



Carmage Walls
Commentary Prize

2019 Entry Form

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What is the subject/title of the entry? A selection of John Brummett's columns from the spring of 2019

Date(s) of publication?

Is your newspaper under 50,000 circulation or above 50,000 circulation? Above

Please give a brief explanation of issues discussed and the results achieved. (This space will expand as you type in your comments.) John closely follows every session of the Arkansas General Assembly. Call it his job.

This entry focuses on the Confederate star on the Arkansas flag and the aftermath of a bill.

More heat to come

After the fire

All that smoke streaming for months from beneath the ground to waft across portions of residential Bella Vista has created considerable heat.

Between the outcry from a motivated neighborhood group and recent lawsuits, including the latest filed by Jim "Perennially Persistent" Parsons of Bella Vista, the legal after-effects from the much publicized stump-dump fire will smolder well into 2019. At question: Who will rightfully pay for the mess?

Chris Nelson with wife Sonja said he began gathering data soon after the fire started in the Trafalgar Road unpermitted residential section dumping ground leased from Blue Mountain Storage by the Bella Vista Property Owners Association and also used by Cooper Communities Inc. until 2016. His family lives 1,250 feet from the smoldering dump. A U.S. Army veteran and small business owner, Nelson understands emergency response methods.

"I initially flew the site with my drone a few times a month because after the initial blaze in July, I assumed the fire department had it under control. But the odor changed to a more noxious smell in November.

"After the first legal meeting about the fire, I began to identify the amount of people having medical conditions, much like our family, wasn't a coincidence, or only from trees or yard debris. My neighbors got organized and we started demanding answers after a city council meeting where, once again, the mayor and city council had nothing to say about the situation."

A Dec. 1 community meeting organized by his small group provided minimal information. However, he'd continued flying his drone over the smoldering site as he investigated further using photography and video skills. He said he found construction waste such as polybutylene pipe, PVC pipe, siding and a small barrel. "Some days there's blue smoke and others it's white," he added.

Nelson said his group installed monitors to determine the air quality. "We have filed multiple FOIA requests to the city and found the city was not engaged with getting ahead of this until after citizens got organized. There was very minimal engagement until the end of November," he told me.

An Aug. 2 state Department of Environmental Quality report contained photos revealing solid waste in the dump. However, Nelson said his group was told it was nothing until after EPA tests came back. "For almost four months officials told residents there was nothing to worry about as smoke infiltrated their homes and people were getting sick." His group established a website at www.bvstopthesmoke.org.

Nelson said he is "wearing many hats" in efforts to get appropriate action that would remove residents from harm's way and finally get the nearly eight-month-long fire extinguished.



Mike Masterson

He also said he's been working with the High Heat Fire Specialists company from Ohio which "guarantees" it can get the fire out in a matter of days for \$3 million, rather than the estimated \$29 to \$35 million. Sounds like a deal to me.

Nelson said his "educated opinion is Cooper Communities used this site to dump a lot of their construction waste while they were building Bella Vista. Additionally in 2008 CCI dumped their concrete mixing drums in the site with their logos that have since been removed. There have also been reports of city trucks dumping asphalt there.

In October I was running 8-minute miles. I am now on four inhalers and have experienced chemical burns on my face and arms from helping neighbors on a particularly bad night and a neighbor's house was engulfed in smoke from a flare-up."

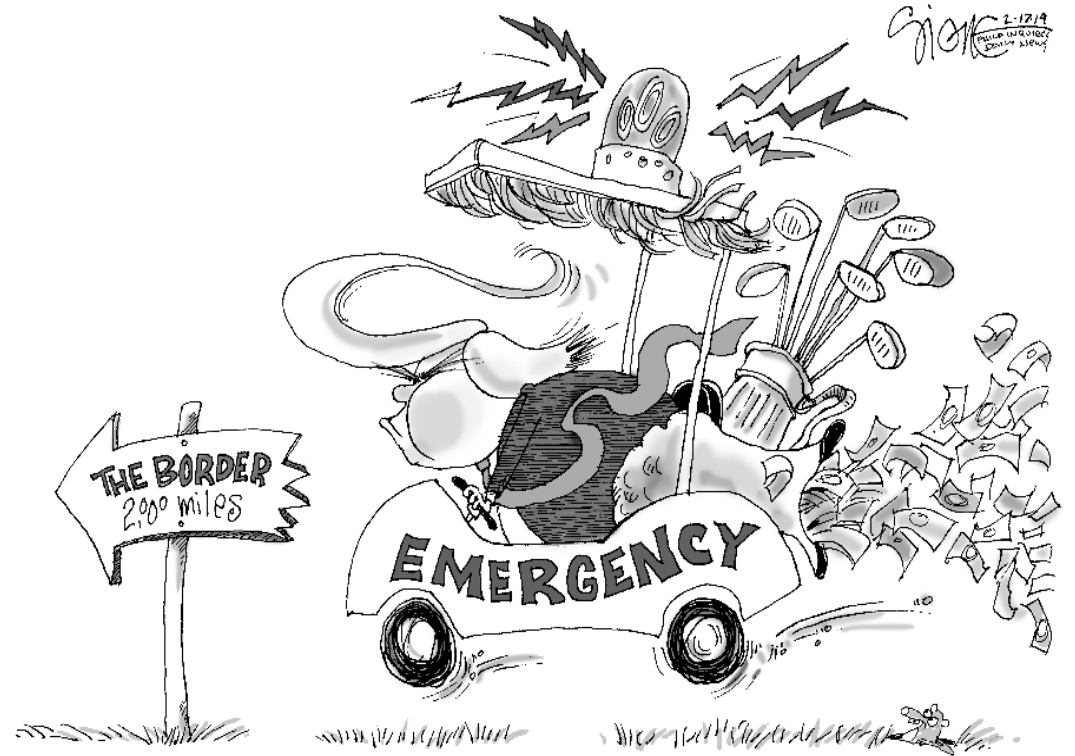
The Nelson family is far from alone in families affected by the continuing smoke, as borne out on the group's website. The Department of Environmental Quality is monitoring the air quality at two locations near the fire. An unhealthy reading in December prompted the state to caution everyone within a half-mile radius to avoid prolonged or heavy exertion outdoors. By late January, particulate readings were in the good-to-moderate range.

