

Carmage Walls
Commentary Prize

2019 Entry Form

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What is the subject/title of the entry?

Downfall of Gov. Eric Greitens

Date(s) of publication? 5-18-18, 5-31-18, 6-3-18, 6-17-18

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

Please give a brief explanation of issues discussed and the results achieved. (This space will expand as you type in your comments.)

Just before the contest entry period started, we urged for the resignation of Missouri's then-governor, Eric Greitens. He did eventually resign, and the ensuing editorials opined on the loose ends in the wake of his administration.

OUR OPINION

Greitens' undoing
caused by
his own actions*"He resigned under the weight of his own actions."*

Rep. Travis Fitzwater, R-Holts Summit, on KWOS Radio

You might love what Gov. Eric Greitens has done for our state in terms of policy, or you might hate the way he's governed. You might find his personality repulsive, or you might believe he's affable and charming.

However, hopefully, we all can agree that what led to Greitens' downfall was not a "political witch hunt," as he called it. He was not an innocent victim caught up in a whirlwind of jealous politicians, looking to further their political careers by using him as a stepping stone.

It wasn't the Democrats that caused his downfall, nor was it the Republicans. It wasn't a "reckless liberal prosecutor" or Attorney General Josh Hawley or the House special committee investigating Greitens.

Likewise, his undoing wasn't orchestrated by his former hairdresser with whom he had an affair in 2015.

Greitens — and Greitens alone — sowed the seeds that led to his own political demise. His own actions backed him into a corner, and even some of the best defense attorneys in the state couldn't give him any other viable alternatives to resignation.

His resignation came hours after Cole County Circuit Court Judge Jon Beetem ruled he would have to turn over documents from his campaign and from A New Missouri to the House committee investigating the governor. A New Missouri is a dark money committee — one designed to shield the identity of Greitens' donors.

The House committee was investigating allegations that, in 2015, Greitens stole the donor list from a charity he started to solicit donations that would seed his gubernatorial campaign. He also has been accused of invasion of privacy relating to his affair.

As of now, he hasn't been found guilty of anything in a court of law. However, credible evidence has surfaced suggesting these are more than wild allegations. Meanwhile, Greitens has refused to answer questions that could help establish his innocence.

It's such secrecy that has been the hallmark of his short term as governor. He has rarely answered questions or explained to Missourians how he has governed and why he has made the decisions that affect our lives. He has used dark money to hide his donors, and Confide apps to hide his communications.

All these things would be fine under some forms of government, but not a democracy.

He did the right thing by resigning. Unfortunately, his resignation came too late. It was too late to limit damage to his own party, and to fellow Republican Josh Hawley's chances to unseat U.S. Sen. Claire McCaskill, a Democrat.

His resignation speech included no admission of wrongdoing, and no apology to his own party or to Missourians in general. Instead, he continued to label himself the victim.

"It's clear that for the forces that oppose us there is no end in sight," he said. "I cannot allow those forces to continue to cause pain and difficulty to the people that I love."

We have no doubt that those people he refers to have suffered greatly, and that truly saddens us. Hopefully, his resignation did not come too late to heal those relationships.

