

Our View

ACLU should solicit state on this ordinance

The American Civil Liberties Union's letter this week, compelling Henry County's supervisors to take a fresh look at the solicitation ordinance they passed in March, arrived with more questions than deserve answers, just perhaps not the responses it is seeking.

In case you missed the news, the ACLU cited a Supreme Court case involving the city of Charlottesville in arguing that Henry County's ordinance violated the principles of free speech as defined by the court because solicitation is constitutionally protected.

The letter said, in part: "Because solicitation is constitutionally protected speech, any regulation of it must, at a minimum, satisfy the requirements for time, place, and manner restrictions; that is, they must be content neutral, be narrowly tailored to serve a significant government interest, and leave open ample alternative channels of communication."

You won't find a greater defender of free speech and the First Amendment than the folks who write, edit and deliver the words you are reading. Our words form the backbones of our industry, and we will die on our keyboards to fight anyone or any group that threatens to take them away. As we often write: There's a reason our Founding Fathers made free speech the First Amendment. And we hold it in reverence for its intrinsic reinforcement to the past, present and future of democracy. You don't have to look across too many borders to see that's true.

The ACLU has a long and steady record for protecting rights of all sorts. The organization confounds some and sticks its toe and nose into arguments that irritate many. But mostly its intentions are golden: to protect freedoms of sometimes generally anonymous individuals and their causes under assault.

Still we wonder why it has emerged as the legal benefactor for people who are most affected by this ordinance: People who stand at intersections, sometimes violate rights of way and generally cause a dangerous situation if not always a public nuisance.

This not to declaim the causes and needs of all of those groups and individuals. We fully support non-profits who need to raise money to help people and those down on their luck who find handouts to a key source of income. Need and generosity deserve an intersection, if you will. But should it be one that creates a traffic hazard?

The Board of Supervisors considered all these issues carefully and with sensitivity in discussing this ordinance. It held several discussions and gathered information, including research of how the language of this proposed ordinance mirrored a statute from the General Assembly.

"Currently as it stands under state law, you are not allowed to solicit motorists, distribute handbills, request contributions, sell items to people on the highway," County Attorney George Lye told supervisors before their vote. "You're not supposed to stand in the median or the roadway and do that. But under the state code it's a little bit difficult to enforce because it involves the traffic code and the administrative code. So the General Assembly authorized counties and cities to adopt the ordinance that I drafted for you. When I say drafted, I really copied the language."

And therein lies our question: Why is the ACLU fingering Henry County when the state statute is the guiding principle for its local ordinance? Surely the cited case in Charlottesville in 2013 was referenced by lawmakers when they drafted the language emulated by Lye.

Wouldn't the ACLU be more efficient to just address rewording the state law?

That's exactly what the supervisors should suggest.

MARTINSVILLE BULLETIN

Kelly E. Mirt Regional Publisher
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United States Constitution, Amendment I:
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Reflections from a day at Notre Dame

BY HOLLY KOZELSKY
 holly.kozelsky@martinsvillebulletin.com

This week's column was written 15 years ago.

At the time it only was a diary entry that I never expected anyone to read. It was written just before I started working at the Bulletin, so back then, I wasn't used to writing every day or to any standard. Thus, bear with me as I share it. You may grimace along with me at some of the inept wording, as long as you don't



Holly Kozelsky

laugh too hard.

The iconic French cathedral Notre Dame burned on Monday. One of the world's great treasures, it was built in the 12th and 13th centuries. It is the most famous of the Gothic cathedrals of the Middle Ages.

Struck by the tragedy, I was moved to write about the cathedral in a column.

However, nothing I could say now would have the strength of the day I visited Notre Dame, so I picked up my travel diary to refresh my mind.

When I was in Notre Dame, I was struck dumb with overwhelming emotions. It was not the first cathedral I had been to, so my reaction was not to cathedrals in general – and no other cathedral has touched me so. Only this cathedral, Our Lady, Notre Dame, could do this.

This is what it was like to visit Notre Dame, written on June 21, 2004:

"Went onto the island Ile de la Cite and by Palais de Justice and the stunning Sainte Chapelle; but reached the shock and the depth and the high point and the impact of the trip! Notre Dame. "I cannot and dare not describe it. "We walked around outside. In the back was a large courtyard, and a black gospel group (not Southern-style gospel, more traditional American) was singing 'Go Tell it on the Mountain' and 'When the Saints Come Marching In.' "Went around to the other side and

looked at friezes in the wall and a hippie-type told me that there is a secret shown; that if I found it (didn't) I could not tell anyone.

