

OPINION

OUR VIEW

Nolan sticks to his guns

It's easy to call for change when running for election to an office.

It's not so easy after the election to get those changes included in bills that could change the way America does business.

Kudos to U.S. Rep. Rick Nolan for sticking to his guns. He's sought to end what he's termed "nation-building abroad" and to instead use America's resources to reduce the deficit and create jobs at home. That theme was fundamental to his 2012 campaign the first time we interviewed him as he attempted to return to Congress. It's been a recurring theme throughout his first term and this year's re-election campaign.

Last week, two amendments authored by Nolan that will move toward achieving that theme were included in the bipartisan National Defense Authorization Act approved by the House.

One amendment stops any new money for major reconstruction in Afghanistan. Nolan has maintained Afghanistan construction projects have been a waste of taxpayer dollars. The U.S. has since 2002 spent more than \$100 billion on projects there, with no accounting for where \$60 billion of that money has gone, according to Nolan.

Under his amendment, none of the \$66 billion in the defense bill's overseas contingency fund will be approved for Afghan military reconstruction. He notes money slated for nation-building abroad would fully fund the state of Minnesota for two years.

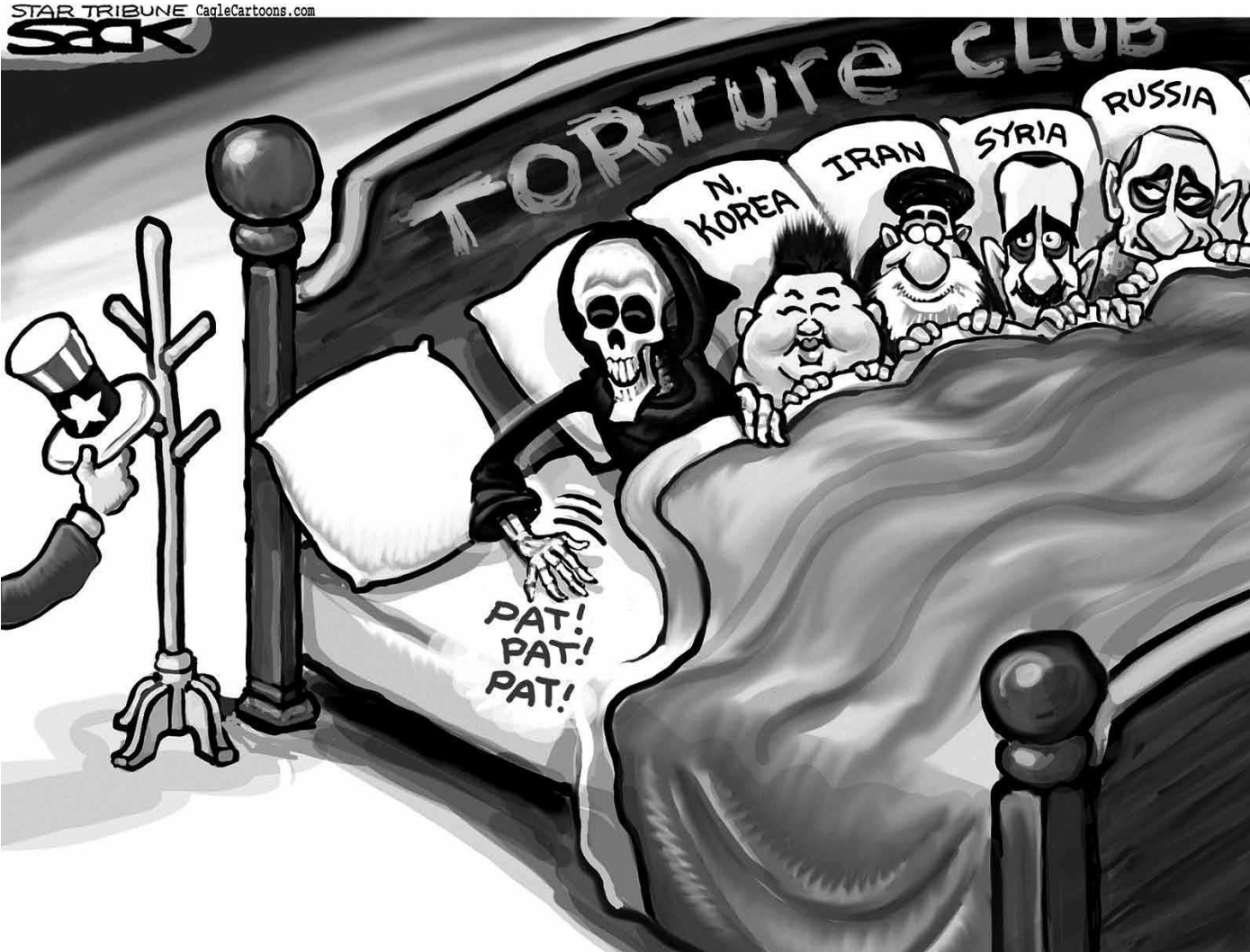
The other amendment requires certification of any new U.S. construction project in Afghanistan in excess of \$1 million to be supervised by U.S. personnel with procedures in place to prevent fraud and abuse.

