

Months-long waits at DMV not acceptable

WHAT IS wrong with the Virginia Department of Motor Vehicles?

It is possible to go to a restaurant, enjoy a live music venue, shop at Walmart, make use of a variety of in-person government services or do just about anything else in the midst of the pandemic. What you can't do is walk into a DMV office and take care of business without an appointment, sometimes one that has to be made months in advance.

Granted, the more prudent among us are wearing masks again as the delta variant and vaccine resistance make another surge look more and more probable. Granted, many establishments are insisting that patrons show proof of vaccination and/or wear a mask.

Still, you can do most of the things you could do before COVID-19 changed everything a year and a half ago. And yet the DMV says it's not time yet to reopen the doors to walk-in customers.

You have to have an appointment, and sometimes those appointments can mean a wait measured in months. State Sen. Chap Petersen, a Democrat representing Fairfax City, claimed in a recent Senate floor debate that he's driving on a license that's been expired for three months. An article in the Virginia Mercury quoted a woman in Richmond as saying that her mother had to wait three months to renew her license after she was unable to renew it online.

Stories like that abound. People drive to localities an hour or more away to take care of vital automotive business in a timely fashion.

The DMV says everything's fine. A spokeswoman recently claimed that the agency was processing more transactions a week than it did before the pandemic, and that an internal survey found that 77 percent of customers wanted DMV to continue offering appointments.

Maybe, though, that 77 percent wants appointments to be one option and not the only option. There are times when waiting three months to transfer a title or renew your license isn't really acceptable.

There are mail-in options, but the DMV apparently is far behind in processing that mail. You send a check and hold your breath. The agency suggests that frustrated Virginians make appointments in other localities, where an earlier in-person appointment might be possible.

Why is the onus here on the taxpayer and not the DMV? If the agency wants to go completely online, getting rid of long waits for in-person service, that's fine, as long as you are connected to the Internet.

Even then, there are too many stories of people who try to do their business online and are told to make an appointment. If your license expires in July and you try to renew in June, it's not acceptable to be told that the next date to see a live representative is in September.

If the DMV wants us all to go online, it should make it possible to make an appointment within a week, not three months out.

Pre-pandemic DMV visits were no picnic. Virginians sat in large rooms and waited for their number to be called, never knowing exactly how long they might have to sit there.

But as it turns out, we didn't know then how good we had it.



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OPINION

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Removal of Lee statue is history correction

ON MAY 29, 1890, the South rose again, at least in the minds of some unregenerate Confederates.

On that day, the Lee Monument, honoring the late rebel Gen. Robert E. Lee, was unveiled. It would become the centerpiece of Richmond's Monument Avenue. Some 10,000 Richmonders reportedly helped pull four wagons containing pieces of the bronze edifice from the railroad station to its destination.

The monument was meant to be, among other things, a way to lure homeowners to what were then the western outskirts of the city. Economic hard times left it standing by itself in the middle of a tobacco field until the early 1900s. When economic conditions improved, four other Confederates—J.E.B. Stuart, Stonewall Jackson, Matthew Fontaine Maury and the president of the rebel states, Jefferson Davis—were added to the avenue.

And now they're gone.

Good riddance.

The best you can say about the Lee Monument and the other statues on Richmond's most famous street is that they were a real-estate ploy. The worst is that they were meant to be a reminder to Richmonders, and especially Black Richmonders, that Dixie was not dead.

An African American walking beneath Lee and his horse, 60 feet above, could hardly be faulted in assuming that old and unpleasant times there were not forgotten.

Race relations inched forward over the next 131 years. The arc of the Rev. Martin Luther King's moral universe, the one that is supposed to bend toward justice, seemed not to bend very much at times, but we live in a much more equitable world than the one that existed in 1890.

However, as civil rights gains changed the nation, those monuments remained.

And then came George Floyd and Black Lives Matter. Suddenly, Black and white Richmonders seemed to realize that they did not wish their city's identity to be tied to a failed revolt based on preserving slavery. Individuals did some of the work. Politicians, seeing which the way the wind was blowing, did the rest, with the state Supreme Court applying the *coup de grâce* earlier this month by refusing to hear arguments from apologists who wanted to keep Marse Robert and Traveller on their perch.

Removing those monuments is not rewriting history. It is correcting history. No Virginia child, Black or white, will ever again be misled by grandiose statues into believing that leaders of an effort to keep people in chains are worthy of our adulation.

As with everything, there should be limits to what we tear down. Some slaveholding Virginians—George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Patrick Henry and others—also built our country. They deserve to be remembered for the good they did, with that good put into context. They are worthy of monuments.

The fear here is that these giants who created the United States will be thrown into the same deplorable basket as the Confederates. When a movement really gets rolling, sometimes common sense is a casualty.

In San Francisco last summer, a crowd pulled down a statue of Ulysses S. Grant. He was the guy who led the Union Army, folks.

That being said, there's one thing that's gone right in this masked-up, pandemic year. Richmond and Virginia are to be praised for consigning Confederate reverence to history's dustbin.

OPINION

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Alas, a dollar isn't what it used to be

BREAKING news: Everything is not a dollar.

In a sure sign that inflation is bearing down on us, the Dollar Tree chain has announced that it is going to stock items in many of its more than 15,000 U.S. and Canadian stores (five of them in the Fredericksburg area) that cost more than a buck.

For the heedless spendthrift throwing money around like a drunken sailor, it soon will be possible to blow as much as five dollars on an item in the famously inexpensive shopping destination.

The change was inevitable. Annual inflation was up 4.2 percent in July, the highest it's been in three decades. The item you bought for \$1 in 1986, when the chain opened, would, according to the U.S. Inflation Calculator, cost \$2.50 now.

Supply chain problems and rising labor costs are contributing factors as we try to find our way out of the pandemic. A dollar isn't what it used to be in the old days, like a year ago.

Investors apparently love Dollar Tree's move toward extravagant spending. Shortly after the Chesapeake-based chain announced its dollar-busting plan late last month, its stock rose 13 percent at the opening bell on Sept. 29.

Make no mistake: Despite the name, Dollar Tree is no nickel-and-dime operation. From that modest start 35

years ago (original name: Only \$1.00), the Virginia operation has grown into a Fortune 500 company.

The move to break the dollar barrier should surprise no one. At Dollar Tree and elsewhere, the buck has taken a beating, although some things still can be had for a dollar.

Among the limited items a website listed recently that cost a dollar or less: A cup of coffee at McDonald's; a Megabus ticket (limited number on each bus); a Classic Crispy Chicken Jr. sandwich at Burger King; a can of Pabst Blue Ribbon (if you buy it by the case, and who doesn't?); a lottery ticket or select Kindle books.

You probably can still tip the dancers at your favorite local "gentlemen's club" with ones, although fives are definitely better appreciated.

For the frugal husband doing last-minute shopping ("Wait. Christmas is on the 25th this year?"), Dollar Tree's move requires some thought. That \$20 you withdrew from the ATM might not yield as much change when you're checking out after your spree at the Tree.

And when your beloved opens that special gift, be sure to tell her that just because it comes from Dollar Tree doesn't mean you paid only a buck for it. Could have set you back as much as a five-spot.

And when she mutters, "Big spender," you can be sure she means it.