Meanwhile, this mess has triggered two lawsuits in Benton County Circuit Court. Parsons filed Feb. 6, aimed at forcing Blue Mountain Storage, a former property owner, and the Bella Vista Property Owners Association to pay the cost of extinguishing and cleaning up this persistent health hazard.

Parsons' lawsuit, alleging negligent oversight, names defendants Cooper Communities Inc., the Property Owners Association, and Tom Fredericks, who formerly owned Blue Mountain Storage and the stump dump property. "Cooper and the POA have deep pockets," Parsons said. "Here's where the money could come from. They need to clean up the mess they have made." Parsons added there's no proof as of yet that others used the property to dump waste or garbage.

Bella Vista residents Curtis and Tiffany Macomber filed the initial suit over the fire in November. The couple, who live near the dump site, sued Brown's Tree Care and "John Does 1-3." The Macombers claim the continued smoke has created a hazardous situation for their family.

Mike Masterson is a longtime Arkansas journalist. Email him at mmasterson@arkansasonline.com.



For human advancement

There are four stars on the official Arkansas state flag. All that state Rep. Charles Blake of Little Rock asks is that we use one of those stars to honor the Native Americans we oppressed rather than the oppression we practiced against blacks.

State Rep. Brandt Smith of Jonesboro has replied in resistance to Blake's proposal by saying we can't rewrite history.

It's not clear what Smith means.

Native Americans lived in Arkansas long before—and persevere long after—those few years in the 1860s of misbegotten secession from the world's greatest nation to fight for the right to continue our regional dehumanization of black people.

Blake's bill would choose to pay no further official homage to the Confederacy, as state law now provides for one of those four stars. It would have that star honor a richer and more relevant element of our place's history. He would write history better. He would declare human advancement in Arkansas.

And this is important: He wouldn't change the flag. He'd merely change the words in the law book about what one of the stars represents.

It's a brilliant and elegant little bill. This issue is easier than monuments or statues. Those are a lot of trouble to destroy, or, better yet, move from the public square to history museums.

This is the question: Do we celebrate our disgrace in the Confederacy or do we vigilantly record it, teach it, lament it and find a way to compartmentalize symbols of it?

I say that we should vigilantly record, teach and remember it, even with monuments or statues in the appropriate compartments.

If we insist on keeping a star on our state flag to celebrate slavery and the Confederacy, then we should add one



John Brummett

for Jim Crow laws. We'd need another for the Elaine race massacre. We'd need another for lynching. We'd need another for white-only bathrooms and water fountains. And we'd need another for the white-thug debacle at Little Rock Central High in 1957.

We don't put a star on the state flag for the Central crisis. Instead we put a museum across the street from the school.

People walk through to remember. They walk through to be saddened. They walk through to be resolved never to behave that way again. That's how you do that.

The three stars on the state flag below the name of the state stand for the nations with which our little spot on the earth has been affiliated, meaning Spain, France and the United States.

Blake's bill would provide that the single star above the name of the state would no longer represent the Confederacy, as provided by a 1924 law. Instead it would represent Native American tribes ancient and rich to our little spot on the earth, such as the Quapaw and Caddo, as well as the Cherokees who passed through by the thousands on the Trail of Tears.

After Blake's bill is passed, Brandt Smith and any like-minded legislators should file their own bill to add a fifth star to honor human bondage.

Then we can call the roll on that. There is the accompanying question of whether Smith is "blatantly racist," as the state Democratic Party put it in a public statement Saturday, or merely "clueless," as I generously suggested on social media over the weekend.



LETTERS

National emergency?

President Trump's physical health is right smart good, according to his doctor, but in his recent mental speech about wall-building and a national emergency, he hardly made any sense at all.

Even one of the right-wing writers, Ann Coulter, said this: "The only national emergency is that our president is an idiot."

WILLIAM KRAMER
Little Rock

That 'crisis' isn't real

President Trump's White House has become truth's killing field. El Paso, Texas, Trump's most recent victim, wasn't dangerous the 30 years I lived there nor is it dangerous today; it remains among our safest cities.

No malevolent invaders are attacking the U.S., as Trump pretends, not since Pancho Villa raided Columbus, N.M., in 1916, but Juarez has had its deadly times. Mexico's drug cartels and their bloody drug wars in Juarez, Cancun and throughout the Americas are fed by our ravenous thirst for meth, cocaine and whatever life-eroding poisons we ingest at a rate and volume to become a national crisis which enriches and arms the likes of El Chapo.

