

“I think you have to know someone to truly dislike them, don't you? That said, I'd shove most politicians into a cauldron and boil them up.”
— Dame Diana Rigg (1938–2020), English actress who played Emma Peel in the TV series “The Avengers” (1965–1968); Countess Teresa di Vicenzo, wife of James Bond, in “On Her Majesty's Secret Service” (1969); and Olenna Tyrell in “Game of Thrones” (2013–2017)

Our View

Casino is the best hope for brighter future

Signs with the phrases “We're betting on Bristol” and “Don't gamble with Bristol's future” have been in place for months and now the moment of decision is quickly approaching.

On Nov. 3, Bristol has a choice to make. The signs, statements, social media posts and letters to the editor show a stark divide in public opinion. However, the clear benefits of the Hard Rock Bristol Casino and Resort have convinced the Bristol Herald Courier Editorial Board to support its approval.

The financial benefits alone should give detractors pause. The project is expected to initially create 2,000 jobs with combined annual wages of \$90 million, with \$15 million to \$20 million generated for the city in annual tax revenues. These numbers do not include the city's share of annual gaming tax revenue, which will be significant.

Virginia created the possibility for casinos in the commonwealth specifically for revitalizing five particularly financially challenged cities — including Bristol. The city has been rated near the bottom of Virginia's economic rankings for years; however, the choice to approve does rest with the city.

The question remains: Can Bristol afford to turn down this opportunity?

More than 10,000 people in Bristol and in 10 Southwest Virginia counties have lost their jobs recently as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The country as a whole is in recession, and the area has longstanding, unrelated financial hardships that make it particularly vulnerable: aging infrastructure and declining revenue as a result of population movement away from the area.

The project may be Bristol's best chance to change its story for the better — and certainly, millions of dollars in new revenue as well as related dollars and attention from out-of-town visitors will help. Other factors make the opportunity even more appealing.

The casino is planned to move into the space once occupied by the Bristol Mall. Like other abandoned malls across the country, the empty lot is more than an eyesore or a symbol of changing consumer choices. It was and remains a very real loss to the city as a whole and the surrounding neighborhood, which has faced challenges without the central economic engine of the mall. The planned casino would not only support the city but would also renew a specific neighborhood in need.

In fact, the impact of the casino will be even wider. Revenues will be split among a dozen Southwest Virginia counties in similar need, with hopes for a region-wide renaissance. Furthermore, gubernatorial amendments direct that cities set aside tax revenues from casinos specifically to restore and improve public schools in the area.

Opponents of the casino cite feared rises in crime, drugs and gambling addiction surrounding the construction of a casino in Bristol. The casino's developers — Jim McGlothlin, president of the United Company, and Clyde Stacy, president of PAR Ventures — have met with opponents and say they respect these concerns as they live locally themselves. However, the developers think the casino will be a boon to local law enforcement and education, as well as the city in general in the form of new jobs.

For reference, much of the research on the connection between casinos and crime rates is both old and inconclusive. In 1999, in what was considered one of the most comprehensive studies on American casinos, the National Gambling Impact Study Commission wrote that there is insufficient data to determine whether casinos cause more crime. The commission concluded: “Taken as a whole, the literature shows that communities with casinos are just as safe as communities that do not have casinos.”

A study by the Associated Press examined crime rates before and after the introduction of two large casinos in Connecticut in the 1990s. The AP reported that crime actually dropped by double-digit percentage points compared to the years before the casinos were constructed, mirroring a decrease in crime nationwide.

