

OPINION

OUR VIEW

Pulling for progress

Using the International Tug of War as the impetus for significant change in the way Borderland residents access medical services is nearly as unique and creative as the activity itself.

We have used this space in the past to criticize the event, which in the last few years turned from what we saw as a charming, yet unique, chance for area residents to join with local officials in a good-natured competition with our sister city Fort Frances.

When money and energy was spent recruiting and paying the expenses for celebrities from outside the area to take part in what seemed like an elitist move concerned us. Gone were the days of the federal, state and local officials lining up shoulder-to-shoulder with local folks to yank a rope across the Rainy River in an attempt to pull our northern neighbors into the river. Instead, there were three separate pulls — for the celebrities, the very strong and then the regular folks.

We applaud local officials, especially International Falls City Councilor Cynthia Jaksa, for using the peace pull, as she said, for “something more substantive than just a celebration.”

Jaksa has called gatherings planned around the July 2 pull a “medical NAFTA.” The intention is to bring together officials from

all levels of government on both sides of the border to discuss how the two communities can share resources each lack locally.

She envisions Fort Frances area residents using MRI services available in the Falls and Falls residents using dialysis services available in Fort Frances. The move would keep residents from both side driving more than 100 miles for the services. Instead, we would simply cross the border.

Clearly, there’s lot of paperwork involved and agreements need to be made before this moves forward. But getting these folks together to talk about it is movement.

Jaksa’s also invited hospital officials from the Windsor and Detroit communities to the meetings to share their experiences in developing agreements that allow a similar sharing of resources across the border.

Last year, Jamshed Merchant, Canada’s consul general to the United States, attended the celebrations and meetings that got the talks started. He and others are expected to return to the area to continue the talks and work toward building the needed relationships across the border.

Kudos to all those who have found our peace pull can be used for a larger benefit for a larger population.

How to contact your lawmakers

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GUEST COLUMN

Deportation statistics: Separating fact from fiction

BY JOE GUZZARDI

For more than a year, immigration reform has dominated the news. The Senate and then the House introduced bills that set off a nationwide debate about the perceived merits or inherent flaws written into legislation that would legalize 12 million illegal immigrants and, within a decade, double the number of overseas workers. Those new legal workers would compete for jobs with 20 million unemployed or under-employed Americans.

But if there had been responsible media coverage, the contentious immigration haggling may have died out before it reached the rancorous pinnacle it quickly did.

One of the arguments immigration advocates make is that granting legal status to millions of aliens would end deportations and will end keep families together. At a recent rally, protestors carried signs with President Obama’s picture that read: “Stop Deportation and Separating Families” and “Not One More Deportation.”

Early on, the media picked up on the family unity theme, and helped spread the falsehood that under Obama deportations have hit record totals. The New York Times wrote that Obama has deported 1.9 million aliens or more than 1,000 a day, “a record for an American president.”

But a conscientious investigative reporter, assuming one can be found, could access the published Department of Homeland Security immigration information and readily discover that the opposite is

true. President Obama has the fewest deportations in recent history, and the lowest yearly deportation average since President Richard M. Nixon.

During the administration’s first four years, President Obama deported about 3.2 million aliens or an average annual of 800,000. Obama’s predecessor, George W. Bush, averaged 1.3 million deportations per year. President Bush had the benefit of a pro-active Homeland Security Secretary, Michael Chertoff, who was more dedicated to enforcing immigration law than Janet Napolitano.

The difference between the factual DHS count and the inflated statistics advocates quote is easily explained. More than half of the total deportations pro-immigration lobbyists cite are apprehended at the border while trying to cross illegally, and then put briefly into ICE custody before being returned. In other words, they are not torn from their families because they never made it to the interior. ICE Director John Sandweg recently admitted that in 2013 ICE deported only 134,000 illegal aliens from the interior out of an alien population estimated at 11.5 million.

