

Opinion

Let's talk about the Nazis, in the room and outside it

We'll get to the Nazi flags in a moment. First, however, let us turn to Merriam-Webster for clarification of a point recently made in this space that left a few of you vexed. It came in a passage that noted the right wing's attempted takeover of state voting apparatuses and contended that because of it, 2024 could be the last meaningful election we ever have. "Fascism is on our doorstep," it said. It seemed a self-evident truth, but it didn't sit well with some on the right. "You have become more hysterical and hyperbolic," said "Jack."

"A great example of why Dems aren't taken seriously any more," said "Eric."

"(Fascism) would be the mask and vaccine mandates," said "James."

Hence, the recourse to Merriam-Webster, where we



LEONARD PITTS

learn that fascism is, in fact, "a political philosophy, movement, or regime . . . that exalts nation and often race above the individual and that stands for a centralized autocratic government headed by a dictatorial leader . . . and forcible suppression of opposition."

So let's parse that, shall we? Who do we know who exalts nation ("I am a nationalist, OK?") and race ("I want [President Obama] to show his birth certificate.")? Who can we think of who admires centralized, autocratic government ("[Kim Jong Un]

is the head of a country, and I mean, he is the strong head. He speaks and his people sit up at attention. I want my people to do the same.") What recent president so believes in forcible suppression of the opposition that protesters in Washington were gassed and beaten so he could walk through Lafayette Square, while those in Portland were dumped into unmarked vans for unstated reasons by unidentified federal agents?

The answer, of course, is Donald Trump, to whom much of the right swears fealty above the Constitution itself. Twenty months after Joe Biden won the presidency in an election that was not close, most of them still insist he did not. As noted previously, a number of those election deniers are seeking – or already hold – offices allowing them to oversee voting in battleground states. And Jonathan Swan of Axios recently reported that

supporters of the disgraced former president are planning to fire thousands of career civil servants from government posts and replace them with loyalists should he ooze his way back into office.

Friends, these are structures of fascism. The word describes not "mask mandates," but strongman rule – think Putin, Kim or Castro – in which "Dear Leader" is unbound by such trivialities as the laws, the courts or the ballot. This is what Trump desires to have – and the political right aspires to give him. The rest of us would do well to understand this, given the mortal threat it poses.

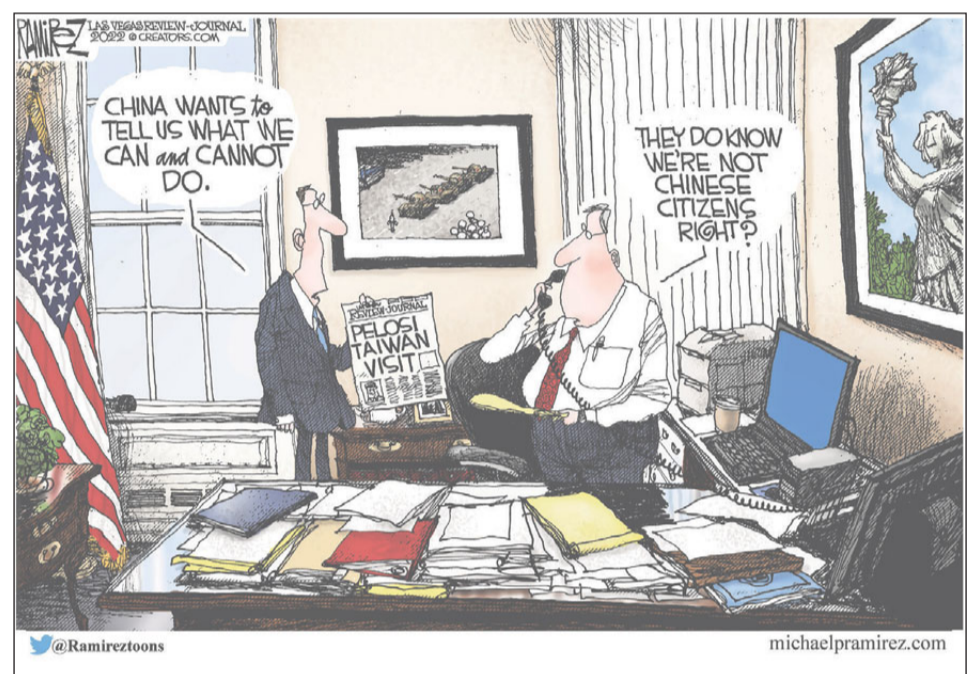
And that brings us to the story of the swastika flags – which offers an eloquent rebuke to the denialism so prevalent on the right. It seems Hitler's banners were carried by demonstrators who turned up outside a conservative

gathering last week in Tampa. The Florida Holocaust Museum was, not surprisingly, appalled and Turning Point USA, sponsor of said gathering promptly distanced itself. "We have no idea who they are or why they're here," said spokesman Andrew Kolvet.

Which was naive, if not downright disingenuous, for the representative of a convention whose attendees worship Trump like Jesus. But then, he might have choked on the likely truth. Namely, that the Nazis simply sought the company of like-minded people.

And knew just where to find it.