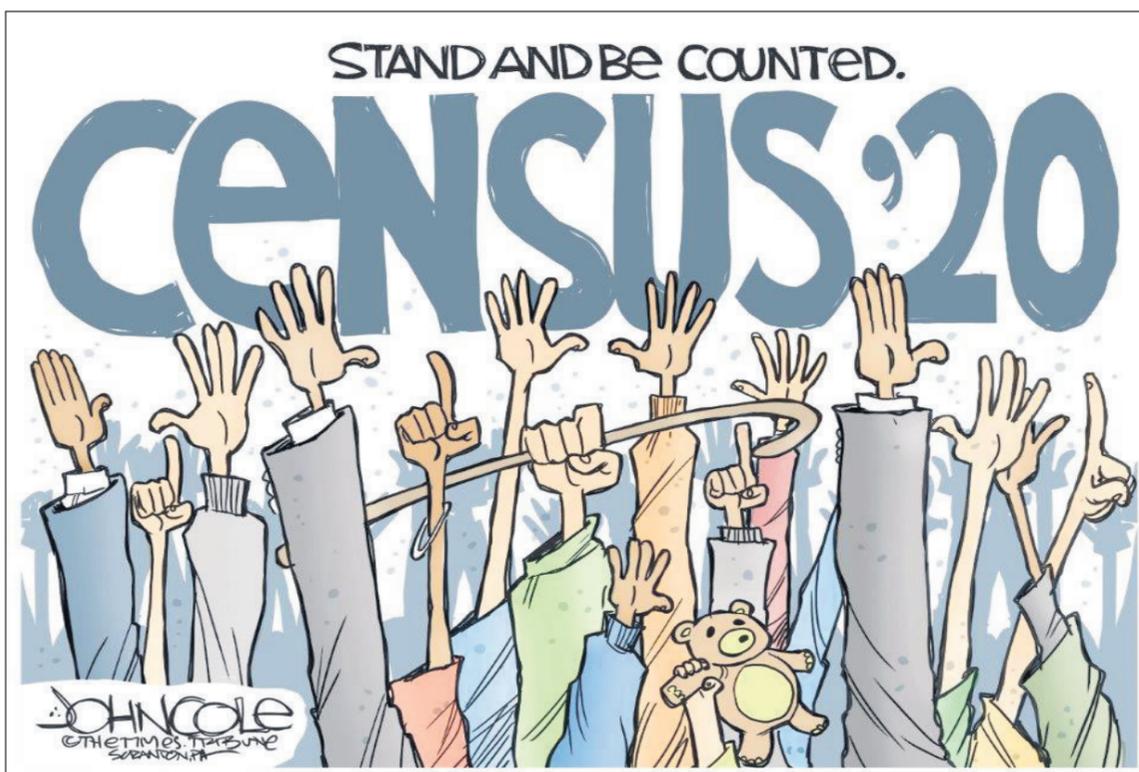
Local leaders have made their opinions clear. Bristol, Virginia's Mayor Bill Hartley, School Board Chairman Steve Fletcher and Police Chief John Austin have all endorsed the casino.

Ultimately, this referendum is nothing less than a choice between two futures.

A future without the casino looks very familiar; it is the natural result of longstanding trends in the area, which cannot be changed without decisive and bold action. The outcome would be fewer residents, older schools and other public infrastructure, and an ongoing struggle to achieve financial stability, let alone larger public projects.

The second future offers opportunities that would have been unimaginable in this area two years ago. Tax revenues to overcome longstanding hardships on a local and regional level. Thousands of new jobs. Revitalized schools and neighborhoods. A commercial ripple effect of more businesses and tourists.

Voting for approval is not a gamble nor a vote for increased crime. It is simply a vote for a brighter future. We urge residents to consider the immense opportunities available — and vote for approval.



“STAND AND BE COUNTED” BY JOHN COLE/THE SCRANTON TIMES-TRIBUNE, PENNSYLVANIA

Your View

Do your homework: Has Trump ever lied? Abused his office? Given bad advice? Now vote.

Marc Thiessen's Sept. 9 column shaming Kamala Harris for casting doubt on a pre-election vaccine caught my attention. I'd like to help those readers who had some doubts about his views.

Thiessen called Kamala out for stating that she would not trust Donald Trump's assurance that a vaccine was adequately tested and safe. Kamala! How could you? Has our president ever lied to us about anything important?

Kamala has suggested that President Trump might cause a vaccine to be released before it is fully vetted. She said he might do this because it would help get him reelected. How dare she suggest such a thing? Has President Trump ever inappropriately used the power of his office to help his campaign for reelection? Has he ever given us bad advice about dealing with COVID-19?

Dear reader, you can't trust these people. You can't even trust me. Find out for yourself. Do your homework. Use Google to find out what's really so. Can you find even one verified incident where Donald Trump lied to us about something important? Can you find an incident where he inappropriately used his office for political purposes? Just because Kamala said those things does not make them true. Do your research and settle any doubts you have about whether Kamala deserves the shame Marc Thiessen calls for.

I hope this will help you decide who to vote for.

Harry Baya
Bristol, Virginia

Take off your shoes, find a peaceful place, breathe and enjoy a moment of gladness

I'm sitting on the front porch soaking up the breeze. Finding silver linings was a good first step not to worry about the pandemic. But then breathing became this new direction for me. It seemed it had been too long since I took in real air. It is summer and I've been swimming in a deep hole, spending hours with my bare feet on the ground, walking my dog more regularly and believing for the first time that what happens to me is God's plan. If you're reading this, take your shoes off, spread your toes, find a place to be peaceful and enjoy just one moment of gladness before you go on with your life. And don't

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forget to breathe. We have more in common than some admit.

