

Hospital-room raid busts dying man for pot extract

BY DION LEFLER
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If you're like me, you might question whether raiding a dying man's hospital room to bust him for possession of marijuana extracts is the best use of police time.

But this Christmas season, it happened in Hays.

Police went into a room at Hays Medical Center on Dec. 16 and seized a terminally ill patient's vaping device and some edible paste containing THC. They cited him for drug possession and set a court date for Jan. 2.

He's essentially bedridden and in the final stages of terminal, inoperable cancer.

I called the Hays Police Department about it. The dispatcher said she'd have someone call me, but that hasn't happened yet.

The news of the bust was relayed to me by one of the patient's friends. I talked with the patient, 69-year-old Greg Bretz, by phone from his hospital room and he described what happened.

He said he's "flat on my back" in his hospital bed and can't stand up unassisted. He's been using his vaping device and eating a little bit of the THC paste on bread to relieve his symptoms since he was hospitalized about three weeks ago.

He said a doctor told him to do whatever he wants if it makes him feel better, because there's

basically nothing medical science can do for him anymore other than hospice care.

But a hospital staffer caught him vaping and reported him. Police were called and three officers came to his room.

He said they told him the vaping device was a fire hazard, because the room is equipped with oxygen.

That could be a valid concern. Vape devices have a small electronic element that heats liquid to steam for inhalation, and there have been cases where they malfunctioned and patients got burned using them while taking oxygen through a nasal tube. Bretz said he's not on oxygen.

He said the police were

mostly intent on seizing his THC paste, which he argued was medicine, because his vaping liquid contains only a trace of THC, if any.

He said he'll try to contact the prosecutor and see if they'll push back his court appearance. The one certainty in this sorry episode is that he's not going to make it there.

Typically, when a defendant doesn't appear, a judge will issue an arrest warrant. If it comes to that, well, Bretz will be easy to find. He's not going anywhere.

Bear in mind that in 47 states and the District of Columbia, this would be a simple issue of violating hospital rules, not a criminal drug-possession

charge. Twenty-one states have approved marijuana for recreational as well as medicinal use, including Missouri and Maryland, which just passed it in November elections.

Only Kansas, Nebraska and Idaho still fully ban medical marijuana.

Word on the street is that this will be the year the Kansas Legislature finally moves some sort of medical marijuana legislation. They probably have to approve something — the public outcry is too great, the momentum too strong.

But there are still far too many Kansas lawmakers stuck in an outdated "Reefer Madness" loop.

Rep. Gail Finney, D-Wichita and a longtime sufferer of the autoimmune disease Lupus, made a compelling case for medical marijuana year after year after year. It fell on deaf ears, year after year after year, and she died in August without seeing it come to

pass.

My prediction is this: Lawmakers will legalize medical marijuana just enough to get themselves off the hook for having a total ban, but then over-regulate it and make it so expensive and hard to get that relatively few people who could benefit will actually be able to have it.

Meanwhile, we can keep raiding hospital rooms and treating dying people like criminals.

I think I speak for a majority of Kansans when I say this:

To Greg Bretz, and all those who are similarly situated this holiday season, we're sorry. We sympathize with what you're going through and if we could change it, we would.

May your last Christmas be as joyful as possible under the circumstances.

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Journalists give lives, freedom for democracy

THE COLUMBIAN,
VANCOUVER, WASH.,
EDITORIAL

It's an annual practice — and fittingly so — to pay tribute to law enforcement officers who've given their lives in the line of duty. The same goes for members of our armed forces, and even homeless people who've died on the streets. We think similar attention should be paid to journalists who have lost their lives or their freedom for reporting on the activities of those in power.

According to a recent report from the International Federation of Journalists, 67 media professionals have been killed on the job "in targeted attacks" so far in 2022, an increase of more than 40 percent over the 47 who died in 2021.

"The surge in the killings of journalists and other media workers is a grave cause of concern and yet another wake-up call for governments across the globe to take action in the defense of journalism, one of the key pillars of democracy," IFJ General Secretary Anthony Bellanger said in a statement, the New York Daily News reported.

The organization cited Russia's invasion of Ukraine, unrest in Haiti and the work of criminal groups in Mexico as key factors in the spike in journalist deaths.

But not all outrages occurred on foreign soil. One of the most chilling incidents took place in Las Vegas in September, when Jeff German, an investigative reporter for the Las Vegas Review-Journal, was fatally stabbed outside of his house. Charged in German's slaying is now-former Clark County Public Administrator Robert Telles, about whom German had written a series of stories documenting allegations of administrative bullying, favoritism and questions surrounding Telles' relationship with a subordinate staffer. The stories ran in May, and Telles lost the Democratic primary to retain his job in June.