I drove the Border Highway to work for years and frequently slowed to give right-of-way to Mexican workers, some in their work uniforms, some carrying sack lunches, as they sprinted north across four lanes to catch buses to work.

Expletive deleted

Voices still wants to know how you censor yourself but still cuss. The responses so far have greatly amused the Voices editor and given her some good ones to add into her vocabulary, but she wants more, dagnabbit.

Email bloopers@arkansasonline.com or mail a letter to Brenda Looper, Voices/Arkansas Democrat-Gazette, P.O. Box 2221, Little Rock, 72203, with your creative cussing, and you may appear in a future column.

If you stand on the University of Texas at El Paso's southern-most parking lot you will see past I-10 to the huddled poor living in depressing and meager cardboard shacks lining dirt roads climbing hills. You'll see women and children laundry clothes they slap against stones and wrench dry alongside the Rio Grande, a trickle where dams are closed upstream, or rushing, dangerous waters let loose to irrigate farms on the U.S. and Mexican sides of the muddy river.

During the desert's monsoons, the cardboard houses are crushed, scattered and swallowed by mudslides that steal lives few deem worthy of a helping hand. These are the destitute families against whom Trump has spread his cruel xenophobic narrative in an attempt to give himself cover to declare his and his cowed Republican Party's fake national emergency.

BOB REYNOLDS
Conway

LETTERS

Record doesn't agree

While I certainly expect to see a conservative take on the editorial page, I don't expect to see facts ignored because anyone says something in particular. In your recent editorial, "La ley es la ley," you tell us that in a recent interview and in the State of the Union address, President Trump told us he wants increasing numbers of legal immigrants. You then dismiss critics who claim he is opposed to immigration.

President Trump may have called for increased immigration in the SOTU, and then doubled down later, but the record speaks differently, and he is still on record endorsing Tom Cotton's efforts to significantly reduce legal immigration. If anyone believes Trump's newfound change toward legal immigration is real, much less that it could survive the Ann Coulters, Rush Limbaughs and Sean Hannitys of the world, they are very likely incorrect.

I expect a pro-Trump view on the editorial page, but I don't expect you to ignore the facts and reality. I will believe Donald Trump has changed his mind and will follow through, and

I would expect the editors should also, when concrete actions have taken place, and they have withstood the Fox News challenge.

I really expect pragmatism from the editorial page, whether I agree or not. Suggesting that this president has had some change of heart based on flippant comments in the SOTU that don't even appear to be scripted, and him doubling down later, is not a pragmatic view, but more importantly, it flies in the face of previous actions.

GREG ROUNTREE
Scott

Back flag legislation

I think House Bill 1487 filed Friday by House Minority Leader Charles Blake is an absolutely brilliant piece of legislation.

Blake's bill would change the designation of the lone star above the word Arkansas on our state flag from signifying that Arkansas belonged to the Confederacy. Yes, top billing in our state history goes to the Confederacy. The legislation would amend the Arkansas Code Annotated 1-4-101 to state the star "commemorates

the heritage and contribution of the Quapaw, Osage and Caddo tribes and other Native American nations who inhabited Arkansas" prior to European contact.

I have written many letters asking for our flag to be changed. This legislation changes the designation of the star without costly redesign of the flag. I am 74 years old, but I would walk to Little Rock in support of this change.

For those of you who say we should not change history, I say this is just supporting more appropriate history. Those legislators who cannot support this legislation have their minds and hearts twisted in the wrong direction.

GARY W. JOHNSON
Springdale

See the big picture

Close your eyes and imagine it is 2025 and our borders were opened in 2019 to allow 20 million refugees from Central and South America to migrate to the U.S.

What do you see now?
MERLE CROUCH
Searcy

Express yourself

The *Democrat-Gazette* welcomes your opinions. Not all letters received can be published or acknowledged. Clarity, brevity and originality are particularly valued, and letters must be suitable for publication in a family newspaper. Handwritten letters must be legible. Statements of fact are checked for accuracy; letters will be edited and may be republished in all media.

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Submit letters of fewer than 300 words to Voices, *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette*, P.O. Box 2221, Little Rock, Ark., 72203; by fax at (501) 372-4765; by email at voices@arkansasonline.com; or via our website, www.arkansasonline.com/contact/voicesform. Please sign your letter and include your home address and daytime telephone number for verification. Writers are limited to one letter per 30 days.

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Mysterious document

In the Goff file

A document riddled with factual errors about Belynda Goff's first-degree murder conviction mysteriously found its way into her permanent file maintained by prison and parole officials.

I believe the undated, unsigned two-page message was placed by someone whose intent was to damage Belynda for years to come, to continue planting material inaccuracies about the woman imprisoned for 22 years.

Maintaining she did not murder her husband, Belynda refused to accept a 10-year sentence she was offered to plead guilty to manslaughter in her husband Stephen's pre-dawn bludgeoning death on June 12, 1994, in their Green Forest apartment.

Had she taken the plea deal, she would have been freed by 2006. Her 1996 conviction was properly overturned on appeal due to ineffective counsel. A new trial was ordered, but the state Supreme Court reversed the appeals court ruling.