Maggie Hess
Bristol, Tennessee

If 'losers' comments are true, why are the sources anonymous and 2 years late?

Anonymous sources in The Atlantic recently said the reason President Trump didn't go to the cemetery outside Paris is because he said it was filled with “losers.” Recently, this paper reprinted an article from The New York Daily News and printed a Letter to the Editor regarding these comments as well.

This is all easy enough to believe given his comments about John McCain.

Yet, the event in question was nearly two years ago. On Nov. 10, 2018, Reuters reported the trip was canceled due to scheduling and logistical difficulties caused by the weather and a similar situation kept Trump from visiting the demilitarized zone between North and South Korea the year earlier. On Nov. 11, 2018, The Atlantic wrote that the White House said the trip was canceled due to weather. On Nov. 12, 2018, The Washington Post reported the trip was canceled due to near zero visibility.

So now, two years later, just before an election, The Atlantic reports four anonymous sources say Trump canceled that trip because the cemetery was full of “losers.”

In response, officials who were on the trip, including John Bolton, who is no fan of the President, have stated that the reason was the weather, and they did not hear a “loser” reason.

I cannot reconcile those

anonymously reported “comments” with what Trump has done for the veterans, especially cleaning up the Veterans Administration and putting into place a program where vets can get treatment outside a VA Hospital, and what Trump has done to fund the military in general.

So, I wonder, if Trump did say it, why did it take these folks two years to speak up and why are they hiding behind anonymity?

Cynthia Montgomery
Blountville, Tennessee

If Donald Trump is reelected, not only liberals, but we all will weep for our country

I recently saw a bumper sticker that read “Vote for Trump! Make Liberals Cry Again.” Over the years the terms liberal and conservative seem to have lost their meanings. The dictionary defines a liberal as “one who is open to new ideas” and a conservative as “one who wishes to preserve the gains of the past.” I do not understand how these two terms have become associated with support or opposition to Donald Trump.

I think that most Americans, including myself, have personalities that encompass both of these values. The collapse of the coal industry and the devastating impact it has had on our local economy, combined with the COVID-19 pandemic crisis suggests to me that our region and our country desperately needs some new ideas.

I have a conservative side too. Growing up, Scouting was an important part of my life and helped to shape me into the man I am today. I earned both the Eagle Scout and God and Country awards. While the national Boy Scout organization has had its problems, the program's basic tenets of decency, honor, love of God and Country, continue to express what I believe represent the core of American values and the characteristics of effective leadership.

I will be voting for Joe Biden this year because I believe that our country needs new ideas; and yes, I am open to them. I will be voting for Joe Biden because I believe that he personifies the basic conservative American values of decency, honor, respect for God and country.

If Donald Trump is reelected, both my conservative and liberal sides will cry. We will weep for our country.

Edward B. Morgan
Abingdon, Virginia

“A man who was completely innocent, offered himself as a sacrifice for the good of others, including his enemies, and became the ransom of the world. It was a perfect act.”

— Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948), Indian lawyer, anti-colonial nationalist, and political ethicist, who employed nonviolent resistance and inspired movements for civil rights and freedom across the world

Our View

Virginia needs better data to fight COVID-19

It's now common knowledge that medical supplies such as ventilators and masks are key to fighting COVID-19. What's less well-known is the importance of another weapon in this fight: open and in-depth hospital data. Virginia needs better numbers in order to surgically pinpoint hot spots and allocate resources.

At the state level, Virginia's Department of Health provides only “top-line” numbers — total cases, total deaths, cases per county, etc. — without the context of specific, granular data such as ventilator availability, total cases recovered, or even ZIP code-specific case numbers, to name a few.

These specific numbers are helpful not only for retrospectively viewing the progression of the virus, but also for projecting future numbers at the actionable level. With timely and in-depth data, health officials can make decisions to prepare for a growing body of new cases. Because Virginia's numbers don't drill past the general level, administrators can struggle to make projections and prepare on a meaningful level.

Here's an example. With the current data, it's clear that the majority of Virginia's cases and deaths are currently located in the Northern and Eastern Health Planning Regions. Fairfax County has the most cases, but it's also home to 43 ZIP codes and a large population. (Compare that to Washington County's nine ZIP codes). The current numbers don't go past the county level, but health officials clearly need more location- and severity-specific data on cases and resources in order to do their jobs well.