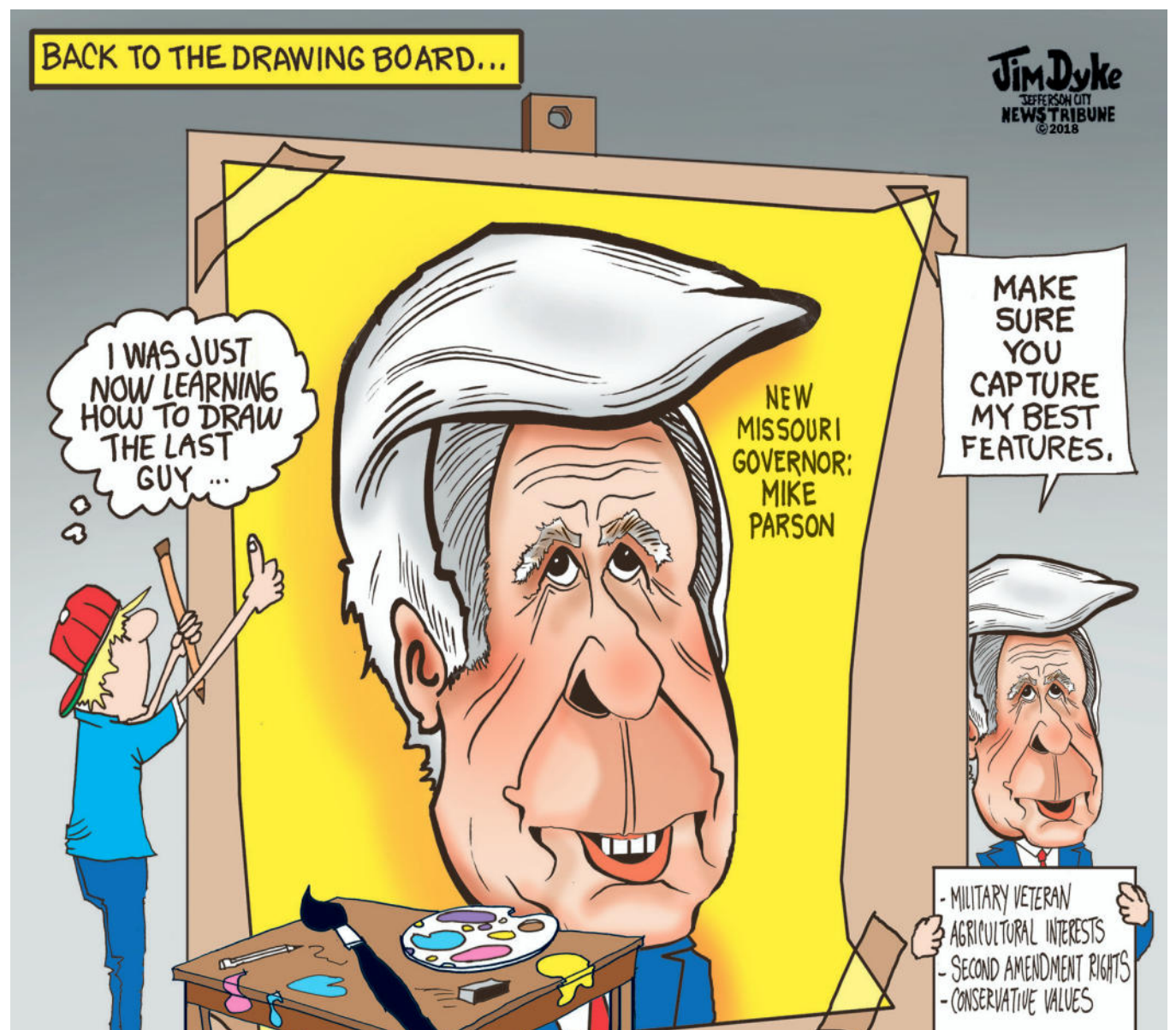
We're also sad for our state, and for the more than 1.4 million voters who trusted Greitens enough to send him to the highest elected office in our state.

Hopefully, the healing can now begin for us all.

News Tribune

Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord.

Colossians 3:20



WASHINGTON — Franklin Roosevelt, afflicted by the disease at age 39, died in April 1945 at the polio recuperation facility he had created in Warm Springs, Georgia. Before then, Mitch McConnell living in Five Points, Alabama, began going there for treatment for the polio that struck him at age 2, in 1944.

After paralysis by polio, an inner iron undergirded the ebullience of FDR, who hitherto had relied on privilege and charm. McConnell, who had none of the former and is parsimonious with the latter, acquired while overcoming polio the patience and grit that on June 12 will make him the longest-serving leader of Senate Republicans, surpassing Bob Dole.

Since McConnell and his mother, returning from two years of intermittent treatments in Warm Springs, bought his first pair of walking shoes, he has played "the long game," which is the title of his 2016 memoir. In his 33 Senate years, he has become a major figure in the history of two of the government's three branches — the legislative, and now the judicial as he oversees the reshaping of federal courts.

If McConnell's low emotional metabolism allowed him to become agitated, he would do so about complaints — mostly from people inattentive to events or uninformed about possibilities — that Republican control of the two political branches is not producing results. McConnell says:

The largest tax reduction in 31 years has contributed to the best economy in 18 years. Defense spending is up, many Dodd-Frank banking rules and the Obamacare individual mandate have been repealed. Drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, blocked for 38 years, has been approved, as has a reconfigured National Labor

YOUR OPINION

Issue-oriented letters to the editor are welcome. All letters should be limited to 400 words in length; longer letters may be edited to conform to the specified length. The author's name must appear with the letter, and the name, address and phone number provided for verification. Letters that cannot be verified by telephone will not

School shootings:
What has changed?

Bert Dirschell
Centertown

Dear Editor:

According to a Reuters article, the recent school shooting in Indiana was the 23rd shooting on a campus this year. What has changed in our society to bring about this level of violence in schools?

I am 70 years old. I grew up as a member of a blue-collar family in rural Michigan. It is difficult to believe that there has been a significant increase in the percentage of households in which firearms are present. (Because we are such an affluent society I can easily believe that there are more guns per household.) As a young man I would have been shocked to hear someone say their household was "gun free." All those guns and yet my parents were not at all concerned

about someone shooting up one of the schools their children attended.

