

OUR VIEW

National Guard's help needed longer

According to an AARP analysis of government data, nearly a third of the nation's 15,000 nursing homes reported a shortage of nurses or aides in December. Minnesota ranked among the worst, with more than 60% of the state's long-term care facilities reporting staffing shortages.

That is why Gov. Tim Walz's decision in November to deploy some 400 members of the state's National Guard to skilled-nursing facilities was a smart move. More than 22,000 elderly and vulnerable Minnesotans receive care at roughly 365 skilled-nursing facilities across the state.

Walz should be applauded for his efforts to help long-term care facilities that are woefully understaffed as they care for this state's elderly in one of the worst healthcare crises in modern history.

In Steele County, the Benedictine Living Community in Owatonna directly benefitted from the governor's unprecedented action.

Executive Director Lisa Kern applied for the assistance in November and just before Christmas, 20 soldiers who had received specialized training to serve as certified nursing assistants, temporary nursing aides and culinary staff arrived on the scene to assist residents and staff alike.

But as quickly as they arrived, the soldiers are now gone. Each facility that received help through the state's Long Term Care Response Team is allowed just three weeks of assistance.

Frankly, we don't think that's long enough and urge state officials to rethink the length of the Guard's stay – at Benedictine and all of the long-term care facilities that qualified for the program.

When Walz announced the program, he pledged "to do whatever it takes to help Minnesota's long-term care community get through this challenging time."

He needs to follow through on his promise and increase the time soldiers are allowed to remain at nursing homes. Three weeks is akin to offering the understaffed facilities a Band-Aid.



Hot Pursuit
RICK BUSSLER

Lights blazing, cameras rolling and sound equipment adjusting.

It may have looked a bit like Hollywood in the downtown area of Blooming Prairie, especially at the Steele County Times. Our small office was crammed with more cameras, lights and sound equipment than I've seen in quite a while. On top of all that, there were no less than 10 directors, producers, camera operators and others tripping over each other.

At one point, the excitement poured out into the streets of

Riess murder saga captures HBO's interest

Blooming Prairie, with yours truly walking down with a camera in front. It didn't take long for a few curious on-lookers to reach out to our office wondering what in the world was happening.

On Dec. 14, a crew from HBO in New York came to Steele County to begin piecing together a three-hour documentary on Lois Riess, the infamous killer from Blooming Prairie. HBO is an American pay television network by WarnerMedia Studios and Networks.

Most know the story, but in case you don't, Riess killed her husband in their rural Blooming Prairie home in March 2018. Then, she fled the state and ended up killing a woman she'd befriended

while on the run in Florida. She is now serving a life sentence without parole in the state women's prison in Shakopee.

This isn't the first time Riess has made national headlines. During her run from the law, many national TV shows picked up the story to help authorities catch her. It worked. A bartender at a Texas bar recognized Riess from TV coverage and called police to end a month-long manhunt.

The saga continued to be covered nationally and locally after Riess' capture and court hearings.

Last January, Dateline NBC showcased the Riess murders in a two-hour special. The show featured various law enforcement

officials, prosecutors, friends of Riess and people affected by the tragic outcome of Riess' killing spree.

When stories of local interest grab the attention of national media organizations, one of the first places they often reach out to is the local newspaper. As you may recall, the Times was thrust into covering what quickly became a national story beginning the weekend David Riess' body was discovered in his home. We were the first media outlet to break the story on our website. And, I might add, it generated the most activity to our website ever—27,000 views within the first couple of days.

During their recent visit, HBO producers See **RIESS** on A8 ▶

YOUR VIEW

Warmer temps here to stay

To-the-Editor: Warmer temperatures, not counting this month's arctic blasts, are the norm now. We can't escape it.

I'm a retired Air Force meteorologist who farms. During my 20 years in the Air Force, no one thought climate change would affect us during our lifetime. When I retired in 1992, there were no plans to change how the military operates or how they plan for military missions around the world. Now the military aggressively addresses how they have to adjust to the rising waters and temperatures, as well as what they can do to reduce their carbon footprint.

I'm doing the same thing with my farming operation. Gone are the days when tillage was the best practice. It allows too much soil and wind erosion and the loss of expensive fertilizer. Our lakes and rivers don't need fertilizer and valuable soil mixing into their clean water. Now I do no-till and strip-till along with cover crops. It's not been an easy transition, but I have to make it work.

The farmers who lead in these changes have been doing it for decades; they find it reduces costs while yields don't suffer.

Hopefully help is on the way that quickly addresses the hotter world. There is a bill in Congress that would put a fee on carbon that comes out of the ground in order to reduce consumption. All the money collected would come back to consumers to spend on energy resources and products that use less or no carbon. This is an issue that requires all of us to contact our political leaders to strongly encourage them to enact a carbon fee and dividend law now.

We all have a different timeline when we've had the "Aha" moment such that we can no longer accept the detrimental climate impacts on our earth and society as the status quo. Please reflect and act! One no cost but effective way to get involved, for the sake of your kids and grandkids, is to join Citizens Climate Lobby at www.citizensclimatelobby.org.

Paul Knutson
Owatonna

GUEST COLUMN

Fear is a serious matter

BY JAN MITTELSTADT TIPPETT

Fear is a terrible, crippling emotion.

It can keep us prisoners in our homes or looking over our shoulder. It can keep us from doing things we might enjoy or it can result in horrible consequences from inappropriate responses fueled by fear. It can keep us from trying new things or making new friends.

It is a serious matter. We all have fears. Those who fear nothing are probably too reckless and take too many chances.

A little fear is a healthy thing. It provides a reason for locking one's doors or wearing a seatbelt or getting vaccinated.