"Went in and was awestruck and more inspired and touched than ever in my life. I walked around in shock and wonder at that edifice started in 1163, about 700 years old. The genius to conceive of it and plan it out; the never-ending (& exploited) labor to produce it; the centuries of use of it – beyond comprehension – I sat and gazed and admired and felt mute and stunned by it all. All through it, I could not stop the tears; and my body all through felt the wonder of it.

"Well, I can't do any sort of justice whatsoever with my meager and ineffectual words to the Notre Dame so I'll stop here and move on, after saying that visiting Notre Dame was one of the most wondrous and moving moments of my life.

"p.s. [My sister] lit a candle and prayed and knelt on altar. Also organ recital, a major part of the majesty."

Swings at tax pitches leave frustration

One of the reasons I became a journalist was because I learned at a peach-fuzz age that I couldn't hit a curveball. Last weekend, I learned I still couldn't, and that had nothing to do with my eyes, reflexes or long-

gone dreams of playing in the major leagues (however misguided those may have been).

What I did was take my annual swing at accounting for the money my family pays the government each year. Like the rest of you, I know this game and how it's played. Even if I'm not always very good at winning, the process always has been pretty straightforward — like a fastball.

But this is where the curveball comes in: The new tax code adopted last year left me jelly-kneed and flailing in frustration. A little history: I always slave over record-keeping and tax filing, and I've prepared my returns digitally since the software arrived on 5-inch, floppy discs and a 286 was a lightning computer. A couple of times I've involved accountants, but that was after I had slogged through the process myself.

I've had my lovely do-

do's with the IRS, and I've contributed many dollars at April 15 or thereafter. Fluid life circumstances sometimes changed the pitching pattern, if you will.

And this year I, of course, had read about people being "surprised" at tax time by a lower refund. That was understandable, I thought. If you are deducting a lower percentage from each paycheck, you will have paid less into the system that potentially could owe you a refund.

Maybe you saw this pitch coming better than I, but I thought I dug in for my tax season realistic about my chances. We had received a decent refund in 2017 but not in any recent year before that. And I stepped up to the plate having faced other troublesome breaking pitches thrown at us in the past year.

For one thing, our family made significantly less income for the year. Still the deductions I track so carefully weren't decreasing significantly. In fact, because our decreased income, the baseline deductions would be lower, meaning that more accumulated deductions should be worth, well, more.

But as Lee Corso likes to say on ESPN Game Day: "Not so fast, my friend."

At the halfway point of the process, everything seemed to be going according to ex-

pectations. I plodded through the software, shuffled my papers, did my arithmetic, answered the software's prompts and entered my numbers.

And then that's when the new tax law blasted its bigger message right into my face.

We were going to owe a few hundred dollars this year.

That nice headline our lawmakers gave us about the "tax cut for the middle class" — and my family is certainly in that group — was a nothing but a spitball. It's like you really never know where this thing is going.

Under the previous code we received a standard deduction for each member of our family, which created the tax rate we would owe. Then we deducted a wide array of expenses, such as home interest, medical bills, charitable donations and some employee business expenses. Those offset the amount owed.

But for 2018, with the new law, we lost that standard deduction, were given a \$25,000-plus threshold for itemized deductions, and there were certain expenses that no longer were counted toward that total.

So even though my household income fell by about 10% and we paid taxes at the same rate, my overall allowed deductions and credits under the new formula fell by about

50% from 2017. So there was a check written on April 15.

Does that mean I paid less in taxes as my leaders had told me I would?

Of course not. A greater percentage of my income would go to Washington. I also spent hours on a process that no longer has value. All that math and those questions I answered in the software saved me maybe \$200.

This is why I am proponent of a flat tax for everyone and everything. In my Utopia each person pays a percentage of his or her gross income — no matter its source — and that's the tax process. Period. I perhaps would allow a deduction for mortgage interest and dependents but nothing else.

That way, the government has its nut — X percent of the GDP becomes our set revenue pot — and there's no need for all the paperwork and process, no need for all the gamesmanship and, most significantly, no need for the IRS as its now defined. Maybe all that unnecessary expense could go into, oh, I don't know, health care.

That likely won't happen in my lifetime. I've been paying taxes for generations, and I'm used to those big-league curveballs. Somehow, though, it feels like the strike zone isn't the same for everyone.

How to submit a letter to the editor

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Our View

PHCC's baseball players don't need to handle these errors

Baseball is a game of fundamentals. You throw the ball, you hit the ball, and you catch the ball. Sometimes you mishandle the ball, though, and it can cost your team the game.

Ironically, such a fundamental error has cost Patrick Henry Community College's baseball team almost all its games, its season and its hopes for a national title.

