

Opinion



Fooled out of a quarter ... of a billion ... dollars

'Everybody plays the fool." —*The Main Ingredient, 1972*
I won't bother reasoning with you.

As I've said before in this space, it's my opinion that you folks who support Donald Trump are, by definition, incapable of that function, so it's foolish to even try. You may think that's harsh. I think it's time-saving.

But I do have a question for you: Don't you feel kind of stupid right now? Doesn't the revelation that it was all a con leave you feeling like a sucker? Doesn't simple human pride have you smarting, at least a little bit?

Or maybe you have no idea what I'm talking about. After all, Fox "News" and other elements of the conservative media omnibus have studiously avoided giving much attention to the hearings of the House select committee investigating the attempted coup of Jan. 6, 2021. For the rest of us, they've become must-see TV, but you've likely been shielded from them.

So you may not have heard Monday's revelation that not even members of Trump's own inner circle — his daughter, his aides, his attorney general — believed his absurd claim that he was cheated out of the 2020 election. Lawyer Eric Herschmann thought it was "nuts." Attorney General William Barr feared your guy was "detached from reality."

But — and here's the part that relates to you — even though his own people told him quite clearly that there was no election fraud, he still told you something else: a bizarre fable about a vast and byzantine conspiracy involving Democrats, Republicans, poll workers, truck drivers, a polling machine manufacturer and — who knows? — maybe Bigfoot on the grassy knoll. We all know how that lie brought thousands of you to the National Mall in the attack on the U.S. Capitol. What is less often discussed is that he also used this lie to tap folks like you for donations to the tune of a quarter of a billion dollars.

It bears repeating: a quarter ... of a billion ... dollars.

As the committee established in a video presentation, you were told in relentless email solicitations that your money was needed to stop the so-called "left-wing mob" from stealing the election. Your donations, he claimed, would go to something called the Official Election Defense Fund. But as Trump officials now admit, no such fund ever existed. Your money went elsewhere, including to the "Trump Hotel Collection."

So yeah, to quote Denzel Washington in "Malcolm X:" "You been had! You been took! You been hoodwinked! Bamboozled!"

That should make you angry, but it probably doesn't. Over 40 years of research has firmly established an odd fact about us humans. If we are deeply



LEONARD PITTS

Donald Trump doesn't love you. He is a con man from Queens who cares about nothing that doesn't line his pockets or fatten his ego. Hundreds of you are now imprisoned or facing indictment because of him. And he's taken you for a quarter of a billion dollars, besides. But sure, you go right on believing in him. Everybody plays the fool.

invested in a belief, we find it almost impossible to admit — even to ourselves — that we are wrong. Indeed, if confronted with incontrovertible proof that we've made a mistake, we'll double down on the mistake rather than embrace the truth.

Which is scary, because who has ever been more deeply invested in anything than you are in Trump? But as it says in the wise old song quoted above, "Falling in love is such an easy thing to do, and there's no guarantee that the one you love is gonna love you."

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Some of us more than others.

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OUR VIEW

Let golf course be part of a greater (w)hole

In November 2016, the City of Rochester released a large document entitled "Soldiers Field Park Master Plan Outline." This 42-page proposal, created with the assistance of two Minneapolis consulting firms, included four "Preliminary Concepts" for a possible redesign of the park.

One of those concepts retained the existing 18-hole golf course. Another shrunk the golf course to nine holes, while the other two eliminated golf entirely.

Six years later, we're down to just three preliminary concepts — one with 18 holes, one with nine, one without golf — so that's progress, right? At this rate, the actual work of redesigning and modernizing Soldiers Field Park will be completed the same year this year's high school graduates start signing up for senior golf leagues.

Yes, we know that haste makes waste, and we don't want Rochester to rush the planning for what could and should become the crown jewel in the city's parks system. Few cities have a 140-acre chunk of green space so near downtown, and Rochester has the opportunity to create something truly remarkable on land that 98 years ago was a pasture. The city needs to get this right, and it needs to get it right the first time.

But there's a difference between "Measure twice, cut once," and paralysis by analysis.

