church or simply have packages delivered to us, our transportation system is critical for allowing us to live our lives.

With a projected \$9.3 billion budget surplus, there is no excuse for legislators to neglect our aging roadways and deficient bridges. This is the year to direct more resources to the basics: fixing the potholes, replacing the worn out bridges and smoothing out the supply chain issues by improving the ability of businesses to deliver their products.

One idea that needs to get done this session is completing the work to dedicate the money we spend when we buy automotive repair parts to our transportation system. If you buy a new or used car, the sales tax you pay on that car is dedicated and goes back to fixing our transportation system. But if you decide to fix your car instead of buying a new one, that sales tax revenue isn't all reinvested in the transportation system. This is a common-sense dedication that needs to get done this session.

It's one that will help local governments like Stearns County as we try to pay the increasingly high costs of road repair. Without adequate state funding, local governments have to turn to the property tax to fix your local roads. This year, there is no reason why legislators can't come together to assist taxpayers by redirecting existing state dollars to our roads.

Road design and maintenance play a key role in improving safety. People will always make driving mistakes but that shouldn't be a death sentence. We can and should make investments that will improve the safety of our roads and bridges and this is the year to get that job done.

Tarryl Clark is a member of the Stearns County Board of Commissioners representing District 1. Submit a Your Turn for consideration by emailing columns@stcloudtimes.com.

Beware gift card scams, from one who is sadder (and poorer) but wiser



Patrick Henry
Times Writers Group
St. Cloud Times
USA TODAY NETWORK

1. Computer screen flashes, strobe-like. Looks as if it comes from Microsoft (logo seems legit). "Warning: you mustn't log out or turn off." That's exactly what I should do, but don't.

2. I call suggested number. A woman answers, claims to be Microsoft, remotes my computer, runs some programs. "A Trojan virus in your bank accounts."

"I will connect you to your bank on a secure line," she says, "because your phone may be compromised."

3. The main scammer, who pretends to be an 'agent' of my bank and who will stay on the line for the next three hours, says, "Some large charges have been made against your credit card, and you authorized them."

"No, I didn't."

"But we sent you an email earlier today about the charges, and you replied with authorization."

I check my email. They didn't.

"Oh, this means the scammers stole your identity and have access to your email."

4. The bank's 'agent' assures me he is doing everything possible to prevent my losing the sums.

"I want to go to my bank to confirm this," I say.

"Oh, no. The only person at your local branch who can deal with this has left for the day. Do exactly as I say, or you will lose all that money."

5. He explains that to prevent the money's transfer at midnight to the 'authorized' charges, I must purchase 'dummy gift cards' with my credit card, then read him the IDs and PINs so he can deposit the sums in a new account for me at the bank. His urgency blots out my knowledge that credit card charges, unlike debit card ones, are instantaneous.

"Don't tell anyone what you're actually doing. Say you have big family events coming up and require several large gift cards. If your card gets a 'decline' notice and you need to talk to the bank's credit card company to lift it, I will connect you.

There is something about the way the delusion feeds on itself – a sort of addiction. These scammers get inside your head, inducing frenzy, panic. They have a rejoinder for every question. When I periodically ask, "Why can't I tell the credit card agent why I am doing this?" I am told, "Oh, we are separate departments at the bank, and we don't share information."

Do not tell them what you are doing – use the same story about needing many family gifts."

I am so bamboozled that the absurdity doesn't register: my bank is instructing me to lie to merchants and to itself.

6. The 'agent' clearly has a Google map. He sends me to a nearby major national department store to buy 10 \$1,000 gift cards. The sale is declined.

I go outside to ask the 'agent' what to do (he warned me never to talk to him in hearing distance of any store employee). While he connects me to the credit card agent, a store manager comes and says, "We can't make such a sale. Do you know there's a scam? Is somebody telling you to do this?"

I have already lied about why I am buying the cards, and, I think, "How could it be a scam if I am following my bank's instructions?" So, I lie again: "No one is telling me to do this."

7. Thwarted at the national store, the 'agent' directs me to local stores. I am not to buy their own gift cards, but cards from one or more of five national brands. These stores have daily limits on gift card sales, so while they are skeptical, they accept my lie about why I need them.

8. At three stores I collect six \$500 gift cards from two national companies. After each of the three purchases I tell the 'agent' the IDs and PINs. Of course he immediately transfers the funds into something very different from the 'account' he had said he would set up 'for me.'

9. At this point you're saying, "How could you not see what was going on?" I've asked this myself dozens of times. There is something about the way the delusion feeds on itself – a sort of addiction. These scammers get inside your head, inducing frenzy, panic. They have a rejoinder for every question. When I periodically ask, "Why can't I tell the credit card agent why I am doing this?" I am told, "Oh, we are separate departments at the bank, and we don't share information."