The single-spaced document has only "Carroll County Circuit Court" in the header as a possible source. Belynda wrote Carroll County Circuit

Clerk Ramona Wilson in 2016, seeking its origin. "... [A]t least three quarters of this document are in fact false," she wrote. "Please tell me where this document came from, who authored it and why. ... For example, where in public record does it reflect in your files that I made the comment about [Stephen] drinking and womanizing?"

Wilson responded, "I would assume the document you enclosed in your correspondence was prepared by law enforcement. It was not generated by this office. ... It does not contain my file stamp."

Nonetheless, the document apparently originated with someone with enough animosity toward Goff to prepare and include it as an unsolicited part of her official file.

How and why was it allowed into her file after 22 years? I believe Wilson is correct when she assumes it came from law enforcement. My money is on the same person calling himself or herself "Identification" in comments regarding my columns on the Goff case.

The comments cited in this document as purported facts in many instances don't describe the facts in transcripts of Belynda's case.

For instance, Goff's grown daughter, Bridgette Jones of Virginia, says the document specifically claims: "The shape of the markings on the door trim [at the Goffs' apartment] are of a characteristic pattern consistent with the claw markings of the hammers."

"Yet nowhere in the Arkansas State Crime Lab report does it make such a statement," Jones said. "The report states the claw hammer found in the apartment had a rounded head, much different than the penetrations left on paper scrapes and sheetrock surrounding Stephen. The wooden-handled hammer had an octagonal head with symmetrical edges and its angles were considerably smaller than the penetration markings."

Jones said the lab's analyst couldn't



Mike Masterson

determine with any scientific certainty that either hammer produced the marking on the paper or sheetrock. Neither contained blood. Further, the blood splatter patterns did not present sufficient substance to even reconstruct or reenact the crime scene.

Also, Jones told me, "The autopsy opinion rendered by Medical Examiner Dr. Kokes says nowhere does it state 'consistent with a hammer.' In fact, he says blunt object. He states he is not testifying that the hammers caused Stephen Goff's death."

"And about that forged document—let's call it what it is—this was intentionally made to look like it came from somewhere official when it did not," Jones added. "It also states Belynda said Stephen promised to quit 'womanizing,' and they were having marital difficulties

because of that. The document claims she messed up their anniversary date and that Stephen made fun and hurt her feelings.

"Never did mother tell police her feelings were hurt or that their marriage was in jeopardy because of womanizing. So why are there transcripts saying she said those things? As for the tapes of those purported comments—of course—they were all 'accidentally' deleted."

Also missing is potential DNA evidence recovered from the crime lab by a Carroll County deputy, then strangely "lost."

Jones said she found it remarkable that the affidavit filed by then-lead investigator Lt. Archie Rousey of the sheriff's office uses the term "officers," as in officers noting this and that about the case when these supposed "observations" were solely his.

For instance, she said, Rousey wrote, "Officers discovered in Goff's bedroom approximately 14 wet towels that had been buried." However, on the crime scene video you can clearly hear another officer saying, "They don't feel wet at all."

She remains equally mystified by the second page of Rousey's affidavit for Belynda's arrest warrant where he states: "[T]he autopsy indicated that the victim had died from multiple blows to the head consistent with a hammer."

"It's interesting how this hammer phrase kept coming up," she said. At Belynda's 1996 trial, Prosecutor Brad Butler in the transcript tells the court two years after the murder: "That's it until Dr. Kokes, your honor. We haven't recovered a weapon ..."

And after 24 years, they still haven't, which tells me the bloodied murder weapon left the Goffs' apartment with the murderer that night.

Mike Masterson is a longtime Arkansas journalist. Email him at mmasterson@arkansasonline.com.



MEDICAL PROVIDER MASK



FAMILY PLANNING PROVIDER MASK



The South rose again

In other states, overzealous news organizations scour old college yearbooks in search of evidence of Confederacy-approving behavior by contemporary politicians.

In Arkansas, all you had to do Wednesday was walk into the great white citadel known as the state Capitol.

In a first-floor room during a meeting of the House State Agencies and Governmental Affairs Committee, the South was winning the Civil War.

In a vote of 8-to-5 with six members in the bathroom or otherwise unable or unwilling or afraid to vote, the committee endorsed the state's honoring of the enslavement of black people.

It did so by voting down Rep. Charles Blake's simple bill to change the law declaring what is honored by the one star above the word "Arkansas" on the state flag.

By a 1924 law, thus of a time in Arkansas known for Jim Crow laws and massacre of black people, that star honors the Confederacy.

Blake's bill would have left the flag alone but changed that law. He would have provided that the aforementioned star no longer honored the Confederate secession and war, thus the cause of preserving human bondage.

He proposed to honor instead the native tribes living in Arkansas long before the Europeans came through to claim Caucasian domain.

The eight votes, all cast by white Republicans, which is to say white Confederates, were against this bill. The five votes, cast by four Democrats and a lone Confederate defector, were for it.

The six non-voters, AWOL Confederates, apparently were challenged by bladder or nerve. Perhaps they were scared by a couple of tough-looking Confederate sons seated with disapproving visages directly behind Blake, the sponsor.

It was a day for symbols like that.



John Brummett

"What's next?" asked state Rep. Bruce Cozart of Hot Springs, meaning after we stopped saying officially by law that our state flag honored slavery.

I don't know. Maybe a black woman on the committee, Democratic Rep. Jamie Scott, wouldn't be crying.