Earlier this month the National Junior College Athletic Association, the governing body under which the Patriots compete, audited paperwork the school's athletic department had submitted. That audit found PHCC Athletic Director Brian Henderson had booted a ground ball.

Sadly, this wasn't a difficult play. All he had to do was complete a set of forms and submit them to the NJCAA by April 10. For two players and two forms, eligibility rolled between his legs.

When the NJCAA realized the players had not been approved, it did the only thing it could: It ruled them ineligible, which means any game in which they competed had to be forfeited. And the Patriots once-promising season was lost.

There would be no postseason tournament berth, no chance to pursue a national title that had eluded them by a single game the past two seasons. Some errors are more damaging than others.

PHCC has responded with remorse and reflection. PHCC President Angeline Godwin seems to have taken the reins in reviewing how this mistake occurred and how it might be avoided in the future.

She said this was a human mistake, the audit was appropriate and the outcome understandable. "[T]he coaches thought we had everything, the athletic director thought we had everything, and we would have thought we were in very, very good shape," Godwin told Bulletin Sports Editor Cara Cooper this week. "... Fundamentally, and in the administration, we've taken full responsibility for this."

Henderson, a former women's basketball coach at PHCC, has been athletic director since 2014. These forms are routine in all the sports he manages, and the deadlines are various and constant. It's a primary role of any athletic director to ensure that these details are handled appropriately, although he certainly is not the first to err.

Still, we find Godwin's action plan to address this error to be curious. Instead of specifying steps to help Henderson stay organized, she suggested that coaches and players would be brought into the process to ensure everything is complete.

Read that again: PHCC will have players making sure the athletic department is doing its job. Maybe the chemistry students will be in charge of the lab, too.

"We're not trying to divert our responsibility to the students," Godwin said. "We have our responsibility. But we want them to really understand what are the elements of eligibility. So when we ask them for a form, they really understand it."

Actually, we don't doubt the athletes already have received a strong lesson in how important an eligibility form is. But this isn't their responsibility.

Coaches teach players fundamentals. Players apply those fundamentals in life and in games. Administrators make sure they both can handle those chances. That should be the end of this game.

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The Saturday Columns

To find truth, look the other way

BY STEVEN DOYLE

I'm a guy. I'm a husband. Given those qualifications, it should surprise no one that I sometimes say and do things that are at cross purposes with my wife (Happy Mother's Day!) and do so without any clue of how my innocent (read: ignorant) efforts were caught in her eddy of irritation.



Stephen Doyle

So she gives me a piece of telltale advice to clear up my myopia: "Try flipping it around and see how you feel."

She may have followed that up with something like: "Put the shoe on the other dang foot, dumbo" (at least I think the words were "dang" and "dumbo").

With that as my foundation, I suggest it's time in our country for a lot of flipping of the picture to see what is being drowned out in our diminishing discourse: We pursue might at the expense of right.

We have lost focus on right and truth and preserving the core of our nation. A lot of people are being dumbos.

These days many among us, about 100% of our leaders, only appear to care about politics — the thing that separates good people from good decisions, as I've always said — which means right never gets on stage, must less finds the spotlight.

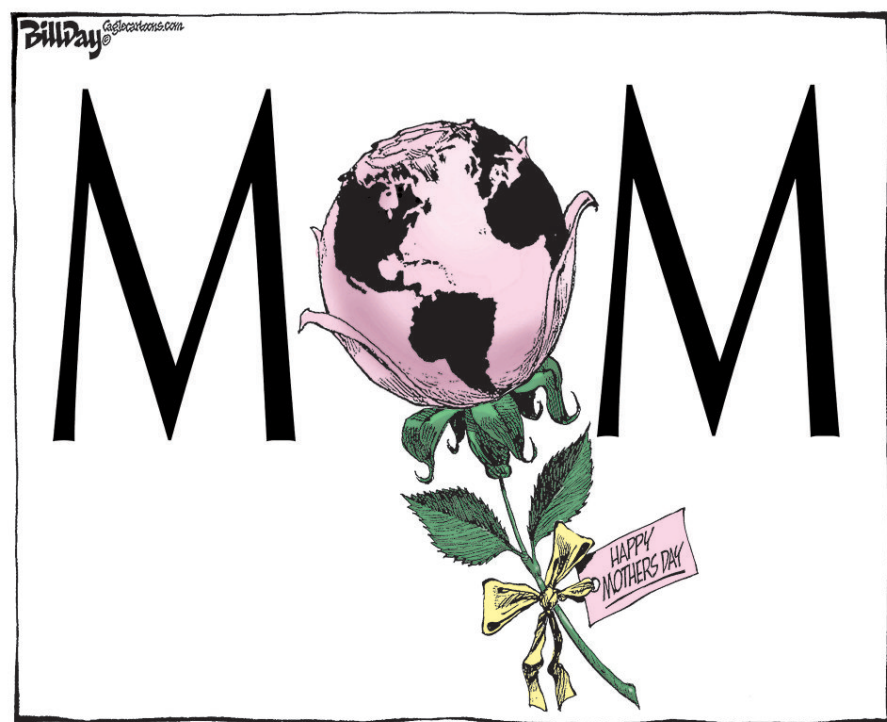
How did we get this way? Well, we have for the past few decades empowered those who only protect power. If you think every leader in Washington upholds his or her oath, you haven't been listening. These deaf, dumb and blind kids sure play a mean spinball. And spinning is our game.