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OUR VIEW

Cascade Lake Park should not fall prey to the geese

On a glorious afternoon this week in Rochester, Cascade Lake Park bustled with activity. Some kids pumped water into a meandering artificial creek bed. Others tested their skills on a playground structure built of logs, complete with cargo nets for climbing. It was a bit warm for the big metal slide, but conditions were perfect for youngsters to try their hand on the huge musical instruments that dot the park's landscape.

Adults relaxed in the pergola and chaise lounge area, perhaps after taking a stroll on the well-manicured garden paths. And all the while, a constant stream of bikers, runners and dog-walkers cruised by on the paved trail that encircles Cascade Lake.

It was a perfect scene. Well, almost perfect.

A few yards from the park, behind a chain-link fence, lies a beach that should be the focal point of the new crown jewel of Rochester's parks system. It's big enough to accommodate hundreds of swimmers and sunbathers, with water that deepens very gradually from shore, rather than dropping off quickly. The water itself appears almost crystal-clear and inviting.

But on this glorious summer afternoon, not a beach blanket or beach umbrella could be found on the sand. Nary a child was wading in the water or building a sand castle. The gate to the beach was wide open, but no one showed any interest in using it. No one, that is, except the geese.

Frankly, it's disgusting. The closer you get to the water's edge, the more poop you'll encounter. The geese themselves have almost no fear of people, and they behave as if they own the place – which seems to be the case.

A sign posted on the fence next to the gate warns of elevated bacteria levels in the lake, and that ingesting the water could make you sick. "Swimming is NOT recommended."

Ya think?

Granted, Cascade Lake Park is still a work in progress, and goose control ranks fairly low on the city's priority list for the area – a list that currently includes construction of

a performance amphitheater and fishing pier.

And yes, we must acknowledge that geese aren't the only cause of problems at the beach. Any Minnesota lake with warm, shallow water can be prone to bacterial problems in mid-summer, especially when heavy rains bring a lot of runoff.

But you don't have to be a water-quality scientist to see that geese are a big part of the problem at Cascade Lake Park. No one wants to watch their barefoot children navigate a minefield of goose poop on their way to the water, and what's the point of letting kids swim if you worry every time they get splashed in the face?

While the city's options are somewhat limited when dealing with a federally protected waterfowl species, its hands aren't totally tied. At the very least, we'd like to see some canine "decoys" that might temporarily push the geese elsewhere. Noise deterrence is another option, as would be the use of dogs specifically trained to harass geese without harming them. And, we strongly support the use of any legal means to reduce the nesting success of geese that lay their eggs in Rochester parks. Goslings are adorable, but they grow up WAY too quickly.

But ultimately, we believe the city might need to try an additional strategy; namely, the creation of a grassy, lawn-like area on the other side of the lake that will essentially lure the geese away from the park itself.

This would be a "If you can't beat them, join them" plan. Geese don't like shorelines with tall vegetation, but they love open, grassy areas along the water's edge – so why not give it to them? Fence the area off and prohibit people and dogs from entering. Such an effort might seem to be at cross purposes with other goose-control methods, but Rochester needs to explore all options.

When all is said and done, the city will have spent about \$15 million in local and state funds to create Cascade Lake Park. For that kind of investment, Rochester residents should end up with something better than another version of "goose poop park."

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

SCHOOL BOARD CANDIDATES MAKING FALSE CLAIMS

Kudos to the League of Women Voters and the Rochester Public Library for their Candidate Forum Program. Last week I attended the RPS School Board Candidate Forums and my eyes were really opened. Wow!

There is a slate of candidates (4YourChildren) that is very well-organized and well-funded. However, this slate is absolutely frightening in its beliefs and statements and if elected would do irreparable harm to the students and staff at RPS. Among other things, the three candidates on this slate who spoke made outlandish, unfounded assertions, displayed lack of knowledge of how funding works for public schools, and seemed to espouse teaching techniques and practices from the 19th Century. It is NOT okay

for anyone to make false claims about others, but the people from this slate did so to a great extent. If elected, this would normalize spreading lies and vitriol and would be detrimental to all students and staff, as well as to our community.

Conversely, candidates Nathan, Marvin, Yussuf, Cook and Chief were respectful and used facts and data in their responses.

Facts. Are. Important.
Honesty. Is. Important.
Don't be misled by the "4YourChildren" slate and their signs. Rochester will NOT be well-served if they are elected. I will be voting on Aug. 9 for Marvin, Nathan, Cook and Workman.

Janine Yanisch, Rochester

MOVING SILVER LAKE DAM NEEDED FOR ADA REASONS

Recent editorials about the Silver Lake Dam have neglected to state the reason the city has made plans to relocate the present dam.

Under the current Americans with Disabilities Act guidelines, a proposed handicap-accessible underpass at the North Broadway bridge cannot be built because the current dam would intersect the east side ramp.

The city's solution is a new dam, built 500 feet upstream, that will allow for construction of proper ramps and help eliminate a dangerous car/pedestrian intersection at the bridge while preserving Silver Lake for its original intended purpose as a recreational site.

Lee Hilgendorf, Rochester



Joe Ahlquist / Post Bulletin

The Silver Lake dam April 6 in Rochester.



Geese Tuesday at Cascade Lake Park.

Contributed / Eric Atherton

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