Can you imagine? You're sitting there, a lone black female surrounded by gray-suited Johnny Rebs who are insisting they still be allowed to celebrate the enslavement of people because their pigmentation was yours.

I applaud Scott for merely shedding a tear. I might have screamed. I'd have wanted to dump water on somebody's bald Rebel head.

But that would have been unbecoming of a legislative body, even this 19th century one.

Blake, by the way, is African American and a close friend and ally of Little Rock Mayor Frank Scott. He is of that "unity" message of advancement that prevailed in Scott's recent campaign. As such, Blake explained that he was seeking only to move the state forward together.

He even went so far as to say that redefining a star added by a 1924 law wasn't so much dishonoring the Confederacy—as if there's anything wrong with that—but dishonoring the KKK-raging era during which the star's meaning was defined.

Never mind his restraint. A neo-Confederate witness prevailed by arguing to the committee that the bill was part of a conspiracy to remove all historic mention of what he called the war for Southern independence.

Some other guy testified to grumble that we only separated Robert E. Lee's birthday from Dr. Martin Luther King's so that Gov. Asa Hutchinson

could make a play for black votes.

State Rep. Nicole Clowney of Fayetteville, a freshman Democrat inflicted with post-graduate indoctrination by a revisionist Yankee college, and who has taught foreign stuff like Latin at the University of Arkansas, sought at once to comfort the emotional Scott and explain that you don't erase history by declining to honor it.

She explained that we must ever remember and study the Civil War, even as we try to move past treating it as a current event.

In his closing argument for his bill, Blake said the point was that Arkansas could be better.

But it couldn't. These were the eight Confederates voting to continue the state's symbolic honoring of a war that sought to preserve enslavement of black people: Cozart and Reps. Douglas House of North Little Rock, Josh Miller of Heber Springs, Justin Gonzales of Okolona, John Payton of Wilburn, Jack Ladyman and Brandt Smith of Jonesboro, and Gayla McKenzie of Gravette.

The six AWOL Johnny Rebs whose failure to vote was as good as a "no" were Jim Dotson of Bentonville, Richard Womack of Arkadelphia, Andy Davis of Little Rock, Les Warren of Hot Springs, Jon Eubanks of Paris and Chris Penzo of Springdale.

Those voting to disassociate the star from slavery were the tearful Scott and the uppity Clowney along with Reps. Megan Godfrey of Springdale and Andrew Collins of Little Rock, and—imagine this—one Republican providing the exception to prove the rule. That was Jimmy Gazaway of Paragould.

No information was available at press time on whether Gazaway will face court-martial proceedings in the Confederate Caucus.

John Brummett, whose column appears regularly in the Arkansas Democrat-Gazette, is a member of the Arkansas Writers' Hall of Fame. Email him at jbrummett@arkansasonline.com. Read his @johnbrummett Twitter feed.

LETTERS

Who feels safe now?

If the American people feel safe daily with this photo-op love affair between Trump and dictator Kim Jong Un of North Korea, they must still believe the Easter Bunny lays chocolate eggs.

Kim will never give up his nuclear program in North Korea. The national emergency is Donald Trump!

G.E. ROWLAND
Fayetteville

Death affects all of us

Thank you, Rep. Dan Douglas of Bentonville, for filing House Bill 1536, which is the physician-assisted suicide bill. You have compassion for those suffering from terminal illnesses. Many of us, when asked privately, say that we so hope such a bill is adopted "in case we need it," but this subject seems taboo in public. Why? Death affects us all.

The Hippocratic Oath, written as approximately 2,500 years ago is used as an argument against physician-assisted suicide, but I am told its interpretation has been revised and/or often not used at all in many of today's medical schools. Undoubtedly, few if any medical treatments from that time are used today.

Thankfully, we can stop the long and sometimes painful terminal ill-

nesses in our pets, but not ourselves? I believe this bill would bring each of us more peace of mind as we make plans for our own aging and end of life. Some will say that it is not one's "right" to shorten his terminal illness, but who gave someone else the "right" to prolong it against our will?

In reality, it will take lots of time and effort to formulate and pass a good physician-assisted-suicide bill, which cannot be abused. Input from medical, legal and religious communities and from all of us interested in this important issue will be needed. The time is now!

SUE NETHERLAND HERTZOG
Ash Flat

Church has regressed

In 1981, the United Methodist Church agreed to act as fiscal sponsor of the Women's Project in Little Rock for five years. That the organization consisted of women of color and white women, heterosexuals and lesbians did not prevent it funding the project and working closely with us.

This past week, the church's General Conference voted to deny equal status and freedom to its non-heterosexual members. Almost four decades later, I am appalled that the church has regressed rather than progressed.

Both young and old will depart the church for places where justice and fairness prevail. Especially the young will seek institutions that embrace plurality and inclusion. And the United Methodists will have to continue fighting to resist falling hopelessly into the quicksand of prejudice and exclusion.

SUZANNE PHARR
Little Rock

LETTERS

Be an informed voter

Why vote if you don't at least try to understand the issues? Why vote if you can't support the values and character of the people you are voting for? Why vote if you only get your facts and information from one source?

Do you claim to be an educated person? Have you in your lifetime written a term paper building that research from one source of information? Most instructors would not accept research collected from only one source. To become educated, you collect information from the many resources available. You then evaluate the accuracy and quality, getting help from the most respected and reliable sources.

If you have done your homework thoughtfully and accurately, you can feel the wisdom of an informed voter.