Let's examine this with one thing in mind: The names and the party affiliations don't matter. Every perspective would change 180 degrees depending upon who is sitting on which throne.

We have a president who doesn't respect the presidency or the rule of law and, sometimes, the Constitution.

We have a Congress charged with checking and balancing the executive branch, only its members check and balance only the people from the opposite party. Otherwise they defend their own.

Then we have all the president's men, which, like President Nixon's, tend to do what they are told and hide behind the coattails of the person who gave



them power, dang the truth and the light.

And all across the nation we have ideologists who don't value doing the right thing unless it empowers them. Would your objections be the same if your questions were about the opposing party? Everyone is being offensive by being defensive. Mitch McConnell is a politician, not a leader. Jerry Nadler may care about the Constitution, but he has to care more about the Democrats' opportunity to control the House.

I don't want to hear about Impeachment — that would be a disaster for the country — but didn't Special Counsel Robert Mueller cede loose ends to Congress that need to be grasped and knotted?

I'm weary of those with any clout using it to avoid the truth, not pursue it. Because I only want the truth. I could care less what it means to the individuals but I care deeply about the foundation of this nation and this planet that I leave to my children and grandchildren. Does anyone else share this concern?

Do you want sidestepping and avoidances that are permitted not by law but by politics to shine on the horizon of our future?

Do you want a mushroom cloud of constitutional assault to be allowed to leave a malignancy for generations?

But this is where we are, teetering at the precipice of becoming Nicaragua

or Saudi Arabia. Is that what you want? Do you really want absolute power to continue to corrupt our nation absolutely?

Some appear to be afraid. Of what? The truth? If you have nothing to hide, why do you hide behind red tape and verbosity? Why not just help clear up our understanding.

I don't know if any crimes have been committed. I believe everything that is said has been done. I know the credibility of some of those involved. You do, too, but do you want to know the real truth or just the version that perpetuates your personal power?

Whether or not you support President Trump, surely you want America to have a moral compass that has the rule of law as its northern point. Otherwise, we are all misdirected and will wander around in the morass of politics until we have no nation at all.

I'm not criticizing any individual in this process. Guilt can be shared liberally (not meaning by just liberals).

But if you don't like that the White House and those working inside are being criticized and pursued because they decline to participate in getting to the ultimate truth, declining to participate within the rule of law, declining to honor the Constitution, and that your president and your party are being demonized, well I have only one thing to say:

Try flipping it around and see how you would feel.

The hatred of robocalls is bipartisan

I oversee the care of an ailing man who's pushing 90. When I'm with him, the sound of his phone ringing sends a minor shock



Froma Harrop

to my system. And his phone is ringing all the time. "That's probably a robocall," he says, obviously aware that these auto-dialed spam and scam calls are usually up to no good. He knows deep down not to give personal information to a stranger on the phone, but sophisticated fraudsters sometimes don't sound like strangers to him.

Americans received an estimated 48 billion robocalls last year, 17 billion more than the year before. Only 1 in 5 served a useful purpose, such as a reminder of a doctor's appointment.

Though robocalls make everyone nuts, they are a menace to the elderly. Cognitive decline can lower one's defenses against scams. Older people are often trusting and generous. They may

be lonely and thus susceptible to a friendly-sounding voice. (Some recordings do a very good job mimicking real conversations, complete with pauses and background noise.) This group is more likely to have headlines, which offer fewer options for blocking robocalls. That's why its members heavily populate the "suckers lists" maintained by criminal enterprises.

And the cons are oh-so-clever. They may start with official-sounding words, such as "Our records show that your doctor has ordered a ..." Their come-ons often promise "free" stuff, say, a medical alert system, or help paying for drugs. To get the "bargain," the victims must provide personal or financial information, which is what the sharks are really after.