According to Jessica Vaughn, a former State Department official and currently the non-partisan, Washington D.C.-based Center for Immigration Studies’ Policy Director, ICE agents are now releasing more aliens than they’re deporting. President Obama has issued a series of unconstitutional executive actions that side-stepped Congress and granted

prosecutorial discretion to some aliens that exempts them from deportation. Vaughn calculates that the White House’s executive orders shield at least 90 percent of the illegal alien population.

Exemptions started in June 2011 when then-ICE Director John Morton issued his infamous prosecutorial discretion memo that instructed ICE agents not to arrest broad categories of illegal aliens, including minor criminals, long-time residents, students, parents, caregivers, and a long list of other categories even though there is no statutory basis to give them special treatment.

Then, in 2012, Morton distributed another set of restrictions. Morton’s memo ordered agents to curtail their use of immigration holds which authorize ICE officers to question and detain illegal aliens identified after arrest by local law enforcement. Moreover, about 900,000 aliens ordered removed have successfully eluded ICE and remain in the U.S.

Reporters who cover the immigration beat and legislators who vote on immigration bills need to do a better job of uncovering the truth and sharing it with the American public. Unless the White House and Congress do a better job of enforcing existing immigration laws, passing new ones would make a bad situation worse.

**Guzzardi is a Californians for Population Stabilization Senior Writing Fellow whose columns have been syndicated since 1987.**

WHAT OTHERS SAY

**Public opinion is right — sheriffs should be elected**

On more than one occasion during the past decade, members of the Post-Bulletin’s editorial board have debated the merits of electing county sheriffs.

Strong arguments can be made that sheriffs should be hired by county boards, not chosen by popular vote. Why not let elected officials choose from a pool of highly qualified, experienced applicants, much as a city hires a police chief or a fire chief, or as a school board hires a superintendent? A sheriff who is hired, rather than elected, would be free to do the job without worrying about his/her popularity — and wouldn’t have to waste time planting yard signs, knocking on doors and producing campaign literature when election season rolls around.

And don’t get us started on the fairly common practice of having sheriffs step down in mid-term, handing the reins and the advantage of incumbency to their preferred successor.

Still, we’ve never advocated the abolition of elections for sheriff, primarily because we can’t find evidence that people are dissatisfied with the current situation.

Indeed, quite the opposite is true \_ people want to vote for their county sheriff.

Nationwide, 46 states have elections for county sheriffs. There are no sheriffs in Alaska, Connecticut or Hawaii. Rhode Island has one appointed sheriff with authority over its five counties. Nationwide, just three counties have opted for appointed sheriffs. In 1994, Iowa voters put the matter to a referendum and loudly declared that they wanted to elect their sheriffs.

In Minnesota, recent efforts to abolish elections for sheriff in Ramsey and Hennepin counties have failed \_ with the latest being in 2008, when the Ramsey County Charter Commission deadlocked in an 8-8 vote that, if passed, would have put the matter to a public vote. (One member of the 17-member commission was absent.)

We bring this history up because right now, two sheriffs in southeast Minnesota have been making a lot of headlines \_ and not for busting up meth labs or cracking down on drunk drivers. Sheriff Rodney Bartsh of Wabasha County has been the most outspoken advocate for the controversial “Safe Driving” programs that

recently were ruled illegal, and Dodge County Sheriff Jim Jensen turned heads and attracted a firestorm of criticism when he fired his chief deputy for alleged disloyalty.

In nine months, voters will have their say. Jensen, if he seeks another term, will have at least one challenger in Scott Rose, a law-enforcement veteran with 18 years of experience in Dodge County. And we’d be stunned if Bartsh doesn’t have at least one opponent in deeply divided Wabasha County. Residents of Wabasha County will have the chance to decide which direction they want to go.

Granted, not every county board is as dysfunctional as Wabasha County’s, but the fact is that a good, ethical sheriff’s office will occasionally step on some powerful toes. That’s the nature of law enforcement, and a good sheriff must be able to do the job without constantly looking over his or her shoulder.

That’s why it’s best to have thousands of people make the hiring decision, rather than just five or seven.

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