PHILIP L. GUSTAFSON
Hot Springs Village

Baseless racist claims

Surely you have noticed. Is there any opinion, word, statement, deed, thought, implication, act, judgment, sentiment, pronouncement, descrip-

tion, viewpoint, postulation, label which makes up today's insane world that has not been labeled as racist by some person or persons, or some organization or other entity? In my media experience, I think not, and we all are the worse for it.

Real, genuine racism, racism that demands to be addressed and rectified to the maximum degree possible, becomes meaninglessly foggy if not moot when tossed in the dustbin along with the foregoing descriptive pseudo-charges, which are nothing more than a variation of the timeworn "Wolf, Wolf" appellation, but with societal implications significantly more serious and disturbing. A little more thoughtful introspection by the clueless (not entirely true, they have an agenda) who scream these damaging, baseless charges would be helpful and fruitful, but who among us think that as likely to happen?

JAMES BARRÉ
Little Rock



A fresh new breeze

Dana Kelley recently wrote a column concerning recent legislative efforts to redesignate a star on the Arkansas state flag so that it will represent Native American tribes in Arkansas. He refers to it as "this silly flag bill." He argues that the Democrats had ample time to change this star (which represents the Confederacy) for decades and did nothing. Therefore they are hypocritical political opportunists with "false piety."

He seems to have overlooked the fact that those old Southern Democrats, aka Dixiecrats, converted to the Republican Party about 20 or so years ago.

The Democrats who are attempting to change the flag's symbolic reference to slavery, white supremacy and the Confederacy's misbegotten revolt against our republic are not our daddies' Democrats. They all belong to the Grand Old Party now.

No hypocrisy or false piety here, Mr. Kelley. Just a fresh new breeze blowing through.

BOYD WARD
Mayflower

Where to send your letters

The *Democrat-Gazette* welcomes your opinions. Not all letters received can be published or acknowledged. Clarity, brevity and originality are particularly valued, and letters must be suitable for publication in a family newspaper. Handwritten letters must be legible. Statements of fact are checked for accuracy; letters will be edited and may be republished in all media.

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Serious safety issue

Got their goose?

City fathers in Bentonville have a serious problem that one might rightfully say has gotten their goose. Just hearing about it gave me goosebumps (bear with me, I implore you).

Despite repeated efforts to drive away pesky geese away from the Bentonville Municipal Airport, nothing has worked. That matters because history has proven these large birds flying, well, loosey-goosey in the vicinity of an airport is a serious safety issue.

Flocks have collided with flights, brought down passenger planes and killed hundreds of passengers. Such collisions include one Bentonville plane damaged not long ago by a goose strike, according to a news account.

On Jan. 15, 2009, US Airways Flight 1549 lost engine power and was forced to ditch into the Hudson due to an air-strike with Canada geese. The resulting investigation led to about 1,200 geese being captured and gassed, and 1,800 eggs coated with oil to smother the goslings in an effort to prevent similar incidents.

Bentonville has taken a gander at everything from a \$700 laser to a coyote decoy to frighten the birds away. But nothing seems to work.

Problems with Canada geese are certainly nothing new. The good folks in Bella Vista have been trying to stem their growing numbers by rubbing the eggs they lay on the ground with oil. A brief Internet search shows this serious problem is nationwide and has hatched a cottage industry among some pest-control businesses that have learned how to rid airports and other areas of the often-aggressive birds. Suggestions include making the habitat undesirable in every way for geese and using decoy swans, notorious enemies of geese.

To top it off, Canada geese will come after people who disturb them or their nests. They also are very messy, depositing their waste across large areas (especially on golf courses with water features). Their droppings reportedly contain pathogens that are potentially hazardous to humans.

I suppose this means these enormous honkers, not being all that compatible with our species, enjoy continually leading us on these endless (waaaaaaait for it) wild goose chases in futile attempts to chase them away.

Reader Jerry Jones also is troubled by airborne geese threats. He wrote (in part) the other day: "The [Bentonville] airport manager has already said they are a hazard and has caused some damage to an airplane. I don't want to see these geese terminated, but I also don't want to see any human beings lose their life because of them. Action needs to be taken now to get rid of them. I fly out of XNA and it would be on my mind flying in. ... Let one plane come down and kill passengers and lives would change forever in the court systems. They remind me of our Congress. All talk and nothing happens."

Jones is right. The city needs to discover a way to permanently resolve



Mike Masterson

this problem before a tragedy ensues and they find (just one more, promise) their own goose is cooked.

Exceptional Eden

I'm hereby nominating Eden Garrett of Rogers for Young Enterprising Entrepreneur of the Year, if such an award exists.

The 22-year-old graduated from Drury College and promptly purchased a used tool truck, of all things. Her plan, which stemmed from an idea

for her senior college project, was to magically transform the spacious vehicle into what may well be the nation's first walk-in mobile flower boutique (edensflowertruck.com).

Whether you need flowers for a party, event or whatever in Rogers, Fayetteville or Bentonville, the perky Eden steers the colorful blossoms right to the door in her brightly decorated rolling shop. She even creates custom arrangements on site. If that's not enough initiative for ya, she's opened a self-service flower kiosk inside the Northwest Arkansas Regional Airport.

It does the aging heart good to see such energy and enterprise in any young person striving to fulfill their dreams.