Another robocall tactic is to issue threats, often from someone claiming to work for a government agency. The callers may warn of unpaid tax bills for which the person answering could be arrested. Or they may scare the mark by saying his or her Social Security number could be at

risk. Again, the prize is access to bank account information, a Social Security number or a credit card.

Until recently, the technological defenses have been few. Crooks have tricks to make a call look local on caller ID. Some use numbers impersonating legitimate businesses or institutions.

Robocalls are endangering the health of older Americans. Being cheated causes great emotional damage. Just receiving threats raises anxiety levels. And the nonstop waves of phone calls disturb sleep.

In his prime, my friend worked as a reporter who asked hard questions of everyone. But somewhere in his 80s, he lost his edge. At the same time, he's proud and he doesn't want anyone, his caregivers included, to think that he can't handle his affairs.

And he really does need to monitor the phone. A call could be from his brother or his doctor. It could be the drugstore telling him that his pills are ready.

When people do answer the phone, however, they get

designated as "live," making them a more attractive target for robocallers. The pest calls then multiply.

My friend is, of course, on the National Do Not Call Registry. That just stops reputable telemarketers from calling (not in itself a bad thing). Some service providers now put spam alerts on suspicious calls. But even though that saves folks the trouble of answering, they still have to stop what they're doing and look at the noisy phone.

Bipartisan legislation in Washington could finally put a nick in the robocall plague.

It would boost penalties on robocallers engaging in fraud and require telecommunications companies to strengthen spam-call filters. Thank you, Sen. Ed Markey, Democrat of Massachusetts. Thank you, Sen. John Thune, Republican of South Dakota.

Tech experts say the con artists will find new ways to get around any roadblocks. OK, but let's at least slow them down before we destroy our phones.

Harrop is a syndicated columnist. Email her at fharrop@gmail.com or follow her on Twitter @FromaHarrop.

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This victory was quite clear

Martin Truex Jr. leaves everyone at Martinsville Speedway stuck in mud as he runs away with First Data 500



ASSOCIATED PRESS PHOTOS

Martin Truex Jr. (left) and his girlfriend Sherry Pollex (right) pose with the trophy as he celebrates after winning a NASCAR Cup Series race at Martinsville Speedway on Sunday.

By Steven Doyle

There was plenty of mud in the parking lots around Martinsville Speedway on Sunday afternoon, and the cars chasing Martin Truex Jr.'s Toyota appeared to be driving in it.