The following statistics were surprising. According to a 2013 Pew Research Center study, the national gun homicide rate dropped from 7.0 per 100,000 people in 1993 to 3.8 per 100,000 people in 2000. By 2010 it had dropped further to 3.6 per 100,000. Non-fatal firearm crimes dropped from more than 700 per 100,000 people in 1993 to 269 per 100,000 in 2000. It dropped further to 181 per 100,000 in 2011.

FBI data shows the rate of total homicides in 2013 and 2014 were the lowest since 1960, however the number of total homicides has grown in 2015, 2016 and 2017.

Why have homicides increased during a period of economic growth? The unemployment rate has steadily dropped from 10 percent in October 2009 to its current rate of 3.9 percent, the lowest in more than 40 years. Median household income rose by 5.2 percent in 2015 and another 3.2 percent in 2016, after adjusting for inflation. 12.7 percent of people are now below the poverty line, the lowest since 2007. There are so many jobs available that Homeland Security just said it will provide an additional 15,000 H-2B visas so more low-skilled workers can come here to fill open jobs. There is such a shortage of people to fill low-skill jobs that Congress recently doubled the number of H-2B visas available, to a total of 135,000.

What in our culture has changed so radically that shootings in our schools are occurring with increasing frequency?



OPINION

Walter E. Hussman Jr., Publisher
Gerry Tritz, Opinion Page Editor
Gary Castor, Managing Editor

A family owned and operated independent newspaper

May your father and mother rejoice; may she who gave you birth be joyful!

Proverbs 23:25

OUR OPINION

End of administration shouldn't be end of Greitens investigations

We're dismayed as to why St. Louis Circuit Attorney Kim Gardner would drop the felony computer tampering charge against former Gov. Eric Greitens in return for his agreement to resign.

We're not trying to beat a dead horse. Nor do we want to delay our state's healing process over Greitens' short and scandalous term as governor. But if charges and investigations against Greitens are completed — rather than dropped — Missourians will see a resolution and see justice being served. That, we believe, will lead to more trust in the judicial system, more closure and, ultimately, faster healing.

The Associated Press reported former Missouri Supreme Court Chief Justice Michael Wolff said the agreement between Greitens' attorneys and Gardner's office is highly unusual because it protects Gardner and her staff from being sued for their actions and because Greitens did not have to plead guilty to any lesser charge.

"Here's a guy who gets to get out of a felony charge just by agreeing to quit his job," Wolff said. "Most people don't get this deal."

Gardner, whose office already has invested \$65,000 in the cases against Greitens, said she had the evidence to pursue the charges. Her only explanation for making the deal to drop the charge was that "sometimes, pursuing charges is not the right or just thing to do for our city or state," according to the St. Louis Post-Dispatch.

We believe the question of whether charges should be pursued should be based on the evidence, not whether he resigns as governor.

In the same vein, we question why Cole County Prosecutor Mark Richardson hasn't explained his decision not to prosecute Greitens on a Class A misdemeanor of falsifying campaign finance reports.

Attorney General Josh Hawley investigated Greitens and believed the charge was warranted. He forwarded information to Richardson, who decided not to file a charge. As we reported, Richardson didn't say why not and declined to comment further.

Prosecutors have the discretion as to whether they file charges, and they're not required to explain themselves.

But in a case this prominent, not offering an explanation only breeds distrust of the legal system. In fact, it already has, as Richardson's ties to Greitens have been questioned.

The Attorney General's Office, meanwhile, continues to believe that there was probable cause for the charge to be filed.

The special House committee investigating alleged wrongdoing by Greitens abruptly cancelled three meetings last week after Greitens announced he would resign. It's unknown at this point what the committee's role will be now.

State Auditor Nicole Galloway said Greitens' resignation came hours before a court-ordered deadline for him to reveal details of his dark money operations. If Greitens is not required to turn over the information now, that could "deprive Missourians of the right to know how dark money and special interests are secretly influencing their government."

"In order to restore public trust, the legislature must continue to its work into the investigation of coordination between dark-money organizations and state entities," Galloway said in a news release.

We agree. The first step is for the committee to finish its work and issue a report to the public. Their work may provide the most complete account for Missourians, and for history, as to exactly what Greitens did or did not do.

News Tribune

COMMENTARY

Gerald Ford: The accidental president who wore power lightly

WASHINGTON — Within 17 days in the autumn of 1975 — first in Sacramento, then in San Francisco — two separate handgun-wielding women attempted to assassinate the president. Had either succeeded, and each was close enough to have done so, the nation would have had a third president in 14 months, and a second consecutive one who had never been on a national ticket. Gerald Ford survived to continue with an 895-day presidency during which the nation regained its equilibrium after Watergate and Vietnam.

