

OPINION

OUR VIEW

Plan for winter fun

Remember how it seemed many of us forgot how to drive after that first snow-fall?

We needed to reacquaint ourselves with the winter rules of the road and be reminded of the need to carry a winter survival kit in our vehicles.

Now, same goes for winter recreation safety. We urge everyone to reacquaint themselves with winter safety rules and recommendations.

At this time of year and with some of the best ice conditions in years, we understand the rush to be among the first out to wet a line on early ice.

We urge people who want to venture out on snowmobile or all-terrain vehicle to check ice thicknesses for themselves or ask around at local bait shops to find out if the ice is ready for use.

We also urge people to wait to drive vehicles onto the ice until the experts say the ice conditions are right. Do not drive around barricades placed in front of what will soon be ice road accesses. The barricades are there for a reason: The ice is not yet thick enough to support vehicles.

Minnesota Department of Natural Resources Conservation Office Darrin Kittelson offers some great tips and insight on ice safety in a story in this edition. The most important of these tips are to accept no ice is truly safe and there is the possibility of falling through the ice. Then, wrap your mind around

a plan to survive falling through the ice.

While snowmobile trails are now open, we urge riders to use caution with the light covering of snow. Speed combined with little snow and the possibility of exposed rocks makes for a dangerous scenario. But the International Voyagers Snowmobile Club’s trail clearing day Saturday should help make the trails even better for riding.

Clearly, maintaining the public’s access to these winter opportunities takes money.

We urge people who snowmobile to join a local club to assist in the maintenance of trails. The IVSC maintains more than 130 miles of groomed trails in Borderland that offer some of the most beautiful riding anywhere. Imagine if those trails were not available or not groomed.

Creation and maintenance of the local ice road takes gas and causes wear and tear on Travis Thompson’s plow truck. Imagine how many hours he works to make for a comfortable and convenient road that leads to some of the best walleye fishing in the world. If you plan to use the road this season, do what’s right and buy a season pass.

Winter recreation opportunities are among the reasons many of us have chosen to live in Borderland. Take steps to keep those opportunities safe and financially feasible into the future.



GUEST COLUMN

Tired of money in politics, negative advertising, a broken Congress?

Time to reform campaigns, way we do business

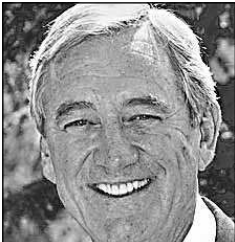
To restore America’s confidence in our elections and our government, it’s imperative we change the way we do our politics.

Regardless of your political views or the candidates you supported this year, I hope we can all agree on this: while campaigns are rough and tumble, partisan exercises – that’s the nature of democracy – when campaign season is over, we need to put politics aside, embrace bipartisanship, and focus on the people’s business. Otherwise, government will never be the effective, problem-solving instrument the Founders intended it to be.

The good news is that there is plenty of good will and desire for bipartisanship among Republicans and Democrats alike. Most voters would be pleasantly surprised to see how well we personally get along, and actually like each other.

The question is – how do we transform the idea of bipartisanship into reality, refocus away from endless fundraising, and start getting things done?

It’s a two-part answer. First, we need to change the way we campaign by getting rid of outside money. And second, we need to change the way we govern



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by returning Congress to its own time tested rules of the road.

Make no mistake. Campaigns are expensive and the pressure to raise money is intense. History demonstrates that the candidates who raise the most money usually get the most votes.

That said, negative campaigns financed by outside money and special interests are polluting our airwaves, degrading our candidates, corrupting our public policy, and diluting confidence in our elections system and our government.

Minnesota’s Eighth District was the national poster child – one of the most expensive Congressional races in the country. Some \$14 million (Center for Responsive Politics) has already been documented – with considerably more yet to be reported. And nearly two-thirds of that money came from outside special interests.

If you watched any TV at all this fall, you know that most of that money was

spent on negative advertising neither my opponent nor I could legally control or influence. Those ads made many voters angry and discouraged them from showing up at the polls.

It’s little wonder that nationwide, only about a third of eligible voters turned out this year. Campaigns are becoming contests to see who can withstand the most mud. We can and must do better.

How? Well, the Constitution grants Congress the power to govern and reform the elections process. When Congress fails to do so – and it has – the courts step in. Witness the U.S. Supreme Court’s “Citizens United” decision that allowed this flood of unchecked and undocumented outside money into our campaigns by ruling that corporations are “people” and the money they contribute is “free speech.” What nonsense.

A number of us in Congress have introduced reform measures, any of which would help fix the system. Taken together, they would produce a true renaissance for our democracy. With that in mind, I’ve put the best ideas together into a seven-point blueprint called the Restore Democracy Act. Here’s what the plan would do:

■ Reverse the Supreme Court’s Citizens United decision. Corporations are not people and money is not free speech. You shouldn’t have to be rich or rely on

wealthy special interests to run for Congress.

■ Implement a federal campaign financing system that combines public money with small donor contributions – returning control of our elections to regular people.

■ Prohibit campaign fundraising while Congress is in session – that’s time for doing the people’s business.

■ Limit the campaign season, as other western democracies do. Campaigns shouldn’t last 365 days a year – every single year.

■ End “gerrymandering” that’s made all but about 35 Congressional districts safe for incumbents. All 435 districts should be competitive.

■ Establish a nationwide online system of voter registration, and put an end to laws that suppress voting. Voter participation should always be encouraged.

■ And put Congress back to work, five days a week just like other people who have full-time jobs. We need that time to fully consider every bill, idea, and amendment through the regular committee process. By doing so, we can foster bipartisanship as we get to know one another better, and hammer out points of compromise and agreement.

Reform won’t be quick or easy, but our democracy and the integrity of our political process demand that we keep driving forward until we get the job done.

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