Enjoy sharing

Publicly sharing what I do for a living allows me to connect with readers and helps others understand what's involved in expressing my thoughts for thousands of readers with their opinions on many of the same issues.

It's never mattered whether a reader agrees with what I write. I value others' views and their right to express them. In other words, sharing my opinions is a way to hopefully prompt others to reflect on many of the same things.

That's why I was pleased to receive an invitation to speak with a roomful of bright high school journalism students who'll be attending the Arkansas Scholastic Press Association Convention this coming Friday morning at the convention center in Springdale.

Association President Karla Sprague asked if I'd talk with the students about the ups and downs of opinion writing and how it is supposed to differ from objective news reporting (in outlets that practice professional journalism).

Having done both for decades, I look forward to addressing all those bright faces and hopefully leaving them with some fodder for their own ambitions and expectations.

Mike Masterson is a longtime Arkansas journalist. Email him at mmasterson@arkansasonline.com.

LETTERS

Very easy to go high

"When they go low, we go high." To follow Michelle Obama's motto seems easier now than ever. If you have any dignity left, all you need to do is stand still—it seems the Republicans themselves are taking care of going lower and lower.

Every time someone justifies the petty, vindictive, unscrupulous, lawless and autocratic "leadership" of Donald Trump, their feet of clay keep sinking deeper into the swamp of moral decay.

H. PETER ELZER
Fayetteville

Arkansans can do it

Living in south Arkansas and getting our news on TV out of Shreveport, and rarely getting the state paper, I hear very little about what's happening in our state. It was un-

known to me until it happened that Hot Springs was adding more casino-style gaming.

I would think this was a matter put forth to the voters of the state. I would also think one of the benefits promised by the Racing Commission when promoting the proposal for added gaming would have been the promise of more jobs for Arkansans.

It surprised me, or perhaps it did not surprise me, when I saw on the Shreveport news that a job fair was being held in Bossier, La., to fill those job positions in Arkansas. My guess would be those job fairs were also held in Mississippi and Oklahoma as well.

I understand they want experienced persons for those positions, but I wonder if they are willing to train Arkansans to work jobs in Arkansas, or will the majority of the jobs go to out-of-staters?

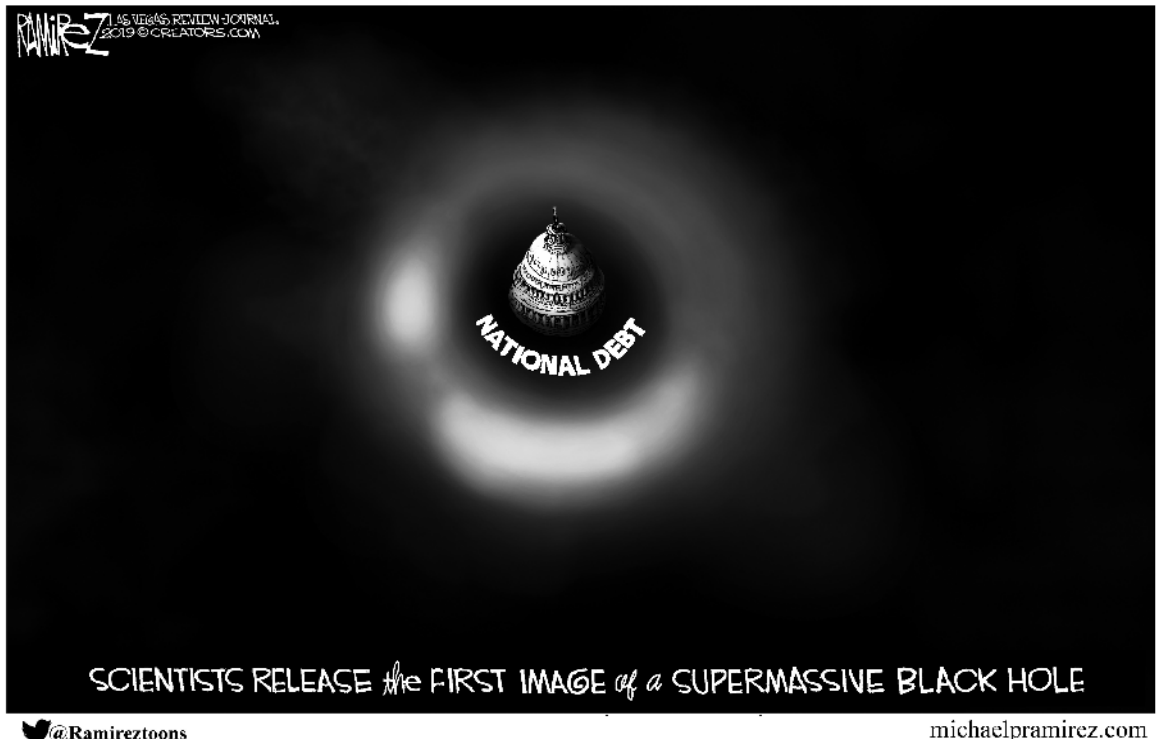
WILLIAM BARLOW
Rosston

Write to us

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Better understanding

I sensed the picture might be worth at least 800 words, the usual length of this column.

The photograph appeared on the front page of this newspaper Thursday. It showed beaming smiles and a warm embrace between a tall, older white man and a short, younger black woman.

They were state representatives bidding a plainly warm farewell on the last day of an often-contentious legislative session.