10. Finally (and fortunately before I go any further), one store's manager brings me a handwritten note of warning. This launches my suspicion: Maybe this isn't all as it seems. I stop driving around (the 'agent' assures me the next stop's gift card limit is \$5,000), go home, sleep little.

11. Next day I go to the bank and learn that every bit of it was a con. I call the police.

12. The fiendishness: By persuading me I am the victim of identity theft, the scammers make me their thief.

13. Scam, start to finish. Federal Trade Commission knows it (<https://consumer.ftc.gov/articles/gift-card-scams>). Merchants know it. Banks know it. I – sadder (and poorer) but wiser – know it.

Now you know it too.

This is the opinion of Patrick Henry, retired executive director of the Collegeville Institute for Ecumenical and Cultural Research. His website is www.IronicChristian.org. His column is published the first Sunday of the month.

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.

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Karen Cyson
Times Writers Group
St. Cloud Times
USA TODAY NETWORK

Lessons from a licensed childcare provider

It's disheartening to think that my default response to anything about licensed childcare in the news is, "Well, that's a lie." But experience is a harsh teacher and here are two lessons I've learned in the past month:

First, when government spokespeople, throughout the first two years of the pandemic, included childcare workers on their list of essential workers and praised them for keeping their homes open to children so other essential workers could also work, their words were just blather.

Now that "hero pay" criteria has been established, we don't qualify. True, all of the newspaper articles and TV and radio reports said we do, but no. The criteria to qualify was specifically set up to exclude us. Childcare workers in childcare centers qualify because they receive a paycheck from an employer.

The more than 6,000 home-based childcare providers in Minnesota do not qualify because we do not have an employer to list on the claim form.

Do I need the money? Probably not any more than anyone else does. It would be nice, but I'm not going to suffer if I don't receive it.

However, the idea that all of these government officials would praise us as essential for two years and then be oh, so sorry that we were left out when it was time to step up and hand out the cash sounds a bit hollow.

Here's some additional irony: I do receive a paycheck for my work, through the local counties, from the State of Minnesota itself for the children in my care who are on Child Care Assistance. Does that count? No.

Second, the Federal Adult and Child Care Food Program is a vital part of ensuring that all children receive nutritious meals while in care. Childcare providers are reimbursed for the food served and the energy it takes to store and serve the meals and snacks. We receive payment for up to two meals and one snack per day per child (I serve two meals and two snacks, but that is my choice, and I don't want to deal with hangry children).

All news reports state that the rate we receive is "tied to the Consumer Price Index". One would assume that the annual increase we receive would reflect the actual rise in the cost of food, refrigeration and cooking. One would be wrong. Last week the annual increase in reimbursement was announced. The increase was 6.2%.

On Wednesday, July 13, the Federal Government released the Consumer Price Index for the previous month and for the previous year. The annual in-

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A video of former U.S. Attorney General Bill Barr, center, plays at the House Jan. 6 committee hearing on June 21, 2022. Should he have gone public in December and told the entire country that Donald Trump's stolen election story was "idiotic"? JACK GRUBER/USA TODAY FILE

Bill Barr didn't defend the Constitution against Trump



Chris Truax
USA TODAY

At one of the recent Jan. 6 committee hearings, Rep. Liz Cheney, R-Wyo., claimed that former Attorney General Bill Barr and others "stood up and did what is right."

As a longtime Republican, I'm proud of the principled stand Cheney has taken. But when it comes to Barr, she could not be more wrong.

I've had an unusual reaction to the House hearings so far, an uncomfortable mixture of embarrassment and disgust. Of course, I am relieved that the Trump administration had devolved into the gang that couldn't coup straight. But I'm also embarrassed by former President Donald Trump's cringeworthy collection of cowards, clowns and traitors.

My disgust, however, has a specific focus: William Barr, as attorney general of the United States, could have helped to stop the Big Lie and discredit Trump's claim that the election was stolen.

Attorney general was not Donald Trump's lawyer

Barr is intelligent, rational and a good lawyer. And as attorney general, he was not the president's lawyer. His sole client was the United States of America. He took an oath to "sup-

port and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic" and to "bear true faith and allegiance to the same."

Support and defend doesn't mean run away. You can't fulfill your oath by withdrawing from the fight when the Constitution is most threatened. So instead of telling Trump that his election fraud claims were "bull----" and "idiotic," — as Barr admitted he did in his testimony before the committee — he should have been telling the entire country.