Covering a government official's actions is a cornerstone of journalism. Taxpayers have a right to know how those whose salaries they pay are conducting the public's business. Yet reporters increasingly find themselves the targets of attacks, both in person and via social media. This is especially true of women in the field.

NiemanLab's Predictions for Journalism 2022 cited a UNESCO report that found 25 percent of women journalists surveyed said they'd been threatened with physical violence; 13 percent said they had received threats of violence against those close to them, including children and infants; and 20 percent "of survey respondents identifying as women said they had been attacked or abused offline in connection with online violence they had experienced."

In addition, according to a Nov. 1 report by the Committee to Protect Journalists, in nearly 80 percent of the 263 cases of journalists slain for their work globally over the past decade, the perpetrators have faced no punishment.

The Committee to Protect Journalists also noted earlier this month that "It's been another record-breaking year for the number of journalists jailed for practicing their profession." The group's annual prison census found that 363 reporters have been imprisoned as of Dec. 1, a global high that exceeds last year's record by 20 percent.

Former President Donald Trump once referred to American journalists as "the enemy of the people." But in fact it's reporters who strive to protect the people by ensuring that those in power are held to account.

The Fourth Estate is the first — and sometimes last — line of defense in an open and free society. Speaking truth to power is too often a thankless and risky task, but those who do so are upholding a cornerstone of our democracy and are deserving of our respect.



Ukrainians are picking unusual date for Christmas: Dec. 25

BY CHRISTIAN CARYL
The Washington Post

Ukrainians are about to celebrate Christmas for the first time since the Russian invasion began on Feb. 24. But which Christmas, exactly?

Earlier this year, the Orthodox Church in Ukraine (OCU), which represents tens of millions of worshippers, announced that member churches would be free to celebrate Christmas on Dec. 25, the same as Western Catholics and Protestants.

That would place many of Ukraine's Orthodox faithful at odds with the practice of other members of Eastern Orthodoxy who celebrate Christmas on Jan. 7 (according to the old Julian calendar). But that is precisely the point.

"Many Ukrainians are now moving toward celebrating Christmas on Dec. 25. And that's only natural, because it's part of our European choice," Serhiy Prytula, a Ukrainian philanthropist and TV personality, told me. "We were always part of Europe before Soviet rule, so it's obvious and logical that people in Ukraine are ready and willing to cele-

brate Christmas together with the European family of nations to which we historically belong." A recent poll shows that the number of Ukrainians willing to adopt the Western date has risen from 26 percent to 44 percent over the past year.

For Prytula and others, Jan. 7 symbolizes a version of Orthodoxy they would rather leave behind — the kind represented by the Russian Orthodox Church, the pet denomination of Vladimir Putin, that self-appointed scourge of Ukrainian national identity.

Over the years, Patriarch Kirill, the head of the Moscow-based church, has developed a symbiotic relationship with the Russian president. Putin showers the church with money and favors and holds it up as the ideological core of the "Russian world," his vision of an imperial culture uniting Russian-speakers across national borders. In return, Kirill gives Putin a valuable sheen of legitimacy — never more visibly than during the current war. The minions of the Moscow Patriarchy have justified the invasion by describing Ukraine as the "Antichrist," the embod-

iment of demonic opposition to Putin's rule. Meanwhile, members of the Russian officer corps have taken to calling the invasion a "holy war."

Ukraine's Orthodox churches, which together claim the allegiance of some 80 percent of the country's 43 million people, are no longer willing to let Kirill call the shots. The OCU, which issued the finding on Christmas, has long steered an independent course. But the rival Ukrainian Orthodox Church, which accounts for the largest share of the country's Orthodox believers, has gone from acknowledging Moscow's supremacy just a few years ago to breaking off all ties in May. (That hasn't spared it from coming under scrutiny from Kyiv's security services, which worry that the church might be acting as a fifth column.)

And yes — religious politics in Ukraine can be mind-bendingly complex. Alfons Bruening, a scholar of Eastern European Christianity at Radboud University in the Netherlands, says that the country's religious diversity means that East-West distinctions are sometimes

blurred. "Quite a few in Ukraine celebrate Christmas twice," he writes in an email. "It is a matter of pragmatism quite typical for Ukraine, as a multi-religious country."

Yet it is striking that Russian propagandists choose to depict this diversity as a vice, mocking Kyiv's army as a collection of "fighters against Orthodoxy" whose leaders include (horrors!) "Protestants, Uniates [Greek Catholics] and atheists."

The same writer denounced Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's offer of a truce around Dec. 25 "because the leadership of the Russian army is Orthodox and for them Christmas is Jan. 7."

Ukrainians respond with a shrug of contempt. "My family made the shift [to Western Christmas] 10 years ago," says political consultant Yevhen Hlibovyt'sky. "And many other friends have since. This is the year when many, many others will follow."