Nolan said this amendment assures the U.S. will not build anything in Afghanistan the U.S. can't inspect, audit and protect.

In supporting his contention, Nolan has pointed to a Washington Post report that tells of U.S. funds used to pay about 50,000 Iraqi soldiers who don't exist. Their salaries, according to the report, are collected by corrupt Iraqi Army leaders.

He also points to the increased Taliban activity in Afghanistan, the No. 1 "narco-state nation in the world," where about \$725 million in construction projects fall outside U.S. inspection zones. Providing money for well-intended projects in a corrupt state that produces more heroin than the rest of the world combined is a prescription for fraud, according to Nolan.

Nolan deserves credit for never wavering from his beliefs and working hard to make the changes he believes will benefit America.



LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Bill would weaken Clean Water Act and wildlife protection

To the editor,

As Congress nears the end of their session they have begun to address funding and have proposed a spending bill so as to avoid another government shut down. Unfortunately the proposed bill has serious implications for the environment and specifically clean water.

Attached to the spending bill are riders that weaken the Clean Water Act and protections for wildlife. Fortunately, a rider to shut down the EPA's proposed clean water rule to restore Clean Water Act protections to thousands of streams and wetlands was not included in the final bill. However, this foreshadows future attacks on the proposed clean water rule.

Minnesota and its citizens have a substantial stake in the fight as the threatened rule would protect the drinking water for over 970,000 Minnesotans.

The passage of the spending bill is important to keep the government up and running, however it is outrageous! that polluters are using budget legislation to attack environmental laws.

Polluters and their allies in Congress have deceptively used the necessary spending bill to achieve anti-environmental goals. We would like to thank Rep. Pelosi and Sen. Boxer for their efforts in supporting the Clean Water Act and also encourage Minnesota leaders to join the fight against these attacks. Whether used for recreation, construction or consumption, clean water remains integral to our way of life in Minnesota and must not be so easily be attacked.

Brian Wasz
Environment Minnesota
Minneapolis, MN

GUEST COLUMN

It's about a broken system, not race

Remember Kelly Thomas?

Didn't think so, but it's understandable.

Thomas was an unarmed mentally ill homeless man from Southern California who was tasered, clubbed and beaten to death in Fullerton by three cops in July of 2011.

Thomas' face was pounded to a pulp and, after losing the ability to breathe normally, he died later in a hospital of brain damage.

Video of the awful incident — including Thomas' screams and his cries of "Dad! Dad!" — was recorded on security cameras and there was a minor outcry at the time over police brutality.

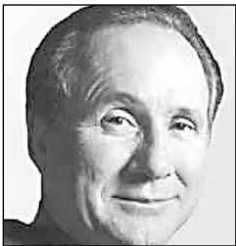
Unlike the case of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Mo., county prosecutors brought the Fullerton cops to trial on serious charges.

But last January a jury acquitted two of them and charges against the third policeman were dropped.

When the "peace" officers who killed Thomas got off the hook, what happened? Almost nothing.

There was no 24/7 media circus. No "Dad! Dad!" T-shirts were printed up. The Rev. Al Sharpton didn't come to town.