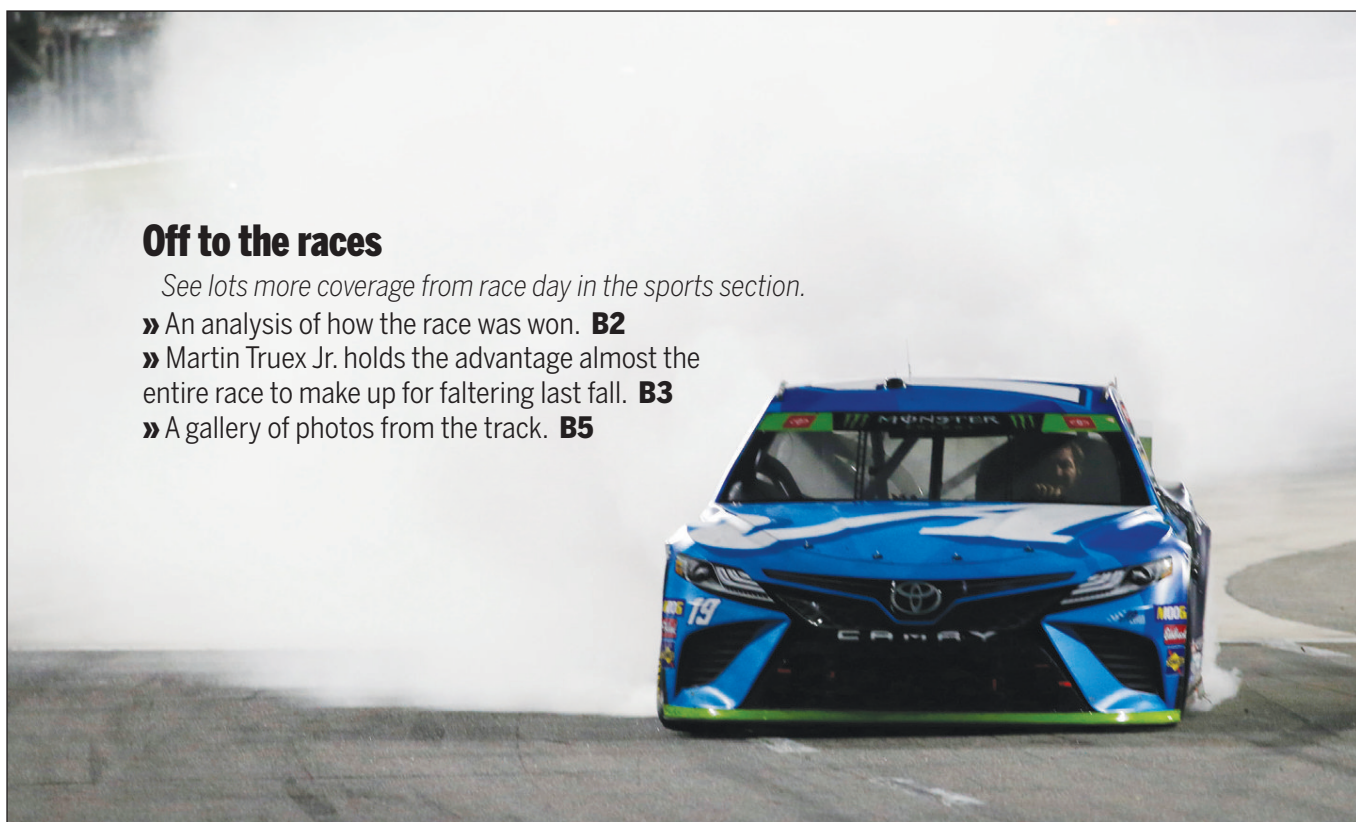


Steven Doyle

Nobody could get anywhere close to passing Truex, no matter how many times serendipity gave them a running chance.

After 30 laps the only real question was what the big

"A" on the hood of his car advertised. That's Auto Owners Insurance, and this sponsor got its money's worth, because for more than three hours on what turned into a gloriously summeresque afternoon, that A was in focus for every eyeball and lens but not a single rearview mirror.



Off to the races

See lots more coverage from race day in the sports section.

- » An analysis of how the race was won. **B2**
- » Martin Truex Jr. holds the advantage almost the entire race to make up for faltering last fall. **B3**
- » A gallery of photos from the track. **B5**

SEE RACE | A8 Martin Truex Jr. (19) does a burnout as he celebrates after winning the NASCAR Cup Series race Sunday.

Trump: US forces cornered IS leader in dead-end tunnel

This file image made from video posted on a militant website April 29, 2019, purports to show the leader of the Islamic State group, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. President Trump said Sunday al-Baghdadi died during a raid in Syria.

AL-FURQAN MEDIA VIA AP FILE



Death of al-Baghdadi a significant foreign policy success for president

By Zeke Miller, Deb Riechmann and Robert Burns
The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the shadowy leader of the Islamic State group who presided over its global jihad and became arguably the world's most wanted man, died after U.S. special operators cornered him during a raid in Syria, President Donald Trump said Sunday. "Last night, the United States brought the world's No. 1 ter-

rorist leader to justice," Trump announced at the White House, providing graphic details of al-Baghdadi's final moments at the helm of the militant organization. "Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi is dead."

In a national address, Trump described the nighttime airborne raid in Syria's northwestern Idlib province, with American special operations forces flying over heavily militarized territory controlled by multiple nations and forces. No U.S.

troops were killed in the operation, Trump said.

The death of al-Baghdadi was a milestone in the fight against IS, which brutalized swaths of Syria and Iraq and sought to direct a global campaign from a self-declared "caliphate." A yearslong campaign by American and allied forces led to the recapture of the group's territorial holding, but its violent ideology has continued to inspire attacks.

SEE LEADER | A8

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WEATHER

Today will be pleasant and mostly sunny. Tonight will be mild and mostly cloudy. For detailed weather information, see Page A2

72 HIGH | 52 LOW



California declares state of emergency over wildfires. Page A5



6 56525 10671 2

Race

From Page A1

That Truex ultimately won by about three car lengths was a dishonest statistic. He spent the afternoon as a Bandit running away from 37 Smokey's. Wait, have you read that line somewhere before? Perhaps it was in March, when Brad Keselowski was somnolently dominant. And Truex beat that performance, too.