Unfortunately for Virginia, as these top-line numbers get even larger, they lose contextual meaning, and our health officials lose a valuable tool in combating the spread of COVID-19.

A clear trend in this crisis is that every state has reacted differently. There's a 50-state spectrum of stay-at-home orders and medical supply availability, and the same is true of data reporting. Other states are providing detailed data, and this information is helping health care workers and administrators to act.

To take a neighboring example, North Carolina provides daily ventilator and bed counts for COVID-19. The state also provides daily numbers on the levels of personal protective equipment (PPE) available and requested.

Or consider cities' and states' responses further afield. New York City has data available per ZIP code and borough. Ohio provides a range of interactive dashboards with specific information and a forecast model that projects future cases based on existing data.

Virginia doesn't currently have the benefit of this information, but it needs this kind of data — and soon. HIPAA protections in place to protect patient privacy are important, but in a pandemic, open access to meaningful and specific data has to take priority.

On April 6, the Virginia Hospital & Healthcare Association (VHHA) launched a dashboard designed to track this kind of actionable data. While the dashboard includes necessary numbers on ventilators, beds and available PPE, the case totals don't always match with the numbers from the Department of Health. On April 7, the VHHA dashboard showed 589 patients hospitalized for COVID-19, while the Department of Health site showed 563. For the moment, the VHHA dashboard is a helpful complement to the Department of Health data; until data categorization efforts can be clarified, the state still needs a more detailed and central response.

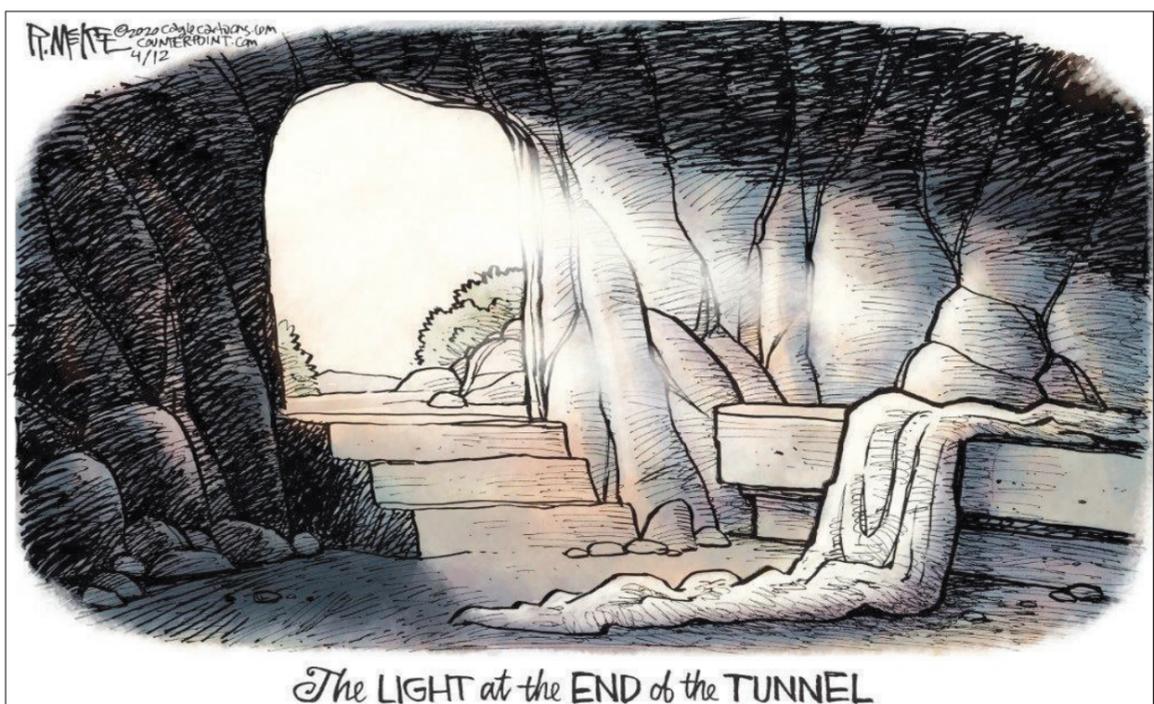
Virginia's Department of Health is doing a good job, but the efforts of other states, cities, and even Virginia's own hospital association show that better data is out there. Our health care officials and providers need the best information available to make decisions in this crisis. Let's make sure they have the tools they need.