What did Barr do instead? Here's the first paragraph from the attorney general's resignation letter dated Dec. 14, 2020:

"I appreciate the opportunity to update you this afternoon on the (Justice) Department's review of voter fraud allegations in the 2020 election and how these allegations will continue to be pursued. At a time when the country is so deeply divided, it is incumbent on all levels of government, and all agencies acting within their purview, to do all we can to assure the integrity of elections and promote public confidence in their outcome."

Barr is just saving his own skin

Notably absent from Barr's last public statement on Trump's attack on the 2020 election results are the words "bull----" and "idiotic." He isn't upholding his oath. He's saving his own skin and removing himself from a no-win situation.

Two weeks before he resigned, the attorney general told The Associated Press, "To date, we have not seen fraud

on a scale that could have effected a different outcome in the election."

In that interview, Barr also announced he had appointed a special counsel to investigate the origins of the Trump-Russian collusion investigation.

This is not the work of an attorney general defending the Constitution. It's the work of a self-serving bureaucrat papering the file.

If Barr had wanted to uphold his oath, there were role models he could have followed.

Two weeks before that Barr interview, Christopher Krebs, the director of the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency and the country's top election security official, was fired for defending the conduct of the election. Just hours before he was terminated on Nov. 17, 2020 — in a tweet by Trump himself — Krebs tweeted out a report by 59 election security experts concluding there was no credible evidence that computer fraud affected the election outcome.

What if, instead of providing cover for Trump's "idiotic" election fraud claims in his resignation letter, Barr had lived up to his oath and defied Trump as his predecessor, Jeff Sessions, had done?

Suppose that, instead of resigning quietly "to spend the holidays with his family," as Trump tweeted, Barr had held a prime-time news conference denouncing Trump's efforts to overturn the election. It

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We can't afford to leave legislation on the 1-yard line



Your Turn
Rep. Dan Wolgamott
Guest columnist

As a former left guard on the St. John's football team and current 9th grade football coach, I know that when you get the ball to the 1-yard line, you gotta work with your team and score.

That's where we're at in the state Legislature. Republicans and Democrats in the House and Senate have been working together all session long to advance important proposals down the field of legislative process and towards the end zone of the Governor's desk.

We had previously reached a bipartisan agreement dedicating \$4 billion to lower costs and provide tax relief, and \$4 billion in new investments to move Minnesota forward. Unfortunately, ne-

gotiations between lawmakers and the Governor recently reached an impasse, meaning these would-be wins are being left on the 1-yard line.

I'm calling on lawmakers from both parties to continue negotiating so the Governor can get us back on the field in a special session to score these legislative victories:

Tax cuts

As Minnesotans deal with soaring gas prices and inflation, now is the time to provide meaningful tax relief. That's why we need to pass our tax bill, which included the largest tax cuts in the history of our state.

Our tax package included the bill I co-authored to eliminate the tax on Social Security. Minnesota is one of only 12 states to tax Social Security, and repealing this tax would benefit 352,000 seniors.

In addition to cutting taxes for seniors, we also need to provide relief for families. That's why our bipartisan agreement included a renter's tax credit, an increase in the childcare tax credit, and a higher income threshold for the K-12 education tax credit. Overall, the agreement would have reduced total taxes by \$1.4 billion in the current biennium and \$2.4 billion in the next one.

Minnesotans across the state are struggling with high prices, and it's our duty to get this money back to them by passing this bill.

New investments

In addition to permanent, ongoing tax cuts, we need to make targeted investments to address critical needs across the state, many of which were nearly finalized.

We need new investments to support the efforts of law enforcement. That's

why I'm proposing legislation to fund recruitment and retention bonuses of \$5,000-\$10,000 for police officers, as well as scholarships and training opportunities to attract the next generation of law enforcement personnel. We need to ensure our police chiefs have the resources and personnel they need to keep our communities safe, which is why we need to pass our agreement to invest \$450 million in public safety.

As the father of two daughters, I know our students have been through a lot in the past two years. Mental health investments for students can't wait. That's why I'm advocating for a proposal to hire over a thousand support personnel like mental health providers, social workers, school counselors and school nurses. We need to support the academic, social, mental and physical health of our students by passing our

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The crisis on the southern border



Gerry Feld
Times Writers Group
St. Cloud Times
USA TODAY NETWORK

The crisis on the southern border blew up into a major catastrophe for the Biden administration on June 27. At approximately 6 p.m. local time on the outskirts of San Antonio, Texas, a worker in a nearby building heard screaming coming from a cargo van that was parked nearby with its rear door partially open. After further examination he observed human bodies lying dead on the floor.