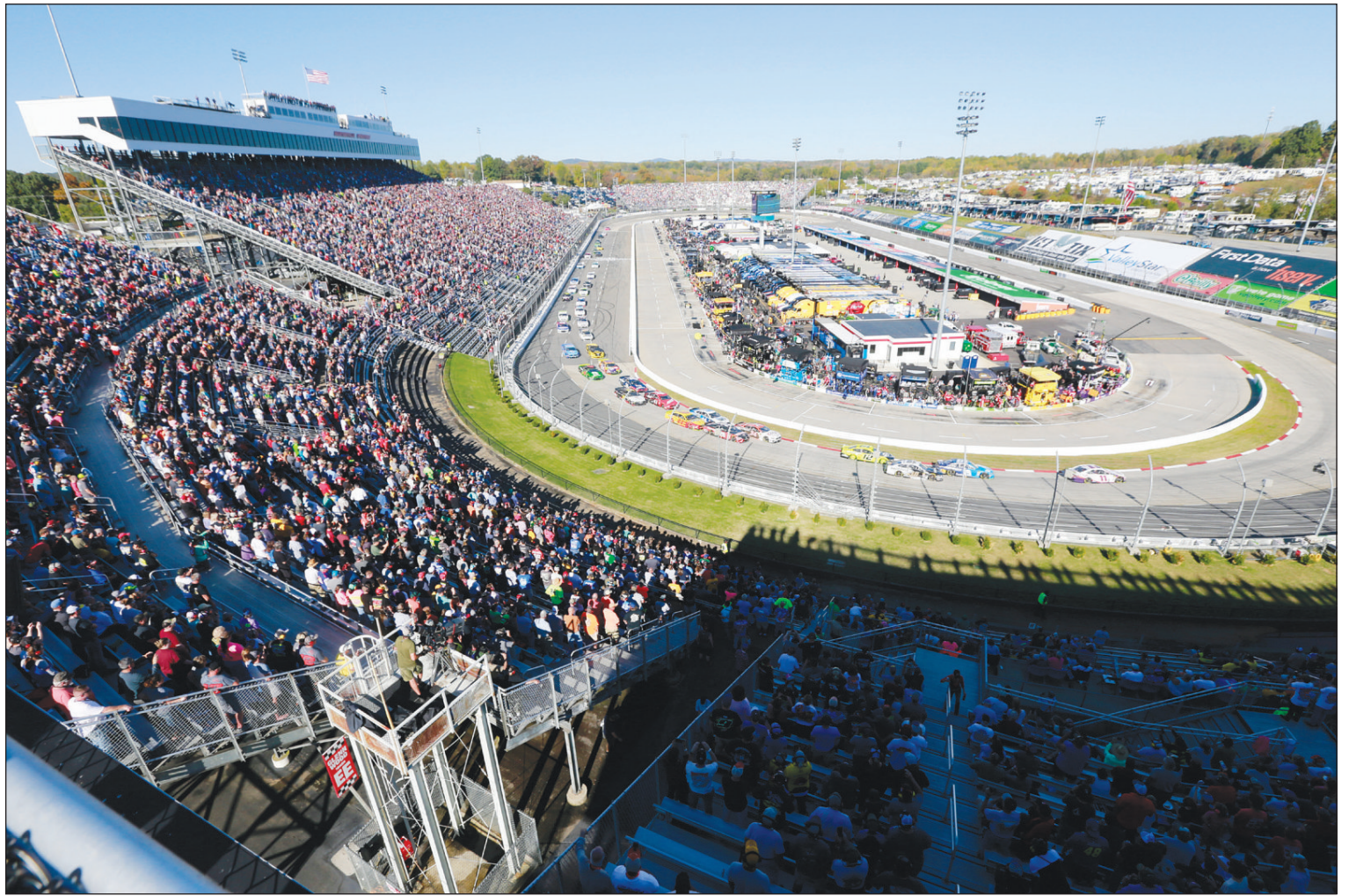
Keselowski led the STP 500 for of 446 laps. Truex was in first place for 469. Denny Hamlin dominated for the first 30 laps, and Kyle Larson stole the lead once after skipping the pits during caution just before the end of the second stage. Otherwise, No 19 was No. 1.

Maybe Truex and Keselowski, whose Ford finished third Sunday, should be designated as pace cars at Martinsville, because everyone is used to following them around The Paperclip.

The only distraction from that performance came after the race was finished, when Joey Logano and Hamlin got into a little bit of an altercation in the staging area between Turns 1 and 2. That's the only way any other driver got any attention from the fans. Maybe the crews should've have let them fight for a while.

Post-race squareoffs and shoving matches and even an occasional punch happen fairly frequently, especially after an afternoon of the metal-mangling maneuvers that happen on a short track and with NASCAR playoff money at stake. There is more heat with the field narrowed to eight drivers who can win in Homestead next month.

Truex last year lost this race at the end. Logano won and went on to capture the championship. That this victory qualifies Truex for the finals, the first of the eight remaining drivers to do so, would seem fitting.



THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

People watch the start of the NASCAR Cup Series race at Martinsville Speedway in Martinsville on Sunday.