The only president to have reached the Oval Office without first appearing on a ballot for either vice president or president, Ford became vice president (under the 25th Amendment) when scandals forced Richard Nixon's vice president, Spiro Agnew, to resign. Ford became president when Nixon resigned. Had Ford been assassinated, his vice president, Nelson Rockefeller (also confirmed by Congress

under the 25th Amendment), would have become president. Today, with the nation seemingly more irritable and depressed than at any time since then, it is well to fondly remember the 38th president, which Donald Rumsfeld does in "When the Center Held: Gerald Ford and the Rescue of the American Presidency." Readers can tickle from this book a reason for looking on the bright side of, or at least for an inadvertent benefit from, the 45th president.

Ford was the most accomplished athlete ever to hold the nation's highest elective office: For three seasons he was the center (hence Rumsfeld's title) on University of Michigan's football teams, two of which were undefeated national champions. Yet because of a few public stumbles related to a football-weakened knee, he is remembered as awkward. His lack of rhetorical nimbleness, one

Please see Will, p. 11



George Will



YOUR OPINION

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Who will be next?

Pat Hebert
Jefferson City

Dear Editor:
Now that the current witch hunt has achieved its goal, I would like to say a few words to those who jumped on their broomsticks to join in the vicious fun — beware! The witch hunters will be looking for their next victim. People who live in glass houses, shouldn't throw stones.

An idea to change the world

Nancy Ames
Jefferson City

Dear Editor:
I'm seriously concerned about the legacy we are leaving our future generations: the crushing financial debt, as well as the environmental disasters that our uninhibited use of fossil fuels has created. Economists and scientists have published numerous studies that have shown the catastrophic financial loss that will and is occurring because of the loss of agricultural productivity, the money spent on rebuilding after natural disasters, and for the medical care of related health problems. The Environmental Protection Agency, under Scott Pruitt is taking action to reduce our fuel economy standards, which will contribute to the problems we face. We all need to be seriously alarmed and take action; we are not helpless.

There is a solution that can help reverse these problems: The Carbon Fee Dividend. This policy would tax the fossil fuels (coal, petroleum) based on the amount of materials harvested, and would then pay that money to

every citizen of the U.S. on a monthly basis. British Columbia has had a similar program in place since 2008 and the rest of Canada will join this year. There are other nations that have similar economic programs. The Carbon Fee Dividend is a sound, science based policy, that will help to reduce our impact on our atmosphere and consequently all biological systems, and improve our future economics.

This policy has bipartisan support. Even former CEO of Exxon/Mobil, and now former secretary of state, Rex Tillerson is in favor of this policy. Estimates show that the bottom 70 percent of earners will receive more money in the flat dividend rebate than they will have to pay as the result of higher cost passed on by industries. There is a really good, simple to understand article in the journal Basic Income by Scott Santens titled, "This Idea Can Literally Change the World."

June 6 is the national lobby day to address this. Call, email, or text our congressmen: McCaskill, Blunt, and Leutkemeyer. It's easy to do and could help to make the world better for our grandchildren and their children.

What do you believe?

Tom Ault
Jefferson City

Dear Editor:
Trump presidential promises, second year in office:

In an attempt to be neutral and strictly fact finding, I have researched several partisan and non-partisan reviews of how our two latest presidents have done in their first two years in office. Obama from 2008 to Jan 2010, and Trump from 2016 to February 2018. While these have been represented as facts, I want to establish that these are from various web-related news agencies that are assumed to be accurate.

(From a Canadian News company)
Trump:
Lower corporate tax rate: passed December 2017, but not to 15 percent as proposed.

Close Paris climate deal: accomplished.
Will appoint a Supreme Court

nominee: Neil Gorsuch appointed, a conservative approved.

Bombing Islamic State: Dropped largest non-nuclear bomb on Afghanistan. Iran says war is over.

Withdraw from Trans Pacific Partnership: Withdrawn as promised.
Ban Muslims from entering US-switched to severe vetting: introduced two travel bans, both stopped by courts.

Eliminate Obama's Cuba Thaw Program: Did not completely eliminate the program, but did place some new restrictions on the program

Repeal Obamacare: Some parts of program have been repealed, but the program is still under scrutiny.

Move Israel embassy: Will be moved by May 2018

Remove troops from Afghanistan: Not accomplished, as a matter of fact reversed and more troops sent.

Border wall paid for by Mexico: Mexico says it will never pay, but the wall prototypes are being evaluated. To date, no wall is in place.

Deportation of illegal immigrants: Obama-era Deferred Actions for Childhood Arrivals program is in limbo. There are many decisions yet to be made by the court system.

Ditching NATO: Trump backtracked on this and indicated that NATO is needed after all.

Torture: Changed his mind and after re-evaluation decided torture is not the answer and such things as water-boarding would not re-instituted.

Prosecute Hillary Clinton: Changed his mind and decided to no seek prosecution, but would prefer to let her "heal."