Sixty-two people were found in the sweltering trailer with 48 already dead. Sixteen more were taken to nearby hospitals for medical care. As of July 3, the death toll had mounted to 53.

Something like this was bound to happen when illegal crossings of our southern border are at an all time high and continue to grow. According to Borderreport.com, migrant encounters on the border topped 2 million in 2021 and are on pace to meet or exceed that number in 2022.

Yet it's amazing the Biden Administration continues arguing the border is closed. Even after the horrifying find in San Antonio, White House Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre stuck firmly to the party line during a press gaggle on Air Force One on the way to Madrid, Spain. She said "We're focused on continuing our historic actions to disrupt dangerous smuggling networks, including through a new anti-smuggling campaign that just in the first two months resulted in over 1,800 arrests. But the fact of the matter is the border is closed."

If the border is closed, where are these 1,800 smugglers and their victims coming from? If press secretary Jean-Pierre's statement is accurate, why then is the Washington Post reporting in March of this year, "When the border patrol runs out of capacity and agents are too overwhelmed to process migrants and conduct patrols, authorities have reverted to releasing large numbers of migrants, asking them to report to U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE)"

Asking them to report? Does anyone actually believe 99% of the migrants crossing our southern border ever take time to look up an ICE official in Davenport, Iowa or Wahoo, Nebraska? What makes this entire scenario even more ridiculous, is that President Biden has done his best to stop ICE agents from doing their jobs and making arrests of undocumented persons.

Thomas Horton, who served as acting ICE director under former President Trump says: "The men and women of ICE, they took an oath to enforce immigration laws. It's unfortunate they can't do the job, and it's unfortunate that many

Luckily sound police work in San Antonio made it possible to arrest the people responsible for this tragedy and they will be held accountable. But how about the next tragedy? And how about deaths caused by Fentanyl coming across the border? Do we even want to go there?

criminals are going to be walking the streets of America because this administration simply thinks they're not important enough to take off the streets."

Luckily sound police work in San Antonio made it possible to arrest the people responsible for this tragedy and they will be held accountable. But how about the next tragedy? And how about deaths caused by Fentanyl coming across the border? Do we even want to go there?

In Tulare County California, two men were arrested for possessing 150,000 Fentanyl pills with a street value of \$750,000. The men planned to distribute their product through out the State of Washington. Eighteen hours later they walked free of jail because of a public safety algorithm used in the state. The algorithm looks primarily at criminal histories that makes risk assessments based on whether individuals are likely to be re-arrested, or they'll miss their court date, or if there is a risk for violence. However what the ridiculous algorithm did not take into consideration is that just 2 mg of Fentanyl is lethal, and that the Drug Enforcement Agency reports two out of every five counterfeit pills in the United States contain a lethal dose.

There's little doubt these men have been involved with Fentanyl before when you consider the dollar amount of product they had in their possession. These men are as dangerous as the criminals that placed the San Antonio victims in the trailer. It's time President Biden and Vice President Harris actually go down to the border and spend time with the border guards to see how bad the situation actually is. Because until they do, the safety of every American is at risk.

This is the opinion of Gerry Feld, whose column is published monthly. He writes about issues from a conservative perspective and is a published novelist.

pass meaningful bipartisan legislation.

This past session, we've teamed up to deliver a deal to replenish our state's Unemployment Insurance Trust Fund, prevent a tax hike on small businesses, and provide \$750 checks to 667,000 frontline workers (which you can now apply for at <https://frontlinepay.mn.gov>).

We also passed my bill to extend the workers' compensation presumption for first responders who contract COVID-19, funded solutions to the opioid crisis, made the largest investment in broadband our state has ever seen, supported nation-leading ALS research, reduced the cost of health insurance for those on the individual market, provided drought relief to farmers, and more.

I'm proud of what we've accomplished, but we can and must do more. Now is not the time to take our ball and go home. We're on the 1-yard line. Let's work together and score historic tax cuts and investments for Minnesotans.

State Rep. Dan Wolgamott is serving his second term in the Minnesota House for District 14B. A Democrat, Rep. Wolgamott serves as Assistant Majority Leader and resides in east St. Cloud.

We cannot wait for May; Let's get our legislators back to the table



Your Turn
Tami Calhoun
Guest columnist

The Minnesota Legislature failed us. Minnesotans are hurting, but lawmakers let the clock run out on the legislative session instead of acting.

I am extremely disappointed in the legislative outcome. Their efforts fell far short. They failed Minnesotans by not providing tax rebates or making investments in mental health programs, child-care, housing, education, employment and public safety.

Seriously?! We have a surplus, a tremendous surplus, which should have been easy to spend.