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Editor's note: Opinions expressed do not necessarily represent those of this newspaper staff and management. In support of the First Amendment right of free speech, the Opinion page offers opportunity for diverse, civil discussion on topics of public interest. Guest opinions are accepted on a limited basis and the publisher reserves the right to reject any submission.



RICK MCKEE/CAGLECARTOONS.COM

Your View

City made wrong moves on former Kmart building

After reading the article concerning the old Kmart location in Bristol, Tennessee, I could not stop laughing. Just to recap part of the article for the reader: Steve Johnson, a well-known business man in the community, purchased the property to create another area for development for more than one employer to locate.

According to Mr. Johnson, the location is located in a redevelopment district — vacant, blighted and condemned. Apparently Mr. Johnson reached out to the city for some incentive to work with him on this project for the area. Keep in mind the incentives that Friendship Ford and others have taken advantage of to help Bristol press forward into the future.

Rather than moving forward with something that would appeal to Mr. Johnson, the city paid a company to study the project and

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make recommendations and delay the progress. Mr. Johnson pays \$2.5 million for the property then sells to a single employer U-Haul for \$3.3 million. Good job, Mr. Johnson!!!! Exactly what a businessman should do!

Maybe the city leaders will do the math and understand the jobs and tax revenues just lost for a company that is laughing all the way to the bank with a nearly \$12,000 check for the work on the study

to determine what to offer Mr. Johnson. That was taxpayer money flushed down the drain.

When local developers such as Mr. Johnson, Friendship Ford and the Hurley family, just to list a few, approach the city, please work with them for the love of mankind!!!! They can always go to other areas with their checkbooks and expertise. Straight talk can't be confused.

William Mullins
Bristol, Tennessee

Now is not the time to cast blame

Recently, I heard myself say something rarely thought, must less expressed, as I was talking to a friend on the phone: “You know, from now on, I think everything we say and do has to be prefaced by the question: Is it helpful?”

This is an echo of the physician's creed: “Above all, do no harm.” But it isn't typically the first thought of most columnists, including this one. Oh, don't get me wrong, we want to save the world with small gestures of biting wit and well-slung sarcasm. But, generally speaking, writing a column isn't far afield from H.L. Mencken's observation that “Every normal man must be tempted, at times, to spit upon his hands, hoist the black flag, and begin slitting throats.”

Pandemics necessarily change one's tune. The normal man or woman today just wants to survive. Me, too.

An honest answer to my question, of course, would end many a critic's career. But some criticism is valuable and necessary, if based in fact and lucid observation. Which brings me to a short detour to address an unintentional mistake I made in a recent column, citing Donald Trump's calling the novel coronavirus a “hoax.” I wasn't aware that this wasn't so until several readers wrote to inform me. With apologies to the president, Trump said that Democrats were using the pandemic as a hoax to take him down.

Let the record reflect: President Trump never said the pandemic was a hoax. He did suggest that the narrative about his mishandling of the pandemic was a hoax. I regret the error. But allow me to post an asterisk as well: Trump has told so many untruths, called so many challenges “hoaxes,” and tried to discredit so many people who displayed what he views as disloyalty by disagreeing with him that it's easy to understand how the incorrect hoax attribution gained traction.

This shouldn't be construed as jus-



Kathleen Parker

tification but merely a larger context in which to appraise the president. Criticism is not, in every case, a function of bias, as his supporters often charge, but is sometimes a necessary balance to Trump's shifting definitions of reality.

While I'm in a generous mood, it may not be entirely true that the president ignored early warnings and the advice of his scientific advisers concerning the virus. To be sure, Trump can be maddening in his elocutions, such as that the virus will just disappear “like a miracle” — pronounced with a wand-like flourish of his hand. Trump *did* say that.

But it was difficult to know how seriously to take the reports of the virus sweeping through Wuhan province earlier this year. At first, most reports were sketchy; the Chinese were not exactly candid about what they knew, or if they were trying to get to the bottom of it. In the early days, even Anthony Fauci, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, spoke cautiously about the likelihood that COVID-19 was a threat to America if only to avoid sparking a panic.

On Feb. 17, Fauci said that the danger to Americans of getting coronavirus was “just minusculely low.” The greater danger, he said, was the seasonal flu. This was broadly believed to be true at the time, when there were only 13 Americans who were confirmed positive, almost all of whom were on board the Diamond Princess cruise ship docked off the coast of Japan. Yes, at times, he said the risk of the virus coming to America broadly was “low,” but he

would typically follow such comments by warning that things could change quickly.