I recalled the time I published a column containing both their names—Jon Eubanks, a 69-year-old Republican from Paris in west-central Arkansas, and Jamie Scott, a 37-year-old Democrat from North Little Rock.

It happened March 3 in an angry essay titled "The South rose again."

A bill by Rep. Charles Blake of Little Rock seeking to re-designate a Confederacy-honoring star on the state flag as a commemoration of Native Americans had been voted down by the House State Agencies and Governmental Affairs Committee. White neo-confederates had testified about the need to keep honoring the "war for Southern independence."

Blake explained that the star had been added in the early 1900s when the Ku Klux Klan raged and Jim Crow laws essentially extended enslavement. An absolute massacre of black people at Elaine went unprosecuted and under-reported.

I wrote that it was understandable that Scott, sitting there as the lone African American committee member amid a band of Confederacy-sympathizing white colleagues, was reduced to tears. I called out by name the "no" voters, including those effectively voting "no" by not voting. Eubanks was in the latter group.

Now there they were, Scott and Eubanks, on the front page, hugging, smiling, saying goodbye.

I got on the phone with them, first Scott and then Eubanks.

"The reason I cried that day was that we'd been hearing so much in the Black Caucus about the Elaine massacre and the Wrightsville 21," Scott told me. The Wrightsville 21 refers to young black males burned to death in 1959 by a still-mysterious circumstance.

"Then to be sitting there with these men talking about the need to honor those times—it just welled up in me," Scott said.

She said Eubanks reached out to her that day, saying he was troubled by her visible pain and wanted to understand.

"He and I just decided that day, I think, to work at being friends, and that's what happened," Scott said. "I'm Pentecostal and he's Mormon, but my sister is Mormon, and we kind of built



John Brummett

from that, I guess."

What came of it, she said, is warm personal regard that might, in time, bring them together on a public policy in a way that wouldn't have been possible without the forging of a personal relationship. It's not about changing philosophies, but sharpening sensitivities, she said.

She said she'd sought to establish other friendships with white male Republican colleagues. She found it good that several of them felt a need to seek her out to explain that their resistance to a bill choosing Daisy Bates and Johnny Cash as the state's new honorees in Statuary Hall in the U.S. Capitol had to do with Cash and seeming dictates from the Senate, not the civil rights icon Bates.

She said two white Republican House members—Doug House and Andy Davis—told her they were working on bills likely to emerge next session to change the declared symbolism of the state flag more broadly.

I then called Eubanks and told him that the newspaper photograph had intrigued me. He laughed heartily.

I related Scott's account of their relationship and he said, "I'd say pretty much exactly what she said. I wanted



Arkansas Democrat-Gazette/MITCHELL PE MASILUN

Rep. Carlton Wing (left) squeezes into the frame Wednesday on the House floor as Rep. Jon Eubanks and Rep. Jamie Scott hug and pose for a photo at the close of legislative business.

LETTERS

Sullyng good name

As a small-business owner, I was relieved when legislation trying to weaken the law raising the minimum wage was voted down in the Legislature recently. I, along with the majority of Arkansans, voted to raise the minimum wage last November because it makes good economic sense. Some lawmakers tried to use the good name of small business as a reason to weaken the law. That's offensive to small-business owners like myself.

Workers in one business are customers at another. Raising the minimum wage will enable many more workers to make ends meet and it will boost the consumer spending that businesses depend on to survive and grow.

The legislation attempted to weaken the law by exempting most small businesses, but that doesn't help those businesses—it hurts them. It incentivizes people to work for larger businesses rather than smaller ones in order to make ends meet.

Lawmakers should understand that people need a wage they can live on, whether they work for a big or small business. I want my employees focused on the job—not worried about

making rent. A lower minimum wage for small businesses would have them paying in other ways—in the form of lost productivity, high turnover and lost customers.

Voters knew exactly what they were voting for when they chose to raise the minimum wage. I'm glad lawmakers didn't overturn the will of the people, and hope they don't try to bring up any misguided bills like this in the future.

Raising the minimum wage will help local communities, small businesses like mine and the entire state economy, and I look forward to the increases going into effect.

RICHARD BISHOP
Maumelle

Sake of convenience

Years ago, when I was in college, I took a course in embryology. I was taught at that time that life begins when an ovum is fertilized by a sperm cell. A recent check of this definition revealed that it remains the same. How then, can we as a nation and as individuals decide to end the life of another human for convenience's sake? If people were made to actually see the destruction of a fetus, I would hope the majority would change their

minds regarding this carnage.

In a recent letter in this paper, someone described a law pending in the state Legislature to prevent the abortion of a child if it was determined to have Down syndrome as a draconian proposal. Perhaps it would be less "draconian" for those who only care about themselves and their own rights to be legally required to be sterilized after an abortion, thus preventing the potential death of yet another unborn child. Also, what about the responsibility of men in the perpetuation of this horror? No matter current thinking, it still takes an egg and a sperm for conception to occur. Responsibility for our own actions seems to be a thing of the past.

Natural disasters can be difficult enough to endure emotionally and spiritually. The legalization of taking the life of an unborn child is an unnatural disaster that surely affects everyone involved unless they have no conscience or their hearts have become too hard.

In historical times barbaric people sacrificed their children to various gods. Things haven't changed much. Children are now sacrificed to the god of convenience.

ROBERT RHOADS
North Little Rock