We have not yet sprung back from the pandemic's ravages on our economy. Without additional investment in nursing home reimbursements, many cash-strapped long-term care facilities likely will further limit admission of older

adults and people with disabilities.

Without an agreement on transportation, planned road projects will not be launched, and projects that are underway have been halted. In addition, Minnesota could miss out on \$100 million in federal funds if lawmakers don't approve state transportation funding. Now that is lost?!

The Legislature and Governor Walz should reconvene for a special session. There is no reason for the Legislature not to do right by Minnesotans who are hurting and a Minnesota infrastructure that is crumbling.

I listen to all options, work together, support each other; then I do the work. I get things done!

We cannot wait for May! I say let's get our legislators back at the table and solve this. We need solutions – and we need them now.

Tami Calhoun is a resident of St. Cloud and the DFL-endorsed candidate for State Representative District 14A. You can reach her at tami-formn@gmail.com.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Fix what's wrong

Abortion isn't a man's or political issue. It's a woman's, family and medical issue. It has been made into a rallying cry, and what does it do but stir people into divisions, the old trick of "divide and conquer!" Functioning on the level of "I'm right, you're wrong," distracts from solving the issue at hand: What/Who needs attention and care?

Abortion was a publicized issue when I supported a candidate in South Dakota who stood for helping all lives, not only smaller ones. Members of the

Republican Party can say that Democrats bring up such and such to score political points, well; this is calling the kettle black. We are led to ignore that all lives are sacred, from womb to tomb, and it will be our saving grace if we could accomplish that in this 21st century.

We are one family of human beings with one Mother Earth, and we need to recognize and fix the evils that befall us: war, hunger, thirst, gun violence, racism, greed, disregard for all life, persecution, pollution, gerrymandering, waste and corruption.

Leona Wieland, Sartell

Barr

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might have gotten him fired, at which point he could have become a constant media presence tirelessly explaining that the Department of Justice had thoroughly investigated Trump's claims and that there was nothing to them.

How would Jan. 6, 2021, have played out then?

Am I being too harsh on Barr? Perhaps. But Barr is the archetype for every Republican politician and every administration official who decided to go along to get along rather than publicly fight for what they knew was right. Maybe one Bill Barr could not have stopped the violent insurrection at the U.S. Capitol. But a hundred Bill Barrs, Liz Cheney, Adam Kinzinger and Brad Raffensperger – publicly declaring what we now know that Barr and almost everyone else in the administration privately admitted – would have.

But at the height of the effort to set aside the 2020 election, the attorney general chose to do nothing. As Cheney herself tweeted, "We take an Oath to defend the United States Constitution. That Oath must mean some-



Should William Barr, as attorney general of the United States, have done more to discredit Donald Trump's claim that the 2020 election was stolen? MANDEL NGAN/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES FILE

thing."

Let's not mince words. Bill Barr did not stand up to do the right thing. Instead, Barr tried to have it both ways. It should earn him nothing but contempt.

Chris Truax, a member of USA TODAY's Board of Contributors, is an appellate lawyer in San Diego and a member of The Guardrails of Democracy Project.

1-yard

Continued from Page 10A

agreement to invest \$1 billion in K-12 education. Also included in negotiations for our students is my bill to close the special education cross subsidy.

Another important area of investment is a bonding bill, where I've been pushing for the inclusion of St. Cloud State University's new Education and Learning Design Complex, as well as additional asset preservation requests for the university. This project will benefit 1,200 students and serve over 500 children and families per year, making St. Cloud a leader in education. We also need to support the children of Central Minnesota by securing funding for the Great River Children's Museum.

The previously agreed-to deal also focuses investments in workforce development, health and human services, roads and bridges, and other critical projects that will pay dividends for taxpayers now and into the future.

Building off of past successes

We can't afford to throw in the towel and quit on Minnesotans. This legislature can succeed by building off of our strong record of working together to

Lessons

Continued from Page 10A

crease in food costs for at-home consumption was 12.2%. The annual increase for home utilities (electricity) for refrigeration and cooking was 13.7%. Ingredients are a larger expense than energy, so let's assume that the approximate annual combined increase is 12.4%. That means my reimbursement increase is exactly half of my actual expense. Can I legally charge parents the difference? No. How is the difference

made up? Out of my wallet. How often does this disparity occur? Annually, so the problem is compounding.

Next, let's watch for the news report on the difficulties in finding childcare and watch the officials wring their hands as they lament the problem with special emphasis on wondering why childcare providers are leaving the profession in droves. Hmmm. I wonder why?

Times Writers Group member Karen Cyson is a child-care provider in Stearns County and the coordinator for Central Minnesota Mensa. Her column is published monthly.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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