

OPINION

“CONGRESS SHALL MAKE NO LAW...
ABRIDGING THE FREEDOM
OF SPEECH, OR OF THE PRESS;”

The First Amendment of the United States Constitution

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Editorial

Legislators we'll miss

Bakk and Tomassoni focused on problem-solving, not partisanship

One advantage of working in the news media, is that we regularly get the chance to talk at length with our various elected officials. Over the years, we've frequently talked with Sen. Tom Bakk, whose long career in state politics will soon come to an end.

While we haven't always agreed with Sen. Bakk, we've always been impressed with his approach to politics, which is focused on results. Sen. Bakk is the kind of politician that voters used to rate highly— effective, non-ideological, and focused on bringing home the bacon.

And we don't mean “bacon” in a pejorative sense. Throughout American history, voters have sent elected officials to their various capitals to fight for their interests, including as much of their piece of the pie as possible.

“Politics” has long been defined as the art and science of government, and it's an art and a science that Sen. Bakk was clearly able to master early in his 28 years in elected office. His retirement, along with that of Sen. David Tomassoni, another experienced, non-ideological senator from our region, represents a major loss for voters here.

We certainly weren't the only ones to recognize that Sen. Bakk and Sen. Tomassoni were cut from cloth much different from most politicians these days. Sen. Bakk spent the vast majority of his years in St. Paul in leadership, including as both minority and majority leader in the state Senate. That he was able to retain that leadership role during a sharply divided era in politics, speaks volumes about his pragmatism and his ability to find common ground, even among the sometimes fractious elements of his own caucus.

When Bakk and Tomassoni left the DFL caucus in the wake of the 2020 elections, it was just another strategic decision that allowed the two senators to leverage a narrow GOP majority in the Senate to further advance the interests of their districts. Bakk landed the key chairmanship of the Senate Capital Investment Committee and Tomassoni was installed as Senate President.

Even as he's heading out the door, Sen. Bakk is still trying to find a path forward for agreement on the uses for the state's record budget surplus. He's been on the phone with leaders in both parties making the case for an agreement that, if reached,

will provide real assistance to the region.

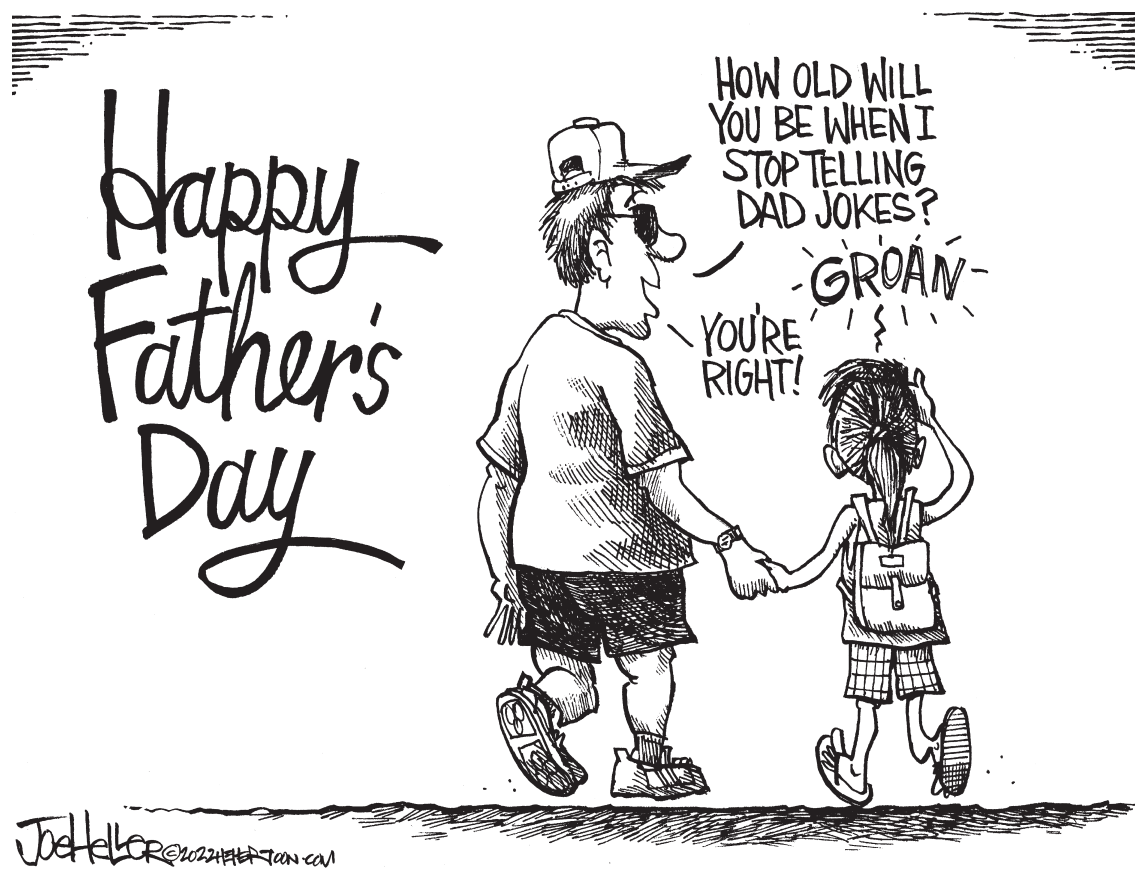
Among the major pieces of legislation still in limbo is the omnibus tax bill, which would, among many other things, provide a solution for the Ely School District's \$4 million shortfall in its ongoing school renovation. That project has been hampered by the rising cost of building materials during the COVID pandemic and without a legislative fix, the district is likely to face some very difficult choices. Sen. Bakk had engineered several provisions designed to help Ely as well as the Rock Ridge School District, which is experiencing similar problems with its own building project.