A campaign from the right to discredit Fauci is now in full swing, apparently because the media seem to admire him, or because forces in the administration do not, or both. In the past 24 hours, I've seen a 2013 email circulating on social media, allegedly from Wikileaks, that Fauci wrote to Hillary Clinton praising her “stamina and capability” during her testimony as secretary of state before the congressional committee investigating the attacks in Benghazi, Libya. Pairing Fauci and Clinton is all that's needed to revive the lock-her-up chorus and toss Fauci into the bargain.

An article recently posted on Real Clear Politics includes a timeline of comments made by Fauci that appear in retrospect to suggest that he (and others) understated the significance of the virus. But a closer examination of the quotes often reveals that many are taken out of their full, and usually careful, context. It all prompts me to ask: Is that helpful?

As a result of all the blaming and shaming, it's even harder than usual to know whom or what to believe. Weeks ago, we were told masks weren't necessary. Now, apparently, we need them any time we leave the house. Could this have been foreseen? Common sense suggests as much. Would people have worn them? I don't know. But the change in policy is unnerving, suggestive that lives could have been saved had we been more careful sooner. Anger about this back and forth is understandable, but it isn't helpful.

There will be plenty of time when this is over to affix blame. In the meantime, as Queen Elizabeth advised her nation and the world, we should remain calm. For the frustrated pirates among you, I'm told black flags make excellent masks.

Kathleen Parker's email address is kathleenparker@washpost.com.

Our View

Who's afraid in Floyd?

In Floyd County, the three-member county Electoral Board wrote that putting the fate of the county's Confederate monument to a referendum this fall would impede the board's ability to conduct a free and fair election in a July 7 letter to the Board of Supervisors. The unanimous letter cited concerns of voter intimidation.

In our view, the only body presently intimidated is the Electoral Board itself and the referendum should continue as planned.

The Electoral Board's Secretary, Tammy Belinsky, has explained that the board has concerns about potential voter intimidation on Election Day due to the polarizing and partisan nature of the Confederate monument debate and precedent. “In 2016, during the presidential election, we had intimidating behavior occurring at one of our precincts, and we believe that this fall's election will be difficult to manage as it is,” Belinsky said.

If taken at face value, voter intimidation is an election management concern that can be addressed by providing more security at polling places. Indeed, the Floyd County Board of Supervisors Chairman Joe Turman has already said he plans to coordinate with Floyd County Sheriff Brian Craig and the Board about the November election if concerns continue.

Turman, who favors voting on the issue, also reports that many of his constituents have requested for the issue to be placed on the ballot as a referendum rather than put up for public comment.

The events of a lively July 14 public comment meeting on the Confederate monument confirm that, while there are passionate arguments on each side, all present at the meeting and hundreds of other voters in Floyd County are ready to vote on the issue.

Furthermore, there is an ongoing national conversation about the historic implications of public monuments in our parks and squares. To not partake in this conversation based on fear alone would be a failure to meet the moment and would deny the distinctly American institution of voting on, well, everything — including charged issues.