So pay attention as Ukrainians face the holidays amid the cold, the darkness, the death and the suffering imposed on by them by Putin's regime. This year, Christmas won't be a routine holiday. It will give Ukrainians one more occasion to make an emphatic statement about who they are — and their determination to survive as a nation.

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DAILY PRAYER: God, as Christians celebrate the birth of Jesus and exchange presents, we thank you for the gifts of life, faith and fellowship. May the day be merry and bright. Amen.

PUBLIC PARKS, PRIVATE PROFITS



JAIME GREEN

The Chester I. Lewis Reflection Square Park, dedicated to Wichita's civil-rights struggle, is being repurposed for double duty as the entry plaza to a new private osteopathic medical school.

ANALYSIS

The public owns the Wichita park system and has a right to expect it to be run for the people, instead of being privatized and profit-maximized by businesses

BY DION LEFLER
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In 1990, as the Wichita City Council contemplated stripping its Park Board of most of its autonomy and authority — which it did — Susan Osborne penned a letter to *The Eagle*. The issue of the time involved a commercial disc golf course that had been put in Riverside Park “at the urging of a City Council member, the city manager and the course’s sponsor,” much to the dismay of people who lived nearby and used the park. The Park Board, which then actually ran the parks, moved disc golf to other locations, making the players and the neighbors happy. “This incident is an example of why the park board should maintain its current semi-inde-



JAIME GREEN The Wichita Eagle

Wichita City Council member Becky Tuttle speaks during a dedication of the Stryker Sports Complex last year. The city spent \$23 million on new soccer improvements, driving the city's nonprofit soccer league out of business.



JAIME GREEN The Wichita Eagle

The Shop & Grub market is one of the recurring events at the remodeled Naftzger Park.

FROM PAGE 3A

PARKS

pendent status and why it should not be directly linked with commercial/political concerns as is the City Council," Osborne wrote. "Though some City Council members have indicated their surprise that the public would think them capable of commercializing or compromising our parks, the independence of the park system has been protected until now (1990) because of that very concern."

In Greek mythology, the gods gave Cassandra the gift of prophecy — and the curse that no one would believe her, even though her prophecies were true.

On parks, Susan Osborne was Wichita's Cassandra.

Her prediction of increased commercialization of city parks has not only come to pass, it's been practically an article of faith in Wichita's park building for years.

Across the city, millions of dollars have been spent building or rebuilding parks with an eye toward benefiting developers, commercial businesses, and/or private-sector facility operators.

And if City Hall doesn't want to build and run parks for the ordinary citizens of this community, maybe it's time to find somebody who will.

Osborne went on to serve 10 years on the Planning Commission and is now a retired college professor. She said she wishes she'd been wrong 32 years ago.

“

WICHITA HAS A LOW NUMBER OF PARKS AND PARK SPACE FOR A CITY OUR SIZE. AND WHAT'S HAPPENING IS THEY'RE TAKING MORE OF IT AWAY AND NEW PARKS AREN'T BEING BUILT LIKE THEY SHOULD BE IN THE OUTSKIRTS. THEY'RE SAYING WELL, IN EVERY (NEW) COMMERCIAL DEVELOPMENT AND NEIGHBORHOOD WE'RE PUTTING IN LITTLE OPEN SPACES SO WE DON'T NEED TO LOOK AT NEW PARKS. AND SOME OF THE PARKS THAT HAVE BEEN AROUND HAVE BECOME EVER-SO COMMERCIALIZED. NAFTZGER PARK IS A GOOD EXAMPLE OF THAT.

Susan Osborne, retired college professor

"Wichita has a low number of parks and park space for a city our size," she said. "And what's happening is they're taking more of it away and new parks aren't being built like they should be in the outskirts. They're saying well, in every (new) commercial development and neighborhood we're putting in little open spaces so we don't need to look at new parks. And some of the parks that have been around have become ever-so commercialized. Naftzger Park is a good example of that."

The park, at Douglas and St. Francis, was rebuilt at a cost of

\$5.2 million in 2018-2020, largely to facilitate construction of a commercial/office complex at the park's east edge and a 41-unit apartment conversion in the former Spaghetti Works building.

Of that, \$1.4 million was donated by electricity provider Evergy, which got its name on the bandshell and the video board that are the park's most prominent features. Programming and alcohol sales at the park are now controlled by the Wave Venue under contract to the city.

PARKS OR BUSINESS DEALS?

Many of the biggest park deals of the past decade have, like Naftzger, been done with private interests at top of mind:

- Starting in 2018, City Hall rebuilt the Stryker Soccer Complex near K-96 and Greenwich, and privatized it. That crushed the nonprofit Sedgwick County Soccer Association, based at South Lakes Park — which once served 3,000 community youth — in favor of the for-profit operator that benefits from \$23 million in new soccer fields funded by Sales Tax and Revenue, or STAR, bonds.