This is what legislators are supposed to do. Sen. Bakk spent his time in St. Paul working on solutions to problems facing his district. These aren't DFL or Republican problems. They're just problems and 95 percent of the time, the solutions are practical, not political or ideological.

It's probably difficult to remember that for many years, up until 1973, legislators in Minnesota were considered non-partisan and didn't run with party labels, a recognition that they were supposed to be problem solvers rather than partisans.

The various disagreements that are currently holding up most of the Legislature's work this year are examples of putting politics over problem solving. DFLers, who are certainly at risk of operating in the minority in both the House and Senate next year, should be doing whatever they can to cut a deal with the GOP, but they face pushback from some in their caucus who are more interested in partisan politics. It's probably worse on the GOP side, where Sen. Bakk notes many Republicans fear they'll face primaries from extremist groups in their party if they show any willingness to compromise with DFLers.

It's no wonder that the Legislature can rarely complete its work on time, and that the state regularly runs the risk of partial shutdowns over political brinkmanship. Legislators like Sen. Bakk and Sen. Tomassoni, who regularly put aside partisan considerations to pursue “the art and science of governance,” are an increasingly rare breed in St. Paul. Their absence, beginning next year, will certainly be felt.



Letters from Readers

ATV trail a poor fit for Eagles Nest area

I would like to highlight several issues regarding the proposed Prospector connector ATV trail that would run through the Eagles Nest Lakes area. First of all, this new portion would serve as a major connecting trail between a proposed ATV campground and the existing trails. It is meant to bring in as many out of town guests as possible to generate tourism dollars. It is not just for local residents to use. It is part of an 8-10 million dollar project to bring people in. There will be many, many ATV's using these trails. Secondly, our Eagles Nest community will not get any economic benefit from this project. Just the noise and disruption.

The ATV trail is not a good fit for the Eagles Nest area. People come to this area for the beauty, solitude, and peaceful lakes. We paid a lot of money for the property, pay a lot in taxes, and contribute to the community. The trail will be a major disruptive and negative influence. Sound travels a long way over water, well over a 100 cabin and home owners will be affected. There are legitimate safety concerns. The roads are narrow, curving, and at times do not have good sightlines. There is traffic from Bear Head State Park that will not be expecting ATV traffic.

Currently there is a working group, from both the Prospector ATV Club and Eagles Nest residents, researching other options. Both sides, along with local government agencies, need to work together to find the best route. The shortest or most direct route is not always the best. There are other options. I enjoy snowmobiling and the trails. There are several signs on the trails reminding us that the trails are a privilege, not a right. I respect that. We need to keep working to find the best solution.

Stephen Casey
Cabin owner on
Eagles Nest Lake 3
Eagan

Mesabi fails with its opinion writer

I was pleased to read the recent letters in the *Timberjay* that told the truth about multi-defective Donald Trump. It was a pleasure not to be found in the *Mesabi Tribune*, where Jesse White frequently criticizes Pres. Biden, most recently for proposing to help students - and the economy - with \$600 checks.