I would probably not be referred to as timid or bashful by most people, despite the fact that I try to convince someone that I am. I've been described as a risk taker – and for the most part I am and I do.

Except for two matters, I am basically brave. But when it comes to my two big fears, I am as helpless as a baby. My palms sweat. My breath quickens. I won't go and I won't do it.

I'm scared to death of heights and snakes.

And, dear readers three, I lived in the Arizona desert and the high desert of Rapid City, S.D., where rattlesnakes abound for some 15 years and believe me just thinking about them gives me the willies.

I hate snakes. I hate everything about them. I had snakes under my front porch, in my driveway, and on the sidewalk and wondered if I could even leave the house. I don't like to see pictures of snakes. The sight of a snake slithering about in a move or television show makes me turn away or cover my eyes.

Ick. Shudder. My skin crawls. I don't even know why I fear

snakes. I just do. I'm not a big fan of anything that crawls, including worms. I conquered worms the first time I stuck one on a hook. I didn't like it but I could do it.

I figure that this healthy respect (also known as fear) will keep me distanced from the reptiles, up to an including at least six feet away from the glass enclosure at the zoo.

Heights are another thing. I am afraid of being anywhere over three feet from the ground, if I can look down and see ground between my feet or out the car window on a bridge and see lots of water between me and death.

Surprising to me, this fear of heights doesn't include flying. I feel comfortable in an airplane and that may be because the floor is solid.

Put me in a stadium with open bleachers and I can't stop clinging down to a seat or a friend. A ladder strikes

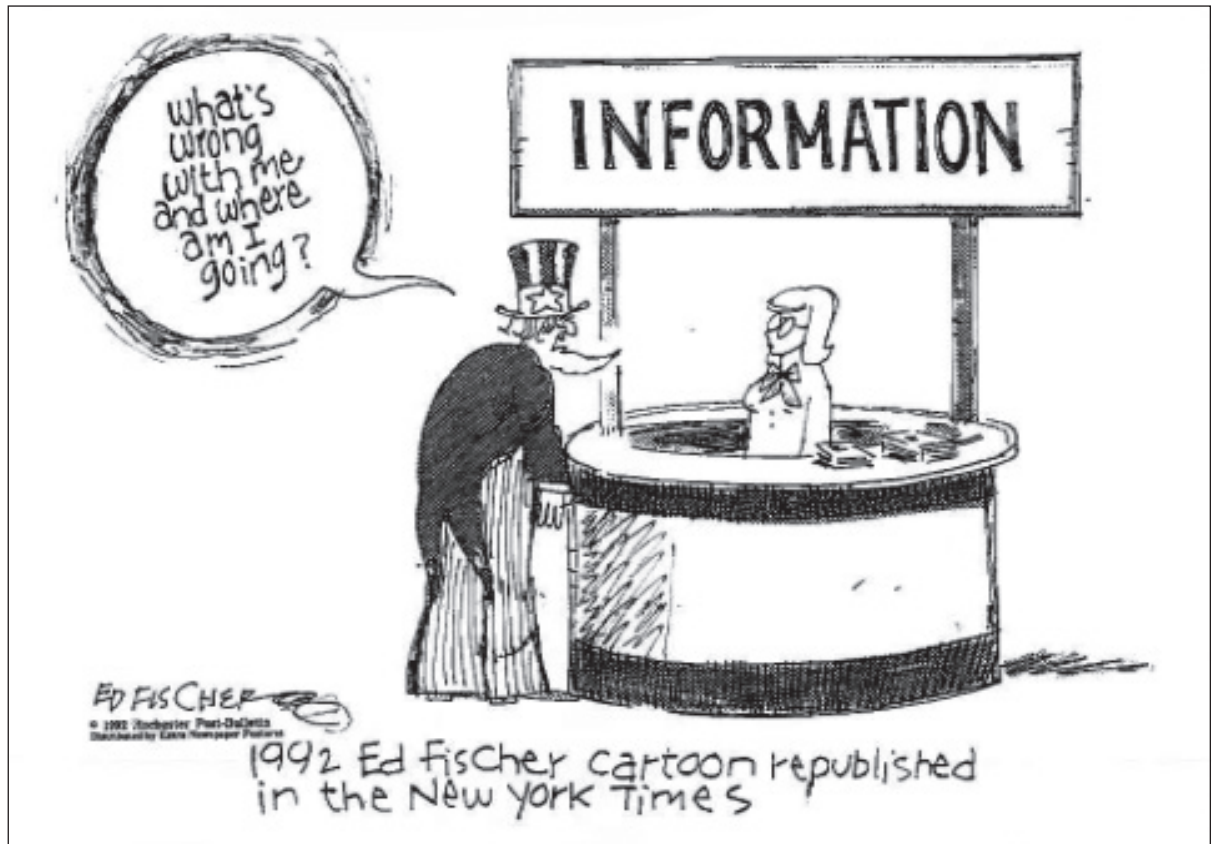
fear in my heart. A gondola or ski lift or a carnival ride makes me feel woozy and/or queasy.

I am able to go up ladders or ride in mountain gondolas as long as I don't look down – ever. I spent the afternoon 45 years ago in the attic garage at the family home because I couldn't make myself take the first step of the ladder. It's a good thing my brother came home and helped me or I'd still be there.

No doubt, there must be a way to cure myself of these fears but sticking to my resolve about staying away from snakes and heights seems to be working. What could be worse than an army of snakes on a roof?

I can't think of a thing.

Jan Mittelstadt Tippett grew up in Owatonna. She is a retired newspaper publisher and editor who came back to the area a few years ago.



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