And there were no big marches like the one in Berkeley the other night to protest the death of corner



Michael REAGAN
MAKING SENSE

cigarette salesman Eric Garner of Staten Island, N.Y.

Why was no big fuss made over Thomas' unjustifiable death?

It was on videotape. It was far more violent than Eric Garner's death. It clearly was not an accident or caused in part by his weight or bad physical health.

Thomas was killed by three men who were either bad cops or poorly trained, or both. But he was the wrong color — white.

That's why there were no sad commentaries from President Obama and no public protests from professional football or basketball players when the three cops who killed Thomas got off.

We have a serious law enforcement problem in America, but it's not about race. It's about bad cops and how we've built our policing system.

No one knows how many people cops kill unjustifiably each year. The statistics are fuzzy because of problems with under-reporting, but the number is said to be at least 400.

The media — and the president — pick and choose which victims of police stupidity or brutality to emphasize.

It's all about politics — racial politics. And it's usually designed to fit the myth that cops hate or fear black males, or devalue their lives compared to whites, and are therefore more likely to shoot them dead.

But it's become clear to me that it's not racism that's the real problem. It's our police.

Most cops, by far, are good. But we also have too many bad or dumb cops.

We've lowered standards and hired people who are under-qualified or not suited psychologically to be cops in the first place.

Then we train them poorly, equip them with all kinds of deadly weapons, give them too much power over our lives and excuse them when they do bad or dumb things.

Making everything worse are our politicians.

Both parties pass all kinds of stupid or harmful laws that cops are then expected to enforce — laws like the one in New York City against selling loose cigarettes that resulted in Garner's death.

New York's lawmakers have jacked up the tax on cigarettes so high that they've created a black market and turned harmless entrepreneurial people like Garner into criminals.

They are the ones who should be put on trial. For criminal greed and stupidity.

Every talk show host in the country, including me, predicted years ago that putting exorbitant taxes on cigarettes would create a thriving black market in New York. The high price of a carton of cigarettes cost Garner his life.

The team of cops who killed Eric Garner shouldn't have been wasting their time harassing him for his minor victimless crime.

He didn't deserve to die. But his death — like Kelly Thomas' death — had nothing to do with his race. It had everything to do with a broken system of policing that badly needs to be fixed.

Reagan is the son of President Ronald Reagan, a political consultant, and the author of "The New Reagan Revolution" (St. Martin's Press). His column is distributed exclusively by Cagle Cartoons newspaper syndicate.

How to contact your lawmakers

FEDERAL OFFICES

President Barack Obama
Democrat
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave. N.W.
Washington, D.C., 20500
202-456-1111
Website: www.whitehouse.gov
E-mail: president@whitehouse.gov

U.S. Rep. Rick Nolan
2447 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington DC 20515
202-225-6211
Website: www.nolan.house.gov
Facebook: US Rep Rick Nolan
Twitter: @USRepRickNolan

Duluth Office of Congressman Rick Nolan
11 East Superior Street
Suite 125
Duluth, MN 55802
Phone: 218-464-5095
Fax: 218-464-5098

Brainerd Office of Congressman Rick Nolan
Brainerd City Hall
501 Laurel Street
Brainerd, MN 56401
218-454-4078

U.S. Sen. Amy Klobuchar
Democrat
302 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510
202-224-3244

Minnesota Office:
1200 Washington Avenue

South, Suite 250
Minneapolis, MN 55415
612-727-5220
Website: www.klobuchar.senate.gov

U.S. Sen. Al Franken
Democrat
Senate Hart Building 320
Washington DC 20510
202-224-5641
Website: www.alfranken.com
E-Mail: info@franken.senate.gov

STATE OFFICES

Gov. Mark Dayton
130 State Capitol
75 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.
St. Paul, MN, 55155
800-657-3717
E-mail: Mark.Dayton@state.mn.us

Rep. David Dill
571 State Office Building
St. Paul, MN 55155
651-296-2190
800-339-0466
rep.david.dill@house.mn
Assistant: Joan Harrison

Sen. Tom Bakk
75 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.
Capitol, Room 226
St. Paul, MN 55155-1606
Capitol Office phone: (651) 296-8881
Email: www.senate.mn/senatorbakkemail

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