In response, Mr. White, who has ignored “the Donald's” endless immorality, ignorance, arrogance and disregard for law, criticized Nancy Pelosi for not wearing a mask while getting her hair done, devised a biased column titled “Money for Nothing and Your Votes for Free.”

Instead of appreciating an administration that is trying to help students directly, perhaps Mr. White would prefer the Republican way, the Bush/Reagan/Stockman way, by selling “trickle-down economics” in which the rich got tax cuts and the rest got next to nothing. Decades later, Stockman even admitted that trickle-down economics was intended to enrich their already wealthy friends.

Like Smilin' Pete Stauber, Mr. White has steadfastly supported the sociopathic Trump clan. Instead, he routinely criticizes Pres. Biden who inherited four years of chaos, illegalities, mismanagement and plummeting international respect - plus a Trump-inspired mob that soiled the halls of Congress.

All in all, the *Tribune* is a decent paper, but it made a mistake when it allowed a Trump-lover to leave his job as a sportswriter and enter the field of politics.

George Erickson
Eveleth

What does it mean to indigenize the USFS?

Earlier this year, news articles across the Great Lakes region were abuzz with a new archeological find: pottery fragments from 1,750 years ago were uncovered in the Boundary Waters Canoe

Area Wilderness on the Superior National Forest in northeastern Minnesota. Also in the news, researchers recently unearthed 23,000 year-old fossilized footprints of Indigenous Americans in present-day New Mexico, though this “discovery” comes as no surprise to the Indigenous peoples of the continent. What is the common thread in these two stories? The fact that Native Americans have been a part of Turtle Island, now known as the North American continent, since time immemorial.

Native Americans have been on the North American continent for at least 30,000 years. Prior to European colonization, the land we now call the United States was indigenized, meaning that it was influenced and actively managed by its original inhabitants. Native Americans are the first land stewards, farmers, and fire managers. Only with the arrival of European colonists did a rapid destabilization occur—the collapse of previously thriving bison, fish, plant, earthen and other economies and, likewise, the supporting ecosystems. Surviving Native Americans were summarily corralled and forced onto managed reservations with land boundaries. In the process, the indigenized systems in place, developed over tens of thousands of years, were discarded. Consequently, federal land management agencies and environmental organizations claimed the void.

Wherever we stand on this continent, we stand on Native land — previously indigenized land that has since been covered with layer upon layer of broken treaties and federal, state, private and political boundary lines.

Native peoples have indelible ties to the forests, grasslands, and waterways of this continent. As a federal agency that manages over 193 million acres of land, the U.S. Forest Service maintains unique and important relationships to Tribes. For the Forest Service to maintain authenticity in its commitment to land management and its service to people,

See **LETTERS...**pg. 5

Read any good book lately?

A rather startling and appalling statistic, came to my attention this last week: in a typical year, 57 percent of Americans do not read a single book. The average American spent seventeen minutes a day reading books and 5.4 hours on their phone (as of 2017.) I gleaned these bits of information not on the internet but



BETTY FIRTH

reading a fascinating and informative book, *Stolen Focus*, with the subtitle *Why You Can't Pay Attention—and How to Think Deeply Again*. Author Johann Hari has written for *The New York Times*, *Le Monde*, *The Guardian*, and other newspapers, authored two other books, and

that have been viewed over 80 million times.

Stolen Focus is worthy of reading and rereading, packed with well-documented information and analysis. Our change in reading habits is just one small, but important part of this portrait of factors connected with the attrition of focus and sustained attention. Hari looks behind the scenes of social media platforms and other businesses that have strategized to intentionally catch and fragment our attention for their profit. You might think,

“Well, that's how it is these days. I hate it, but nothing can be done about it,” but Hari disagrees with that thinking.

First, he explodes the myth of multi-tasking, a term coined when computer technology utilized multiple processors in one machine to handle two or more things simultaneously. MIT neuroscientist Earl Miller explained that given the fundamental structure of the human brain, it can handle only one or two thoughts at once, despite what employers would like to expect of their

employees. What's really happening is we are juggling mental tasks, switching our attention from one to the next and back again, and this reduces our ability to focus in several ways. Imagine you're paying bills and get a text, so you stop to read it, then return to your bills. It takes time to refocus, which causes a drop in your performance, as much as 20 to 30 percent less. If you are distracted by texts, emails, and phone calls throughout your

See **READING...**pg. 5