The association has approached the city about restarting a league at South Lakes, but it would likely be a lot smaller because several fields were removed and the city is planning a \$3 million pickleball complex where those fields used to be. It is not yet known what private-sector components might be part of the PicklePlex.

- Chester I. Lewis Reflecting Square Park near Douglas and Market, dedicated to Wichita's civil-rights struggle, will soon do double duty as the decorative entryway for a new private osteopathic medical school. That \$2.2 million project is under construction.

- The city closed one of its five golf courses, the former Clapp course at Harry and Oliver, and is leasing the former clubhouse and alcohol rights to a disc-golf entrepreneur for a token \$300 a month while contemplating the future. The City

SEE PARKS, 6A



TRAVIS HEYING The Wichita Eagle

The Pracht Wetlands Park near 29th and Maize Road includes this pedestrian bridge over a pond that connects to a Hampton Inn hotel.



TRAVIS HEYING The Wichita Eagle

Pracht Wetlands Park near 29th and Maize is under construction.

FROM PAGE 4A

PARKS

Council has approved a \$28 million plan to redevelop the site with park uses and some commercial components, but those plans are on hold and will almost certainly be scaled back.

- The city has partially constructed Pracht Wetlands Park near 29th North and Maize Road for hiking, bird-watching and other wildlife observation. Some of the land for the park — flood-prone and essentially unbuildable — was donated by a developer of adjacent commercial properties. One of the first parts completed was a bridge into the park from a hotel that’s part of the development.

- Currently on hold is Crystal Prairie Lake Park in northwest Wichita. Another public-private venture, an ambitious \$25 million plan for development has been sitting on a shelf since 2009 while a for-profit sand company excavates a 420-acre lake at the site. A tawdry history of city staff altering bids for the sand led to years of delay in creating the park. Now, the plan is so old that the cost of doing it has been estimated as much as four times what it would have been when it was drawn up. It’s likely to be dramatically scaled back, but developers around the site are still using it as a selling point for new homes.

A CHANGE OF ATTITUDE

When it comes to Wichita government, nothing is ever certain, but the council may be losing its taste for those kinds of back-scratching business deals.

The makeup of the council has changed dramatically. Council members Cindy Clay-



JAIME GREEN The Wichita Eagle

The clubhouse of the former Clapp Golf Course is being leased out for \$300 a month to a disc golf entrepreneur following the closure of the course to traditional golf.

comb and Jared Cerullo were voted out of office and Maggie Ballard and Mike Hoheisel were voted in.

Mayor Brandon Whipple says the conversation has shifted since the new members came on board in January.

Under the previous council, the main question was: How can the city help out the businesses?

Now, he said, there’s a more holistic approach and developers or operators are being asked to explain how their project will benefit the community, beyond just their own bottom line.

With parks, what could be the watershed example of change was the defeat of a plan to turn the city’s golf system over to a

private operator, Kemper Sports. Kemper partnered on the deal with the well-liked nonprofit organization First Tee, which introduces youths to the game and helps them develop their skills.

When it was proposed in 2021, privatizing the city’s four golf courses — Auburn Hills, Consolver, MacDonald and Sim — appeared to be a one-foot gimme putt.

Privatization won a 5-1 recommendation from the Park Board. But the council vote went the opposite way, 5-2 against, after Ballard and Hoheisel took office.

Before the council vote, The Eagle had reported that financial information that had been

presented to the Park Board was inaccurate. But what really killed the deal was that the city’s golfers, by and large, didn’t support it.

Whipple observed that the people backing the project were mainly the company seeking the contract and city staff and that both had something to gain from the deal. For Kemper, it was the potential profit; for staff, it was a reduction in workload.

“No one in the public that didn’t have a vested interest in the deal seemed to be for it,” he said.

He said if it had gone before the council last year, “100 per-

SEE PARKS, 8A



FILE PHOTO

Naftzger Park was neglected for decades as the area around it was redeveloped. It became a gathering spot for the city’s homeless population.

FROM PAGE 6A

PARKS

cent it would have passed.”

He’s not wrong.

Privatizing the golf system probably would have generated more revenue than it currently does. But it would almost certainly have made it more expensive for residents to play in the future. And it would have essentially destroyed the city’s capability to take back and run the courses if things went wrong.

Ballard said the new council is more focused on preserving and maintaining what the city has, rather than farming out responsibilities and creating splashy new park developments that require a lot of for-profit involvement.

“They’ve deferred a lot of maintenance for a long time,” Ballard said. The attitude seemed to be, “Let’s continue to build and kind of let what we already have crumble.”

That, she said, is what creates the opportunity for private businesses to swoop in and take over.

BATHROOM FOR DOGS, NOT PEOPLE

Naftzger Park’s the poster child for what Ballard’s talking about.