Obama presidential promises second year in office:

Close Gitmo: did not.
End Bush-era tax cuts: Instead extended the cuts in exchange for extending unemployment benefits and reduction of Social Security taxes.

Change Washington: partially accomplished.

Expand hate crime statutes: accomplished.

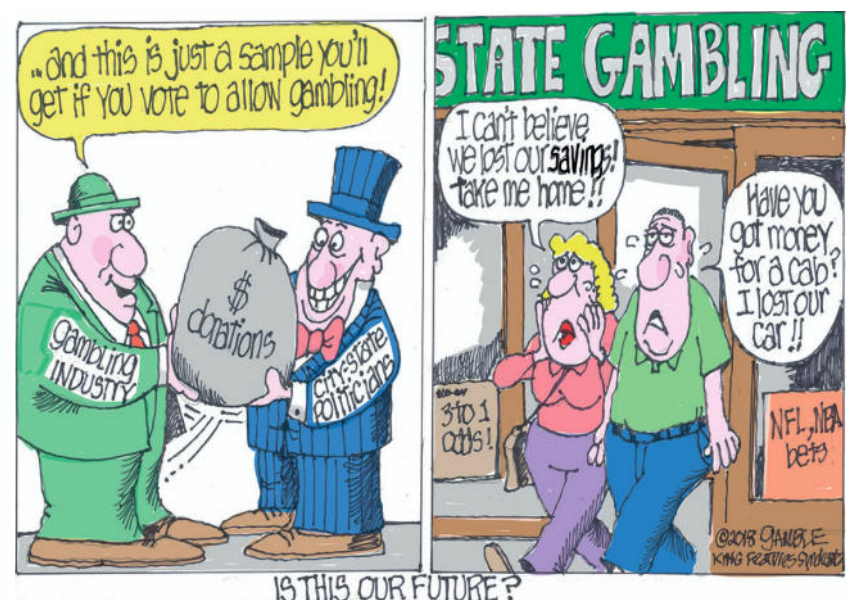
Create or save 1 million jobs with the \$25 billion investment: in progress.

Enact 90-day foreclosure moratorium for homeowners who are making good faith efforts to pay their mortgages: accomplished.

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OPINION

Walter E. Hussman Jr., *Publisher*
Gerry Tritz, *Opinion Page Editor*
Gary Castor, *Managing Editor*

A family owned and operated independent newspaper

OUR OPINION

State correct in not paying for Greitens' legal mess

The state's Office of Administration made the right call in declining to pay legal bills racked up by former Gov. Eric Greitens. Missouri taxpayers should not be on the hook for the bills.

A pair of lawyers whom Greitens hired to defend him in the legal troubles that led to his resignation have billed the state more than \$153,400.

Rep. Jay Barnes, the Jefferson City Republican who chaired a special House committee that investigated Greitens, recommended the state reject the invoices.

"Instead of placing the burden on Missouri taxpayers, those legal fees should be borne exclusively by Eric Greitens himself," Barnes said in a letter to OA.

We commend Office of Administration Commissioner Sarah Steelman who, late last week, announced OA would not pay the bills.

"It appears that the primary beneficiary of the legal services that your firm rendered was the former governor individually and that the services were not 'necessary for the efficient conduct' of the Governor's Office," she wrote in identical letters to the two attorneys.

Barnes argued the contract with the attorneys was for more than \$500, so it should have been bid but wasn't, and Greitens directly benefited from the lawyers' work. He also said the contract violates an executive order Greitens himself signed on the day he took office in 2017.

Kansas City lawyer Eddie Greim, who charged \$340 an hour for his legal work, said the state has a "clear legal duty to pay" for the services of he and the other lawyer, Ross Garber, who last month told a special House committee he charged the state \$320 an hour, "which is half of my normal rate."

Greim said Greitens hired personal legal counsel to defend him against impeachment, and those attorneys will be paid by Greitens, not taxpayers. But he and Garber were not hired to be his personal or "private" counsel, he said.

Their work, he argues, wasn't for Greitens personally, but for the office of governor.

"There is no question that in impeachment and other constitutionally significant proceedings, the Office itself has an interest in ensuring that impeachment is confined to the role specified by the Missouri Constitution," Greim told the News Tribune.

We agree with Steelman that the legal work was mostly to benefit Greitens, not the office of governor. But, regardless of what you believe on that point, the fact that bids were not sought is enough reason to reject payment.