City leaders and parks officials have spent more than enough time gathering community feedback and hard data about the public golf course at Soldiers Field. The short, flat, walkable 18-hole layout is undeniably popular among seniors, beginners and less-skilled players, and for the past decade, these golfers have shown up and spoken up every time officials talked about reducing the course to nine holes or eliminating it altogether.

We get it. We see the value in a public, affordable, walkable golf course located in close proximity to high-density downtown housing, established residential neighborhoods and even a state university campus. Fifty years from now, we hope golfers are still shaking their heads after chunking approach shots into the Zumbro River.

But we also hope that 50 years from now, people are coming to Soldiers Field Park to play pickleball — a sport that continues to explode in popularity. We hope people are curling on both indoor and outdoor ice sheets.

We hope the park is home to an aquatic center that will give Rochester families a reason to stop driving to Kasson or Stewartville on hot summer days. We hope there's a well-manicured arboretum/botanical garden where visitors and residents alike can enjoy quiet walks on shady trails or simply sit on a bench and smell lilacs as they listen to gurgling fountains.

We hope there are more picnic shelters. We hope for a wide-open lawn where UMR students can toss a Frisbee or a football between classes. We hope there's a dog park.

To turn these hopes into reality, nine holes of the golf course will likely need to go away — and that's a trade the city should be willing to make.

The reality is that just 8% of the U.S. population plays golf, and Rochester currently has 63 city-maintained holes. Another half-



Post Bulletin file photo

Soldiers Field Golf Course offers appealing green space within a stone's throw of downtown Rochester.

dozen 18-hole layouts are available for public play in Rochester and the surrounding communities.

A recent study by the National Golf Foundation indicated that Rochester's city-owned golf courses are "producing activity and revenue well below the expected standard," and that Rochester has reached "a key moment in addressing the condition of facilities, as all four courses have significant capital needs."

While we don't expect city-owned golf courses to turn a profit, there is such a thing as responsible stewardship of taxpayer dollars. Rochester's golf courses are currently a drag on the city budget, and while the COVID-19 pandemic caused a sudden resurgence of golf's popularity, we wouldn't want the city to "double down" on golf based on the expectation that this resurgence will be permanent.

We accept the reality that it's time for Rochester reduce the amount of space and resources it devotes to golf, and eliminating nine holes at Soldiers Field is the right decision, especially if doing so creates new opportunities.

But we'd offer one caveat.

Rochester needs a big-picture vision of how its parks connect to and complement each other. That's especially true of what we'll call the "Big Three" parks, which include Silver Lake Park, Soldiers Memorial Field Park and Graham Park. All three are showing their age, and none of them currently come close to fulfilling their full potential as green spaces and recreational areas.

If and when Rochester commits to cutting nine holes from Soldiers Field Golf Course and creating a space that attracts a wider variety of users, the bulldozers shouldn't get busy until until the city knows at least the broad outlines of what will happen at Graham Park and Silver Lake Park. After all, some of the ideas currently being discussed for Soldiers Field Park might actually be better placed elsewhere.

The goal should be for people to see these three parks as parts of a well-thought-out whole, connected by a pedestrian trail that lets people walk or bike from the fairgrounds grandstand to the Soldiers Field Arboretum, then on to the splash pad at Silver Lake Park — all without having to worry about crossing a single street.

They will, however, still need to be alert for someone yelling "Fore!" after hooking a drive over the fence along South Broadway or Highway 14.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

LIGHT POLLUTION IS A PROBLEM IN ROCHESTER'

Would the leaders of Rochester consider a non-upward streetlight system in further upgrades? Light pollution has become an issue for

star-gazers in Rochester for quite some time. I understand that cities such as Lake City regulate light leak. **Rick Dahl**, Rochester

GOT AN OPINION? WE WANT TO HEAR IT

The Opinions page is where Post Bulletin readers share opinions and gain perspective on different points of view. Here's how to get involved.

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sistency.

Guest columns: We also welcome columns on important public issues. Ideal length is up to 600 words, and we prefer guest columns that are exclusive to the Post Bulletin.

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U.S. President Donald Trump speaks to his supporters at the Save America Rally on the Ellipse on Jan. 6, 2021, near the White House in Washington, D.C.