It was neglected for decades as the area around it was redeveloped.

It became a gathering spot for the city’s homeless population and its walls and vegetation created blind spots where drug dealing and other unsavory activities could and did occur. It was more or less useless for staging events in conjunction with the nearby Intrust Bank Arena that opened in 2010.

Change was clearly needed.

But the new Naftzger was designed by architects hired by the developers of the commercial and apartment spaces next door, with their priorities in mind.

Mature trees were wiped out and the park reshaped into an artificial-turfed front lawn for the nearby apartments and businesses. Its main feature is an open field where people can gather to watch events on the Evergy Plaza bandshell or the Evergy video board.

The commercial buildings are built to the edge of the park and the outdoor dining area of the HomeGrown restaurant is actually in the park. That seating is ironically labeled as the “Kindness Zone” and the next line on the sign says, “This seating area is reserved for our HomeGrown guests.”

The park includes a dog run where apartment dwellers can take their pets to do their business, but no bathrooms for human beings.

Chris Pumpelly, the president of the Park Board, is far from a Naftzger hater. In June, he was a key organizer of a large gathering there to celebrate Pride Month.

But he said some of the priorities of the park design are out of whack with the needs of the greater community.

“We build a dog run, but we don’t build a bathroom?” he said. “What kind of message are we sending? It’s don’t expect to be here for more than an hour unless you plan on buying something.”

And removing the park’s well-developed tree canopy was another bad call, because on hot days, people can only gather at the edge of the park where there’s some shade. “The park would not fill in (with people) until the sun sets behind the Eaton,” the apartment building immediately west of the park, Pumpelly observed.

A NEW APPROACH?

But setting aside past mistakes, what really matters is where to go from here.

Last year, Misty Bruckner of Wichita State University’s Public Policy and Management Center floated one intriguing idea: merging Wichita’s parks and cultural affairs departments with Sedgwick County’s to create a countywide park and entertainment system.

While the idea hasn’t been heard from publicly since a joint City Council/County Commission meeting in June 2021, city and county staff have been “exploring a phased approach to cooperative programming and facility management,” City Manager Robert Layton said.

Those discussions paused as the county and city turned to their annual budget seasons, but



JAIME GREEN The Wichita Eagle

Wichita Mayor Brandon Whipple speaks during a dedication of the Stryker Sports Complex last year. The city spent \$23 million on new soccer improvements, driving the city’s nonprofit soccer league out of business.

they’re expected to resume this fall.

The concept of a comprehensive system makes sense on several levels, if run right: it could eliminate competition between city and county recreation programs, take advantage of economies of scale and reduce bureaucracy, leaving more money for programming.

But it would be a serious mistake to use consolidation as a step toward increased privatization, which Bruckner offered as a selling point. We have quite enough of that already.

The best thing about potential consolidation is that it could spur some innovative thinking on the role of public park and cultural services and how to distribute them in a way that is equitable to all residents, not just those who can afford top-flight activities and experiences.

It would certainly require a change in governance.

Part one would be reform of the Park Board.

For too long, it’s been controlled by what Dale Goter — who quit in disgust over the golf issue — calls “letterhead board members.”

These are people who like seeing their name on a board roster, but don’t do the hard work of understanding the issues and instead rubber-stamp whatever is recommended by staff.

Goter knows that when he sees it. He’s been both a journalist covering municipal government from the outside and later a lobbyist for the city who saw the inside story. If you’ve ever been to a Park Board meeting, you’ve probably seen it too.

One specific problem with Wichita’s Park Board is that it doesn’t have enough to do. Since that vote in 1990, it’s been relegated to an advisory role, sending recommendations to a City Council that may or may not follow them.

There’s little responsibility and even less accountability.

The appointment process, as Wichita State sociologist Chase Billingham noted in a recent guest column in *The Eagle*, is badly broken. Basically it consists of each individual council member trying to scrape together enough breathing bodies to fill all their slots on advisory boards.

Council votes on advisory

board members are pro-forma and members almost always politely rubber-stamp whoever’s nominated, without knowing any more about them than their name.

Parks are too important for that approach.

If the city and county go through with consolidation — or even if they don’t — this might be a good time to consider establishing an independent park district, either citywide or countywide.

That may seem radical, but it’s not. It’s done in a lot of places.

Johnson County has the only independent park district in Kansas. When’s the last time you heard anybody complain about their parks?

Chicago’s parks are legendary, and they’re run by an independent district. Park districts are all over California, and whatever you may think of the rest of the Golden State’s political system, their district parks are generally first-rate and often phenomenal.

They too have commercial components, but unlike Wichita, they have the independence to stand up tell businesses: We welcome you as part of our system. But we control the system, you don’t.

In some places, the board members are appointed by local government bodies. In others, they’re elected at large.