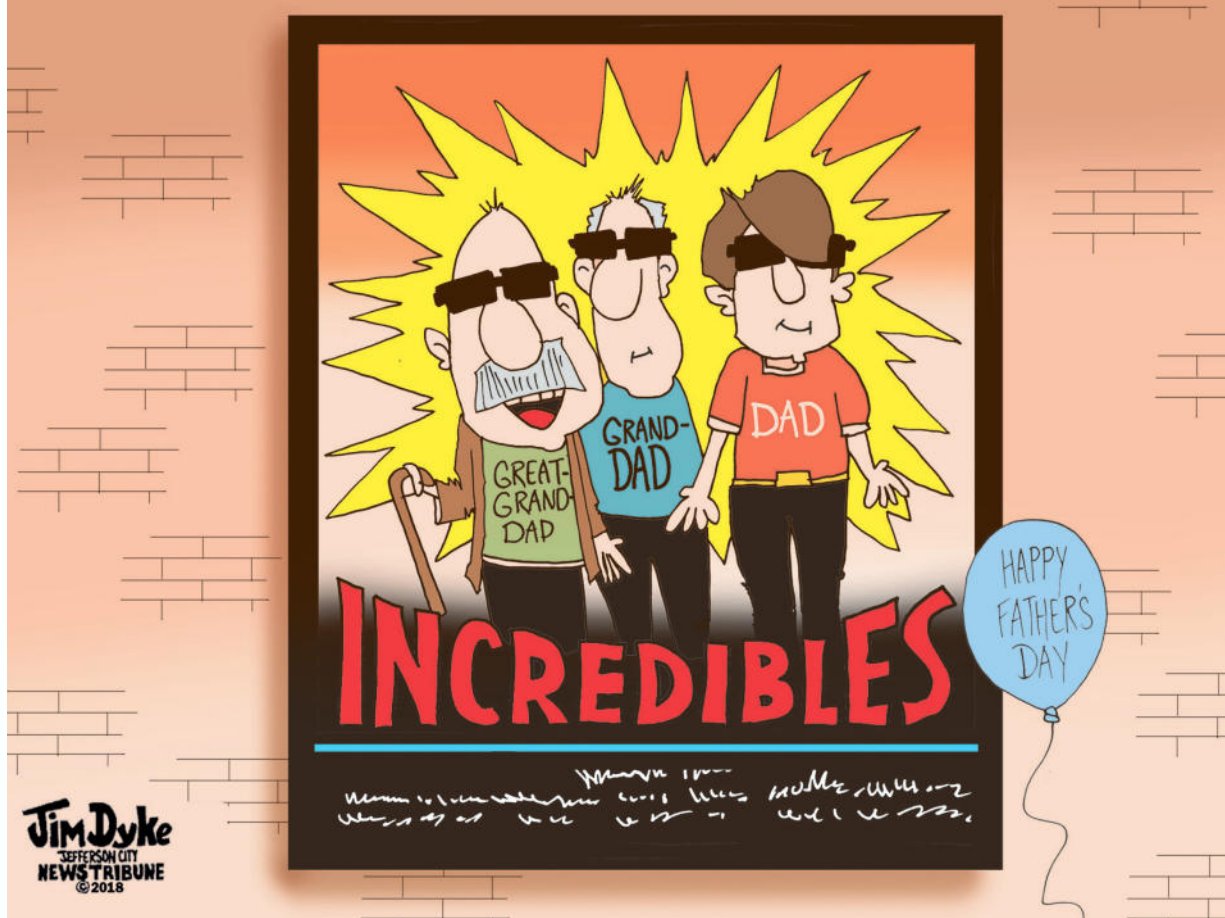
Missouri Auditor Nicole Galloway, a Democrat, said she has concerns about the hiring of the attorneys by the state, and is looking into the matter. State Attorney General Josh Hawley, a Republican, has agreed with Barnes that Greitens illegally hired the attorneys.

Stelman made the right call on behalf of taxpayers to reject the bills. Legally, it has an out because the state didn't seek bids for the work. Ethically, it's right because Greitens' legal troubles were caused by his own actions.

More of our tax money shouldn't go toward cleaning up the mess.

News Tribune

NOW SHOWING :



A history on the 'Missouri Navy'

I'm shirking my duty this month. I wanted to write about Russellville, but I ran out of time. Instead you are going to get a history of the ships of the "Missouri Navy." I'm giving two programs this month — one to the Breakfast Rotary and one to the Host Lions — so you will learn all about our Missouri namesake ships.

We'll start with the first U.S.S. Missouri, a paddle-wheel frigate built in 1841 at a cost of \$570,000. In 1843, she was a part of the Mediterranean Squadron and, while in Gibraltar, caught fire and exploded.

The second Missouri, CSS Missouri, was a Confederate ironclad built on the Red River in Shreveport. She never saw action and surrendered at the end of the Civil War. She was so badly built the U.S. Navy towed her to Mound City, Illinois, and scrapped her. She was never officially commissioned into the United States Navy, but many historians still count her as the second Missouri warship.