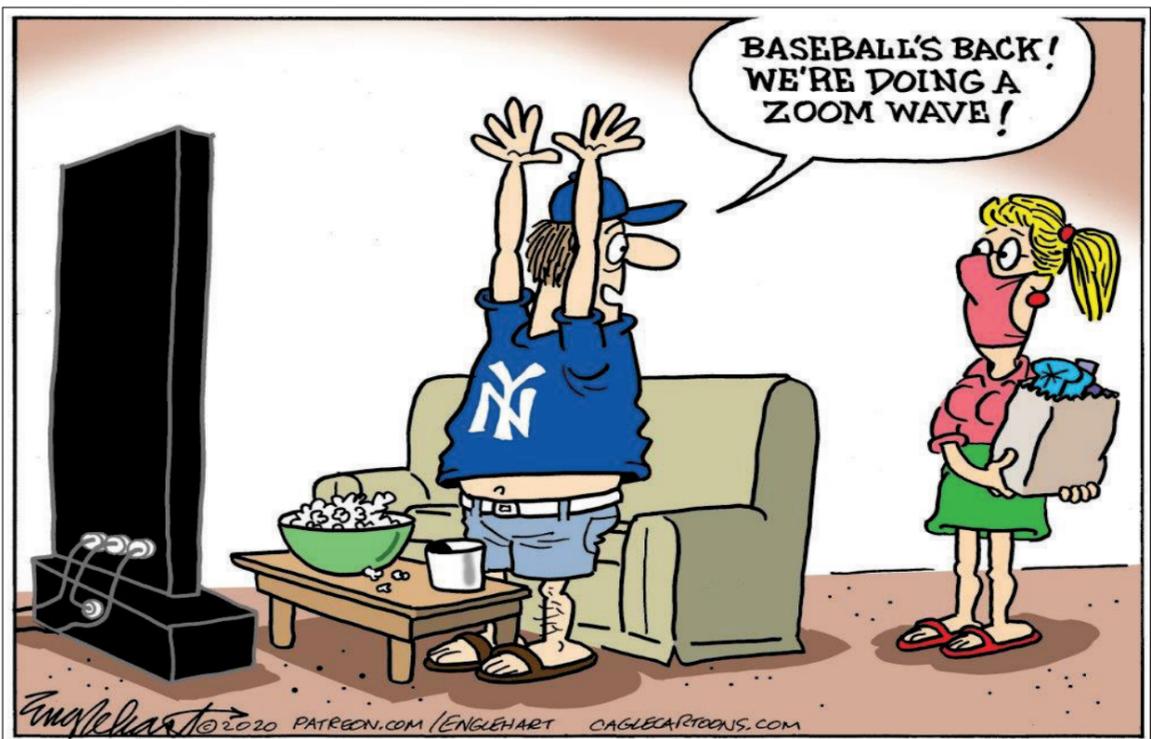
Elections are the backbone of American democracy, and a democracy that can only vote on ‘safe’ questions is neither safe nor strong.

Turman has also said that, to the best of his knowledge, the Electoral Board's July 7 letter marks the first time the group has weighed in on what should be on the ballot.

If the referendum is eventually scrubbed because of the Electoral Board's recommendation, officials will have effectively taken away Floyd County voters' voice on the issue. Even in that scenario, officials may only be able to postpone the inevitable; clearly, this debate isn't going away.

To paraphrase a quote attributed to founding father Stephen Hopkins, who risked being drawn, quartered, and hanged to sign the Declaration of Independence, no issue was ever so dangerous that it couldn't be talked about. The same goes for this public referendum.

In Floyd County, the Electoral Board should find some intestinal fortitude and adequately prepare for Election Day. Floyd voters will be heard.



“2020 BASEBALL SEASON STARTS” BY BOB ENGLEHART/POLITICALCARTOONS.COM

Your View

Trump's increasingly lawless actions should raise alarms

I was alarmed last month by two images: federal officers forcibly removing peaceful protesters near St. John's Church, and, moments later, President Trump posing for a photo op, Bible raised, in front of the same church — evoking messianic images surely meant to cement the image of himself as a divine figure in the minds of his supporters.

But alarm bells are going off again as unidentified, armed “soldiers” descended on Portland, Oregon last week, kidnapping peaceful protesters, forcing them into unmarked vans without telling them why they were detained. We now know these individuals were federal officers sent by the president to make good on his threat to send troops to “democrat-run” cities to maintain “law and order.” Law and order are certainly valued by all Americans but, according to the law, there are limits to the president's ability to use force against American citizens, unless a state requests such assistance.

In Portland, no such request was made. Perhaps Trump believes he skirted that requirement because those deployed were not military, but other federal officers. Yet none of the participating agencies are charged with local law enforcement.

So this raises a question: under what authority did Trump deploy

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federal officers? It surely was not the authority of the U.S. Constitution.

Trump's lawless actions are unnerving. When he faced no consequences for using force in D.C., he tested his limits on a larger scale in Portland. If he gets away with it — if the court does not stop him — what will his next move be? If he can grab Americans off our streets today, when will he send storm troopers to detain reporters, or his political opponents, or ... you? If it can happen anywhere, it can

happen everywhere.

What kind of America do we want to leave our children?

Gail Helt

Bristol, Tennessee

An open letter to Rep. Morgan Griffith: End Trump's abuses

President Donald Trump and Secretary Kenneth Cuccinelli have crossed over the line between right wing populism and fascism with the sending of Homeland Security troops to Portland to harass, beat and arrest citizens exercising their constitutional right to free speech and to petition their government for redress of wrongs. You, along with your fellow elective representatives have a moral and constitutional duty to put an end to this abuse of power by removing both of these extremists from office.

