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THE OPINION PAGE

In the Mail: letters@gfherald.com; Box 6008, Grand Forks, N.D. 58206

OUR VIEW

Push ahead on sports gaming laws

Herald editorial board
More than 30 states allow some form of legal sports betting, yet Minnesota doesn't. It means the state is missing out on the opportunity to tax something that already exists, whether online, through other states or in office pools across Minnesota.

Finally, it appears Minnesota is ready to acknowledge what so many others already know: That legalizing sports gaming is not only wanted by many but also that it's an easy revenue source for the state.

This progress is good, and let's hope the Minnesota Legislature acts during this year's session to put legalized sports gaming on the books.

Perhaps now is the time to say what we have written in this space before: "We aren't necessarily pro-gambling. We are for laws that legalize the obvious will of the people. People in Minnesota and North Dakotans already are gambling legally, and they have numerous ways to do it. Americans have been illegally betting on sports events for more than a century, and states should just as well take advantage of it. We see gambling as a pastime, and there is nothing whatsoever wrong with, say, buying a Powerball ticket or visiting an American Indian casino. We realize pathological gamblers exist, and we know legalizing sports betting will only raise temptation for those who struggle with gambling addiction."

When we first wrote that, in August of 2019, there were only 10 states that had legalized sports betting. Of course, that number has essentially tripled since then.

It's time for Minnesota to make the move. North Dakota – another state that followed rather than led in this effort – allows limited sports gaming in a tribal casino, but should expand it further. States are able to make this decision on their own after the Supreme Court, in 2018, struck down a federal law that prohibits sports betting in states that didn't already have it established.

States aren't getting rich on legalized sports betting, but putting it into law does create a new revenue stream.

Last year, the National Conference of State Legislatures did a study that showed that New Jersey has the largest sports betting market. In 2020, the report noted, New Jersey saw \$49.4 million in new tax revenue – most of it coming via bets made on mobile phones. In Pennsylvania, the revenue was \$38.7 million. The study also noted that sports wagering revenues were lower in states that don't allow mobile bets. Some states brought in only a few million dollars from sports betting.

According to Forum News Service reporting, the proposed bill in Minnesota would legalize sports gaming at tribal casinos, electronically and at race tracks in the Twin Cities area. The word "electronically" is important, since it provides the best opportunity to capture the most possible taxable revenue.

Minnesota lawmakers should push this through – this year.

North Dakota has ties to Ukraine

The crisis in Ukraine may have become a war by the time you read this. I'm writing on Sunday afternoon, Feb. 20, as Russian troops mass along Ukraine's borders and blockade its shipping and as Russian partisans stir up more trouble in eastern Ukraine. While all this seems distant from North Dakota, the consequences either way will have ramifications worldwide.

North Dakotans have a special reason to be interested in developments in Ukraine. Many North Dakotans came from there. There's even a town in North Dakota named for Ukraine's capital, Kyiv. It's spelled Kief on state maps, because that was the conventional English spelling for the city when Ukrainians settled there. Later, the Ukrainian city name was spelled Kiev.

Orthography, defined as "the conventional spelling system of a language," is not the only aspect of Ukraine that's a little, well, mixed up. It's impossible to know how many Ukrainians came to North Dakota, because what we now know as Ukraine was divided among several countries, including Russia, Austria-Hungary and Romania. Census reports listed arrivals under the country of origin, not ethnic identity.

Likewise, not all immigrants from Ukraine were ethnically Ukrainian. Many were German speakers, the people now often mistakenly referred to as "German-Russians." Their ethnic societies commonly use the term "Germans from Russia," but this is not entirely correct either. Some clarity is achieved by using the description "Odessa



MIKE JACOBS

Germans," or "Black Sea Germans," as these are portions of Ukraine.

But this approach diminishes the number of people of German ethnic heritage who came from the Russian Empire, where their ancestors had settled in the 18th century at the invitation of Catherine the Great. The empress admired Germany and wanted to recreate it in lands that she controlled.

The history of the Germans in Ukraine is horrific. During World War II, thousands were uprooted and transported eastward deep into ethnically Russian territory. Many thousands died in famines that the Soviet government has been accused of creating.

Ethnic Ukrainians suffered, too, but many were complicit in the crimes of World War II, a fact that blemishes Ukrainian history. Ukrainian Jews were victims en masse. Yevgeny Yetushenko's poem "Babi Yar" recalls those horrors.

In the North Dakota context, Ukrainians are usually thought of as "westerners" because the largest immigrant colonies settled west of the Missouri River, especially north of Belfield, where a village named Ukraina once existed. Only a cemetery remains.

The generalization that Ukrainians are confined to the western part of North Dakota is a mistake. Ukrainians settled in many places in the state, including its northeasternmost

corner. St. John's Ukrainian Orthodox Church in Pembina has been restored and listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Several other Pembina County communities have Ukrainian roots.

Ukrainians settled in McLean County in the central part of the state, where their community continues to flourish. Wilton, about 25 miles north of Bismarck, also has Ukrainian roots, and there are many other such communities scattered across the state.

My introduction to Ukrainian culture came through the church. The nuns who conducted catechism classes at Queen of the Most Holy Rosary Catholic Church in Stanley, my home town, were keen to teach us the difference between the "true church" and Byzantine Rite Catholics and Orthodox Christians. We were schooled on the symbols. The Roman cross has just one crossbar, the Orthodox at least two and often three, the lower of which is set at a slant. In Roman Catholic churches, the sign of the cross is made by touching the left shoulder first and then the right. It's done from right to left in Orthodox and Byzantine Catholic tradition.

The opportunity to attend an Orthodox service didn't arise for me until I visited Ukraine in 1991, while it was still part of the Soviet Union. Kyiv is an especially beautiful city, and its crown jewel is St. Sophia's Cathedral, originally built a millennium ago.

My interest in Ukraine was piqued early in my newspaper career, when I worked for The Dickinson Press. I soon made the acquaintance of Agnes

Palanuk. We called her "Hurricane Agnes" for her untiring efforts to promote Ukrainian culture and history. These included bringing Ukrainian pastries to The Press office and inviting its staff to the Palanuk Ranch on the lip of the Badlands northwest of Dickinson.

I returned these favors with articles about her efforts to preserve and celebrate Ukrainian culture in the area. Among these was a folk dance troupe that performed the kind of traditional dances made famous among Americans through the movie "Fiddler on the Roof."

Her efforts led to the establishment of The Ukrainian Cultural Institute in Dickinson and to an annual festival celebrating Ukrainian culture and history in North Dakota. She is surely a heroine among Ukrainian-Americans.

Ted Pedeleski has to be counted a hero. Pedeleski, who grew up in southwestern North Dakota, taught political science at UND. He wrote extensively about Ukrainian heritage. The most readily accessible of his work is his essay in "Plains Folk/North Dakota's Ethnic History," edited by William Sherman and Playford Thorson. Father Sherman served St. Michael's Catholic Church in Grand Forks and taught at NDSU; Thorson taught history at UND.

Pedeleski's is a deeply researched and thoughtful presentation of the Ukrainians who settled in North Dakota, and establishes emphatically the importance of Ukrainian settlement in the state.

Mike Jacobs is a former editor and publisher of the Grand Forks Herald.

DOUBLE PLAY



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