Our third U.S.S. Missouri BB-11 was commissioned in December 1903 and was built at a cost of \$5 million. She carried four 12-inch guns that could fire 870-pound shells almost 8 miles. She sailed around the world with "The Great White Fleet" in 1907-08, and was the second ship to pass through the Panama Canal in 1915. Former U.S. Rep. Ike Skelton's father served on this ship, and the punch bowl in the Governor's Mansion is from her silver service. BB-11 was scrapped in 1922.

The most famous U.S.S. Missouri BB-63 was commissioned in 1944 at the height of World War II. She weighed more than 45,000 tons and carried nine 16-inch guns that fired 1,300-pound shells more than 30 miles. The Japanese surrendered on her deck in 1945, and she served through Korea and was mothballed in 1955.

I helped recommission her in 1986, and she served in the Persian Gulf during Desert Storm. Her 16-inch guns were deadly and Iraqi soldiers actually surrendered to her drone. The drone was launched from the battleship to spot targets and range her shelling. The Iraqis knew that when the drones came over, shells followed.

In 1991, it was decided it was too expensive to operate four battleships with nearly 7,000 crew members. I was invited to ride the U.S.S. Missouri on its last North American cruise in 1992 to arrange the return of the silver service and the ship's bell. We decommissioned her shortly afterwards and she is now a museum ship at Pearl Harbor. Last June, I had the opportunity to return a place setting of the silver service to the Missouri.

The fifth U.S.S. Missouri SSN-780 is a Virginia class fast-attack submarine commissioned July 31, 2010. She cost \$3.5 billion to build and is a 21st century state-of-the-art warship. She has no periscope but carries a photonic mast. She will never have to be refueled during her 30-plus years of life, and

her mission is stealth and operating with Seal teams. Gov. Matt Blunt appointed me chairman of the Commissioning Committee so she truly is "my submarine." Gov. Mike Parson and I were honored to ride her into Pearl Harbor, her new homeport, in January 2018. She's a wonderful ship!

Since I'm talking submarines, I can't leave out the U.S.S. Jefferson City SSN-759. She is a Los Angeles class fast-attack submarine, which I also helped commission Feb. 29, 1992. (She's a leap-year submarine!) She also took part in Desert Storm firing cruise missiles into Iraq. She is currently at Pearl Harbor undergoing a mid-life upgrade so she will be part of the Missouri Navy for at least another 15 years.

Parson and I met her captain and crew in January. The U.S.S. Columbia SSN-774 is a step-sister of the U.S.S. Jefferson City. She is also a Los Angeles class submarine named for Columbia, Missouri; Columbia, South Carolina; and Columbia, Illinois. Columbia, Missouri, considers her their submarine, and so do I.

The Missouri Navy has other ships in "our fleet" besides submarines. The aircraft carrier, U.S.S. Harry S. Truman CVN-75 was commissioned July 25, 1998, in Norfolk, Virginia. We fed 25,000 people who attended the commissioning. She cost \$4.5 billion to build and weighs more than 100,000 tons. Her flight deck covers over 4 acres and she has a crew of 5,000 and an airwing of 80-plus aircraft. I have been on five cruises on the Truman, and she is currently deployed in the Mediterranean.

We have had five warships named for St. Louis and two for Kansas City, and we will add a new U.S.S. St. Louis LCS-19 to the fleet in 2019, and a new U.S.S. Kansas City LCS-22 in 2020-21.

I have been fortunate enough to have served on the commissioning committees of the U.S.S. Missouri BB-63, the U.S.S. Jefferson City SSN-759, the U.S.S. Harry S. Truman CVN-75 and the U.S.S. Missouri SSN-780, and now, on the U.S.S. St. Louis LCS-19. These are all "my ships," and I have commissioned them, cruised on them and made lifelong friends with crew members.

I currently serve as a volunteer for the employers in support of the Guard and Reserve program, which is funded by the Department of Defense and operates with the Missouri National Guard. We bring crew members of our Missouri namesake ships back for visits, and I also take special people out to visit our ships. If you're one of those special people let me know!

Parson has a strong "Missouri Navy" with our new ships joining the fleet. If he would wish to attack Kansas, we have them seven ships to two. Kansas only has the submarine Topeka, and a new LCS Wichita! KU watch out!

Sam Bushman is the presiding commissioner on the Cole County Commission. He shares his perspective each month on county issues. He can be reached at sbushman@colecouny.org.



Sam Bushman

PERSPECTIVE

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Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, 20 by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body.

Hebrews 10:19-20

YOUR OPINION

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Great new jobs report

Bert Dirschell
Centertown

Dear Editor:

What a great May jobs report from the Bureau of Labor Statistics. The following statistics note the improvement since the December 2016 report. The unemployment rate has dropped from 4.7 percent to 3.8 percent, the lowest since December 1969. The unemployment rate for blacks dropped from 7.9 percent to 5.9 percent, the lowest on record for online statistics. Over 3.2 million more people are employed. Average hourly earnings for private nonfarm payrolls has risen from \$25.95 to \$26.92 while average hourly earnings for private-sector production and non-supervisory personnel rose from \$21.78 to \$22.59.