He said later he didn't want to talk much about that. He just thought winning in Martinsville and taking home the grandfather clock was the important thing.

And, playoffs be damned, this race was the sort that NASCAR officials would prefer not to see very often: boringly dominant.

NASCAR never has been bashful about pushing in the clutch on rules and shifting regulations and specifications to ensure everyone has an equal chance at winning. In gearhead that means: so no one can run off and leave the pack.

Buddy Baker drove so fast one year at Daytona that he was in Jacksonville before the second-place car crossed the finish line. His speed records still stand. That came a few races

after NASCAR first became a nationally prominent brand. What couldn't happen was that the sport would become one-car-in-the-frame boring.

So officials have added restrictor plates and adjusted restrictor plates. Spoiler sizes and angles were raised and lowered. Anything scientific that could create an advantage eventually has been scrutinized, sanitized and homogenized.

This often has happened in a sermon about the commandment of safety when NASCAR was guilty of coveting – of wanting a 36-car shootout for five laps to go at the end of every race with every piece of equipment pretty much equal, no matter the badge on the hood.

Truth is, they are. Vulnerability of the cars is seldom an

issue. Today's Mustangs, Camaros and Camrys have to hit something pretty hard to leave the track for good. Nobody was in the garage for good until Sunday's race had reached its last hour.

But by then no one was really in the race, either.

Truex's only true competition was the guy on the flag stand. When he waved the caution, that represented the only way the rest of the field could catch up and appear to have a chance. Emphasis on appear.

At one point Truex was so far ahead of second-place finisher William Byron that Usain Bolt could've covered about 40 yards in the time differential. As the track became shadowed and about 75 laps remained, you knew the sun was setting on everyone else.

"This racetrack in general, you don't see that," Truex said.

Later he talked about how lucky he was, what a great team he has, how it feels to "be the best right now."

And, yeah, everyone else is stuck in the mud.

Steven Doyle is Local Editor of the Martinsville Bulletin. Contact him at 276-638-8801 ext. 245. Follow @StevenLDoyle.

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THE WHITE HOUSE VIA AP

President Donald Trump is joined by (from left) national security adviser Robert O'Brien, Vice President Mike Pence, Defense Secretary Mark Esper, Joint Chiefs Chairman Gen. Mark Milley and Brig. Gen. Marcus Evans, Deputy Director for Special Operations on the Joint Staff, on Saturday in the Situation Room of the White House in Washington.

Leader

From Page A1

As U.S. troops bore down on al-Baghdadi, he fled into a "dead-end" tunnel with three of his children, Trump said, and detonated a suicide vest, killing himself and the children. "He was a sick and depraved man, and now he's gone," Trump said. "He died like a dog, he died like a coward."

Al-Baghdadi's identity was confirmed by a DNA test conducted onsite, Trump said.

Trump had teased a major announcement late Saturday, tweeting that "Something very big has just happened!" By the morning, he was thanking Russia, Turkey, Syria and Iraq, as well as Kurdish fighters in Syria for their support.

The operation marks a significant foreign policy success for Trump, coming at one of the lowest points in his presidency as he is mired in impeachment proceedings and facing widespread Republican

condemnation for his Syria policy.

The recent pullback of U.S. troops he ordered from northeastern Syria raised a storm of bipartisan criticism in Washington that the militant group could regain strength after it had lost vast stretches of territory it had once controlled. Trump said the troop pull-out "had nothing to do with this."

Planning for the operation began weeks ago, Trump said, after the U.S. gained unspecified intelligence on al-Baghdadi's whereabouts. Eight military helicopters flew for more than an hour over territory controlled by Russian and Syrian forces, Trump said, before landing under gunfire at the compound.

Trump vividly described the raid and took extensive questions from reporters for more than 45 minutes Sunday. He said U.S. forces breached the walls of the building because the doors were booby-trapped and chased al-Baghdadi into the tunnel, which partially collapsed after al-Baghdadi

detonated the suicide vest. Many homes in Syria, which has been riven by civil war since 2011, have subterranean tunnels or shelters from the fighting.

Trump also revealed that U.S. forces spent roughly two hours on the ground collecting valuable intelligence. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said Sunday that the U.S.-led Coalition launched at least one airstrike in western Aleppo aimed at Abu Hassan al-Muhajir, an aide to al-Baghdadi.

Trump said he watched the operation from the White House Situation room as it played out live "as though you were watching a movie." Trump suggested he may order the release of the video so that the world knows al-Baghdadi did not die of a hero and spent his final moments "crying," "whimpering" and "screaming."

Trump approved the operation Saturday morning after receiving "actionable intelligence," Vice President Mike Pence told CBS' "Face the Nation."

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