It doesn’t seem to matter, as long as whoever is selecting the members takes it seriously and isn’t just filling in names on a scorecard.

Whatever we end up doing, we need to remember this one thing: Public parks are called that because they belong to the public. And they should always be run for the benefit of the public — not privatized and profit-maximized for the benefit of private business interests or the convenience of city officials.

The sooner we understand that, the better off we’ll be.

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ON THE COVER



JAIME GREEN

Naftzger Park was rebuilt at a cost of \$5.2 million, of that, \$1.4 million was donated by electricity provider Evergy, which got its name on the bandshell and the video board that are the park’s most prominent features.

Busting the gun myths that surface after mass shootings

BY DION LEFLER
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Part one of two

Every time there's a mass shooting, a lot of people go on social media and demand action to stop the carnage.

And they are met there with a well-rehearsed chorus of enduring myths and misinformation about guns that shouldn't really go unchallenged, but often does.

The people who post these myths don't like me a lot, because I've been a gun enthusiast for more than 40 years, have fired

thousands of rounds from guns of all types, I know what I'm talking about and am willing to call out lies when I see them.

I was a member of the National Rifle Association back when it was mostly run by WWII and Korean War vets. They hunted a lot and organized shooting matches — which I enjoyed participating in — and preached gun safety with practically every waking breath.

I quit the NRA the same week President Bush (the first one) did and for the same reason.

Two days after the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing, I got a mailer from NRA Executive Vice President Wayne LaPierre embracing the nascent militia movement and characterizing federal agents as

“jack booted government thugs” in “Nazi bucket helmets” preying on innocent civilians.

It's been 27 years. Gun laws have loosened, mass shootings have gotten way worse and the pro-gun rhetoric's gotten more refined.

So here's my take on some of the common myths people post to deflect responsibility for mass shootings away from guns and our gun laws.

'IT'S NOT THE GUNS, IT'S MENTAL HEALTH'

This one's insidious because there is some truth to it.

We have failed to provide adequate mental health services in this country, which undoubtedly contributes to some people losing it and shoot-

ing up a theater, or concert, or school.

And it's easy to assume that anyone who would gun down 19 little kids, like in Texas last week, has mental problems.

But it does a disservice to millions of peaceful, functioning Americans who struggle with mental illnesses, prompting some not to seek treatment for fear of stigma and stereotyping. And it ignores the fact that people with mental illness are far more likely to be victims of violence than perpetrators.

If somebody asks me to choose between adequate mental health funding and reasonable regulation of guns, my answer is the same as the little girl in the Old El Paso ad when asked to choose between soft or hard-shell tacos:

“Why can't we have both?”

'ARM THE TEACHERS'

OK, arm them with what? Pistols?

I hate to tell you this, but all firearms are not created equal.

Mass shooters usually come body-armored and armed to the teeth with assault rifles that can kill in case lots and are quick to reload. The Uvalde, Texas shooter last week fired 142 bullets and it took an elite SWAT team to bring him down.

Against that kind of firepower, a teacher with a pistol doesn't stand much of a chance. The most likely scenario is the teacher gets killed and the killer gets another firearm to use in his rampage.

'YOU'RE INFRINGING ON MY CONSTITUTIONAL RIGHTS'

Yes, you have a constitutional right.

But it's not unlimited.

Assault weapons were heavily regulated from

1994 to 2004.

Numerous constitutionality challenges were filed; none succeeded in court.

We weren't any less free, just safer.

'KIDS USED TO BE ALLOWED TO BRING GUNS TO SCHOOL'

Yep, that happened.

In my generation, they were getting an early start toward sending us to Vietnam and schools had gun clubs to encourage and teach marksmanship.

But the guns were kept under lock and key when not in use and only taken out under close adult supervision.

Also, they were .22-caliber bolt-action rifles, highly accurate, but practically useless for mass shootings.

Tomorrow: Why AR-15s are assault rifles and why an armed society isn't a polite society

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Democrats, there is no prize for showing restraint

BY KURT BARDELLA
Tribune News Service

The question I get asked the most as someone who went from being a Republican to a Democrat is: “What's the biggest difference between the two parties?”

The answer: Every impulse Democrats have is defensive and every impulse Republicans have is offensive.

A recent report in the Washington Post showed these dynamics at play perfectly between Democrats and Republicans on the January 6th Select Committee. As the Post described, Democratic Rep. Stephanie Murphy of Florida insisted that the committee focus less on former President Donald Trump and more on the security and intelligence failures that allowed the attack on the Capitol. In response, Republican Vice Chair Liz Cheney of Wyoming argued that the committee should keep its focus on the former president.

This is the best illustration I have come across that demonstrates how different Republicans and Democrats approach things on a tactical and, I'd say, cellular level.