There is still room for improvement, especially in the area of the labor force participation by men who are over the age of 20. Their labor force participation rate of 71.7 compares to a December 2006, prerecession rate of 76.2.

We are importing both skilled and un-skilled foreigners to work in our nation because we have no citizens who are willing to, or capable of, filling the jobs. Increasing the over 20 male labor force participation rate from 71.7 to 76.2 would add 5 million men to our work force. During the recovery from the recession of the early 1980s the over 20 male labor force participation rate ranged from 78.6 to 78.9. Why do we have so many males not in the workforce today? What changes need to be made to provide a reason for them to return to the workforce?

PS. A recent interesting LTE compared the results of the initial years of the Obama and Trump presidencies. When doing the comparison one should keep in mind that during the first two years of the Obama presidency Democrats had a much larger numerical advantage in Congress than Republicans have under Trump. The Democrats even had a filibuster proof majority for part of Obama's first two years.

Sanity for America?

Tom Ault
Jefferson City

Dear Editor:

While reading the commentary, first published by The San Diego Union-Tribune, regarding comments made by the Starbucks executive, I was mentally "caught up" with the statement, "Here's the easiest way to grasp how risky this is: Imagine if your household was on track to have to spend 20 percent of its income just to make minimum payments on your credit cards and yet family members kept adding new charges."

I may not be correct in my assumption, but it seems to me, that after talking to many of the younger folks who use credit cards today, and some of the older ones as well, the percentage figure he used of 20 percent of their income paid out in that endeavor, is probably more accurate than he thinks.

Recently I visited a relative whose only spending is done with a credit card. It can be for groceries, restaurants, day care, or any other variety of things that I would use cash for. Continuously I heard the statement made "We just don't

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Congress suffers arthritic knees from genuflecting to presidential power

WASHINGTON — Sen. Tim Kaine, D-Va., wonders: "Is there any doubt that America would view a foreign nation firing missiles at targets on American soil as an act of war?" His question might be pertinent to why the Singapore summit happened, and what, if anything, was changed by it. The question certainly is relevant to constitutional government as it pertains — if it still does pertain — to war.

Kaine was responding to a 22-page opinion of the Justice Department's Office of Legal Counsel issued 12 days before the summit. The opinion concerns the president's order for the April 13 air strikes against facilities associated with Syria's chemical weapons, after the use of such weapons in a Damascus suburb. The OLC argues the presidential order, issued without authorization by or consultation with Congress, was nevertheless lawful because the president "had reasonably determined that the use of force would be in the national interest and that the anticipated hostilities would not rise to the level of a war in the constitutional sense."

Kaine describes as "ludicrous" the principle that presidents "can magically assert 'national interest' and redefine war to exclude missile attacks and there-

by bypass Congress." The OLC's capacious definition of actions in the "national interest" encompasses "protection of U.S. persons and property," "assistance to allies," "support for the United Nations," "promoting regional stability," prevention of a "humanitarian catastrophe," and "deterrence of the use and proliferation of" particularly heinous weapons.

This is perhaps germane to Singapore. There Kim Jong Un committed himself only to a process — "to work toward" the goal of "complete denuclearization of the Korean peninsula" — and processes can be interminable (e.g., the Middle East "peace process"). Furthermore, North Korea has espoused this goal for over three decades. Still, let us prematurely assume something momentous has been achieved. And that the achievement was related to the U.S. policy of "maximum pressure," including the threat, made vivid by deployments of impressive U.S. military assets, of the use of force by the president who, like many predecessors, feels free to act without involving Congress.

The threat of military force by an unconstrained president was underscored for Kim shortly before Singapore, when Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., a con-

fidant of this president, said of North Korea, "If they play Trump, we're going to have a war." He said "denuclearization" of North Korea is "non-negotiable," and that a North Korean nuclear capability to strike America "ensures their demise": "If [the president] has to pick between millions of people dying in America, and millions of people dying over there, he's going to pick millions of people dying over there if he has to."

Note the senator's clear premise: It is for the president to "pick" between war involving millions of deaths, and peace. Congress, its arthritic knees creaky from decades of genuflections at the altar of presidential power, will be a gimpy spectator.

The OLC says it has "well over 100" episodes that support its contention that for 230 years presidents have unilaterally employed force in episodes short of "sustained, full-scale conflict with another nation." Note well: "Sustained." "Full-scale." "With another nation."

The OLC notes even the 1973 War Powers Resolution, by which Congress attempted to circumscribe presidential war-making discretion, allows presidents to introduce U.S. forces into hostilities for at least 60 days without congressional authorization. Still, the OLC acknowledges that presidents must "resort

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COMMENTARY