

# OPINION

**FIRST AMENDMENT** “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press or the right of people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.”

OUR VIEW

## Make the right decision

It takes just a second or two to check your cell phone.

But if you are driving, that second or two can mean the difference between life, death and an experience that can haunt the rest of your life.

The tragic death July 1 of a mother bicycling with her two young children in Rock County is a horrifying reminder that distracted driving continues to be a problem in this state.

According to the criminal complaint, the driver admitted to taking his eyes off the road to check his cell phone when he hit the bicycle and bike stroller.

In Minnesota, it's illegal to text while driving and to access the web while in motion or part of traffic, including at a stop light or stop sign. It's also illegal for drivers under the age of 18 to use a cell phone while driving.

And yet, the Minnesota departments of transportation, public safety and health say driver inattention is a leading contributing factor in fatal crashes. Cell phones and other electronic devices are commonplace in our lives today. But using them while we are driving is unsafe, irresponsible and can be deadly.

The Department of Public Safety reports one in four crashes is related to distracted driving, although such crashes are likely under-reported. Distracted driving was a contributing factor in 175 fatal crashes, resulting in 191 deaths from 2011 to 2013 in Minnesota. More than half of those crashes

occurred in rural areas, and those fatalities cost Minnesota more than \$269 million

Again, despite these crashes, people continue to break the law and, as a result, citations for these offenses increased from 388 in 2008 to 2,189 in 2013. That's an alarming trend.

If you text while driving, on average you take your eyes off the road for up to 4.6 seconds out of every six seconds. For comparison, that's like traveling the length of a football field at 55 miles per hour without looking up, according to DPS. Using a cell phone while driving, whether hands-free or hand-held, delays a driver's reactions as much as having an alcohol-concentration level of .08 percent — the legal limit.

While driving: turn off cell phones or place them out of reach to avoid the urge to answer; never text; plan trips ahead to avoid fiddling with a GPS device or application; pull over to a safe location to look at a map; designate a passenger to answer the phone, help with directions or check a device. Passengers must speak up to stop drivers who are placing them at risk by being a distracted driver.

The popularity of mobile devices and services, and the dangerous and often deadly, consequences of their use while driving require each of us to make some personal decisions that can save lives, put our own lives and futures and the lives of others at risk. It's your choice. Make the right one by focusing all your attention on the most important task when you are behind the wheel — driving.



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

## Vandalism has a high cost

**To the editor,**

Vandalism hurts everyone. Whether it's a church, or a community building, the damage and disruption of vandalism has a high cost. Not only do the building owners need to report, document, estimate and repair the damage, but they have to take valuable time out of a busy day to deal with such issues.

Churches and

community buildings work hard to give back to the community in a variety of ways, and when vandals damage these buildings it takes the time away from the good these groups can be doing. Perhaps that's the goal of the vandals, shut the buildings down. Then we would have no places of worship, no gyms to play in, no dining rooms to offer free meals to those in need, no offices

for counseling services, no rooms for rent to organizations that also reach out to various people groups.

Backus works hard to offer a fun, safe environment for people of all ages. It is very unfortunate that some feel the need to slash and break our windows, damage our gazebo and leave graffiti in the building. While we place the majority of

the blame on the youth who do the damage, we also would like to hold parents accountable for their children. A parent's job should be to raise a productive person who contributes to society, not someone who tears it down.

**Robin Bjorkquist**  
Event coordinator  
**Backus Community Center**  
International Falls, MN

## Refugees deserve humane treatment

**To the editor,**

What should the United States do about the many children crossing the border from Nicaragua, Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala?

Missing from the heated discussion is a clear definition of the problem. The only term used as various actions are

proposed is “illegal immigrant.”

The loudest calls for action include “send these illegals home immediately,” “close the leaks in the border,” “send more armed border patrols,” or “send the military to turn them back.”

A better term to

describe these children that points to a humane action is “refugee.”

The United States has a record of accepting refugees from countries whose citizens are at risk of bodily harm or death. These refugees were and are seeking safety and protection.

The latest refugees are

children unaccompanied or in some instances accompanied by a parent.

Humane treatment by our country for these children demands a humane solution.

**Wallace Simpson**  
Ranier, MN  
*Editor's note: The letter was also signed by Rose Simpson.*

### How to contact your lawmakers

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Make a difference by writing a letter to the editor or contributing to our online discussions. The Journal's Opinion page is where meaningful community discussions take place.

### Candidate letter policy

The beginning of 2014 brought a new policy to The Journal. A charge of \$30 will be required to publish letters to the editor from candidates or about candidates. The letters must be 500 words or less and the fee must be paid prior to the letter being published. The name and city of the author will be published with the letter. Letters may be emailed to laurel@ifallsjournal.com. The Journal will publish a deadline for publication of paid election letters prior to the Aug. 12 primary and Nov. 4 general elections.