When Republicans have the reins of power, they do not hesitate to go after the very top. From Barack Obama's birth certificate to Hillary Clinton's emails and potentially Hunter Biden's laptop, the GOP is unapologetic about pursuing witch hunts for political gain.

Democrats, on the other hand, are always pursuing lines of legitimate oversight reluctantly. At times, it feels like they are apologizing for doing the right thing.

I think back to Trump's first impeachment and the hesitant posture displayed by the Democrats during those proceedings. It was almost as if they were forced into it, regretted that it came to this, and moved as fast as possible to get it over with.

Democrats controlled the House majority but never forced Trump administration officials with firsthand knowledge of the events that were at the

center of the impeachment inquiry to testify such as John Bolton, Mick Mulvaney or Rick Perry, and the Republican-controlled Senate predictably torpedoed any effort to compel them to testify.

History repeated itself during Trump's second impeachment as firsthand witnesses like Mike Pence, Mark Meadows, Jared Kushner, Ivanka Trump, Rudy Giuliani, etc., were never called to testify. Hillary Clinton, of course, was grilled by the Republican-led Benghazi Committee for more than 11 hours.

It's almost as if Democrats believe there is some prize awaiting them for showing what they would characterize as restraint. There isn't.

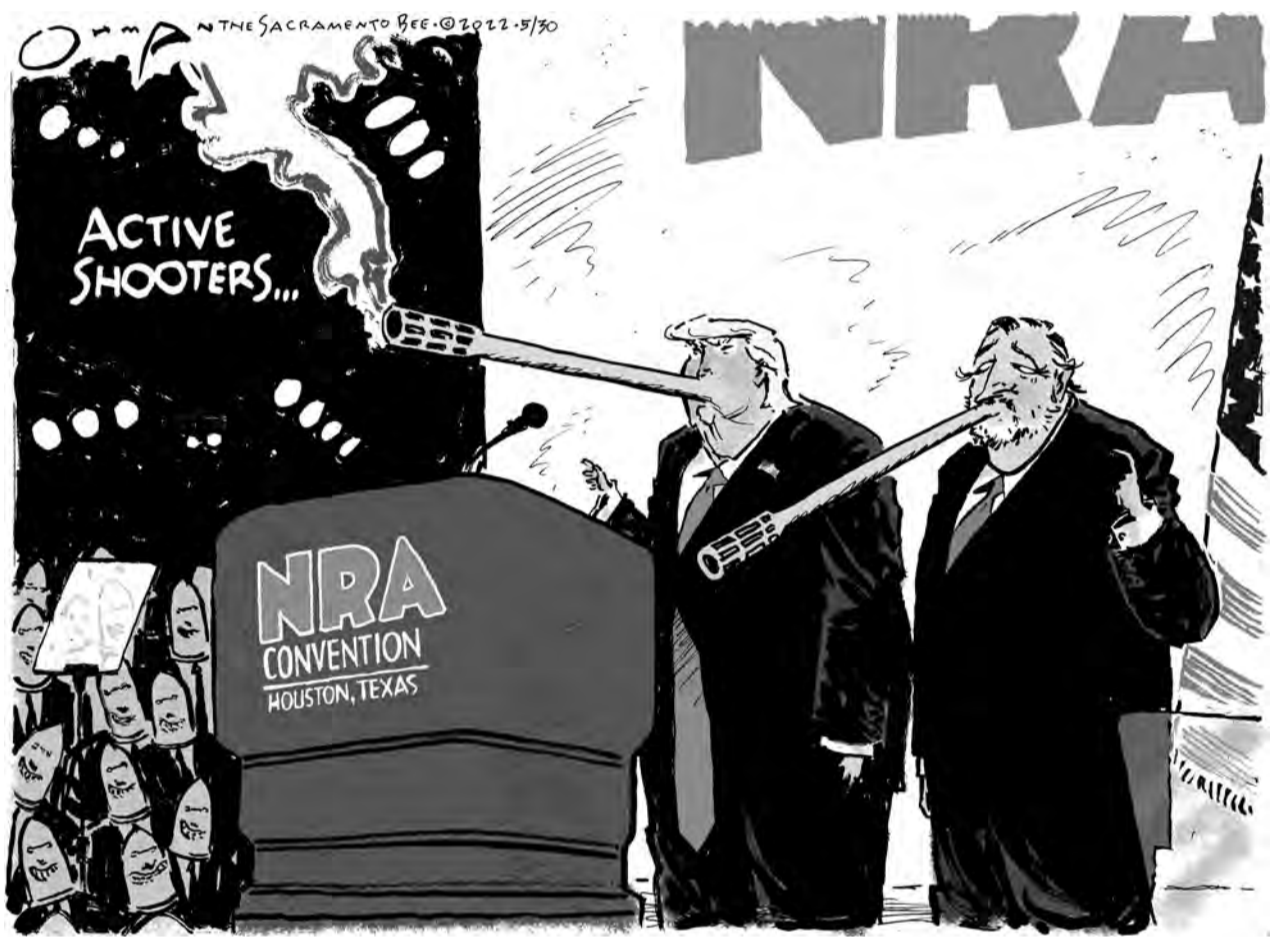
Some Democrats might think that if they pushed for certain investigative inquiries, that would give Republicans license to seek retribution should they regain power after the midterms this November. Newsflash: They are going to do that anyway.