With the exception of Sen. Romney, Republicans shirked their duty with the last impeachment, but now your duty is far clearer. The risks to our republic are now far clearer. The abuse of power is growing daily. The threats are more and more ominous.

This use of police power is quite contrary to the libertarian and fiscally conservative positions you have taken throughout your political career. It is time to stand up to this abuse of governmental authority before it is too late.

David Rouse

Wise, Virginia

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America is flunking its cognitive assessment

WASHINGTON — We should be relieved that President Donald Trump claims he “aced” his cognitive assessment, including what he calls the “very hard” last five questions. Such as:

» Identifying the similarity between a train and a bicycle.

» Repeating the sentence: “The cat always hid under the couch when dogs were in the room.”

» And naming at least 11 words beginning with the letter “F” in one minute.

Forgive me for finding fun and frivolity in our fearless first minister's feeble self-flattery, for his felicitous finesse, fluid facility and firm familiarity with F-words, far from folly, are fully fitting, and fundamentally and fantastically fortuitous.

The real question is whether we, as a nation, could pass a cognitive assessment test. At the moment, we're struggling with the national equivalent of distinguishing a lion from a rhinoceros: 17.8 million Americans are without jobs — but Trump is pushing to cut payroll taxes for those who already have jobs.

Unemployment assistance has held off a wave of evictions, foreclosures and mass hunger — but

Trump and congressional Republicans are proposing to cut it.

Schools need new funds so that they can protect teachers and students from the virus if they reopen their doors — but Trump threatened to withhold money from schools if they don't open.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the National Institutes of Health are struggling to contain the virus and to get remedies to the public — but Trump seeks to phase out funding for both, as well as for testing and contact tracing, ABC News reports.

The federal government poured trillions of dollars into coronavirus recovery legislation, and tens of millions of Americans sheltered in their homes to limit the spread — only for the country to squander both by reopening too soon without following public health guidelines.

State and local governments are hemorrhaging cash as they fight the virus — but instead of providing them relief, congressional Republicans are focused on protecting private businesses from lawsuits if they make workers sick.

Spain, Italy, Germany, France, Japan, Taiwan, South Korea and others are gradually returning to



Dana Milbank

normal after suppressing the virus — but the United States is setting records for new infections: Roughly 900 people are dying from the virus every day, and week-long testing delays make it near impossible to quarantine those infected and to trace their contacts.

Trump has stopped attending coronavirus task force meetings because he does not have the time, aides told The Washington Post — but he continued to play golf and to raise campaign money. (He apparently found time and resumed briefings Tuesday.)

Trump told Fox News's Chris Wallace that the United States has the “number one low mortality rate” — then provided a chart that did not support the claim.

Trump said he was not seeking to discredit the government's top infectious disease expert, Anthony Fauci

— then called him an “alarmist.”

Trump said Sunday that federal police have been mobilized in Portland, Oregon, (against the wishes of state and local authorities) to “protect Federal property” from “anarchists and agitators” — nine days after Trump pardoned two men serving sentences for arson that burned 139 acres of federal property in Oregon in a case that inspired armed militias to seize federal land.

Trump's secretary of homeland security, Chad Wolf, says the Portland operation is to stop “lawless” behavior — achieved by firing tear gas at nonviolent protesters and having unidentified officers throwing demonstrators into unmarked vans without charges.

Trump attributes a recent flare-up in violence in U.S. cities to Democratic mayors — who have been running these same cities for decades. He promises to provide evidence that Democratic challenger Joe Biden proposes to “abolish” the police — then fails to provide the evidence. He says he won't label Biden “senile” — then says Biden “doesn't know he's alive” and is “mentally shot.”

Longtime Trump adviser Roger

Stone seemed to say Saturday during a radio interview with an African American host that he couldn't believe he was “arguing with this Negro” — then he told the New York Times that he didn't say the “epitaph,” and that it wasn't a slur anyway.

And one-time Trump fan Kanye West, now mounting his own quixotic presidential bid, held a campaign event Saturday at which he said Harriet Tubman “never actually freed the slaves,” but rather had them “work for other white people.”

No, our national cognitive assessment is not promising. But now come the “very hard” last questions: Will Republicans, in these final months before the election, find the elusive courage to disavow Trump's madness?

Will the people reject him and his enablers in 106 days?

And, if Trump loses, will all Americans insist he do what he refused to commit to on Sunday: honor the will of the people?

If not, we will have earned ourselves a big, fat F.

Dana Milbank is an opinion columnist for The Washington Post. He sketches the foolish, the fallacious and the felonious in politics.