Understand that if the GOP gets back the power of the gavel, they are going to unleash an investigative tsunami against Democrats and the Biden administration that'll make the Benghazi circus look like a walk in the park. They will not show any hesitancy or restraint. They will not worry about looking partisan or responsible. They certainly won't care about facts and the truth.

Democracy itself is under siege from the Republican Party. Democrats may have just a few months left — if control of the House flips in the midterms — to protect and defend our democratic process.

They should use every single tool of congressional power to hold the leaders of the Jan. 6 domestic terrorist attack accountable.

They should do what the Republicans would do given a chance: refuse to compromise and go on the attack. This difference, of course, is that the Democrats are going after the insurrectionist machine and defending democracy while the GOP is tearing it down.



JACK OHMAN The Sacramento Bee

Biden must stop promiscuous publicizing of US intelligence

BY JOHN R. BOLTON
Special To The Washington Post

Before Russia invaded Ukraine in February, the Biden administration released substantial intelligence analyses about Russia's capabilities and intentions, purportedly to deter the attack by making public the extent of U.S. knowledge about Vladimir Putin's planning. Similar unprecedented revelations continued after hostilities commenced.

Neither President Joe Biden's intelligence releases nor his other deterrence efforts stopped the invasion. Nonetheless, his advisers and media acolytes, piling speculation upon speculation without concrete evidence, claimed that publicizing the information — rather than simply sharing it privately with allies — bought time and helped unite NATO. The media did precious little reporting of the costs involved or other possible motivations.

Publicly revealing sensitive intelligence makes sense when a president has clear objectives, a coherent strategy and, ultimately, when the revelations advance U.S. in-

terests. That can be an aspect of intelligence statecraft: the use of data, analysis and advocacy to advance U.S. national-security objectives. But intelligence is a valuable commodity, often acquired at great cost and risk. Publicizing it promiscuously can endanger sources and methods. It can also prove counterproductive and embarrassing when inaccurate, and encourage the bureaucratic propensity to leak.

Does the Biden administration have a strategy, or did these scattershot efforts reflect larger failures in information statecraft?

Divergent bureaucratic, political and policy cultures disagree on publicizing intelligence. The State Department suffers from institutional logorrhea, whereas career intelligence personnel generally make “Silent Cal” Coolidge seem chatty. Some policymakers in the current executive branch, with roots in liberal academia, think tanks or politics, suffer from “mirror imaging” — the idea that “adversaries” are typically reasonable people just like us, ready to find common solutions to common problems. If only they had the

same information we had, this view holds, they, too, would behave responsibly.

That doesn't describe the worlds of Putin and Chinese leader Xi Jinping. As Putin told me on more than one occasion: “You have your logic, we have ours; let's see who prevails.” And even if Russia or China have superior information-warfare capabilities, releasing classified information shouldn't be our knee-jerk response.

In this matter, Biden seems to be largely re-fighting his last war. The catastrophic strategic and operational failure of the United States' humiliating withdrawal from Afghanistan unnerved his administration — and made Biden look clueless. Contrary to Biden's repeated assertions that Afghanistan's government and military could withstand Taliban attacks, they swiftly collapsed. The White House response was contradictory and confused, utterly ineffective in stemming the flood of public criticism.

Seemingly determined to prevent renewed perceptions of incompetence, Biden's team tried to show that, with Ukraine, unlike in Afghanistan, they were

on top of events and knew what Russia was about. Nonetheless, its performance has been spotty and sometimes incautious, including revealing less-than-certain intelligence during the war.

What was inexplicably underreported and under-analyzed by the pro-Biden media is why the United States was so mistaken in its pre-invasion intelligence assessment that Russia would gain swift victory in Ukraine, with Kyiv falling in days and the entire country in weeks. Fearing sudden Russian successes, the administration leaked that it would support guerrilla operations afterward, presumably to deter Moscow from invading. A U.S. offer to provide Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky safe passage from Kyiv showed little confidence in his government's survivability. You can be sure that China noted these intelligence failures carefully.

These patterns must change. Revitalizing the now-dilapidated Cold War legacy of effective U.S. international communications has supposedly been a national priority for decades. If Congress is looking for bipartisan reform projects, this one should be top of mind. We knew how to do this once; try doing what worked 50 years ago.