

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

Kudos to good intent

Feeding deer in severe winters such as this will always be controversial. On one side of the debate are people, including biologists with the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, who say providing deer with artificial food is ineffective and could lead to the spread of disease. But on the other side of the issue are those, including the Minnesota Deer Hunters Association, who say deer are now dying, and even if some pockets of deer survive because of the feeding program it is worth the cost and the effort. This year marks the first in 17 years the state’s emergency deer-feeding fund has been tapped. Deer hunters have provided, for the past 15 years, 50 cents from each deer-hunting license to a fund for emergency deer feeding. Ten years ago the use of the fund was expanded to include research and efforts to combat chronic wasting disease and bovine TB. Feeding deer this year could be worth the effort, money and possible risk because of a number of severe winters in the 1990s have depleted the population.

The DNR’s involvement in the deer feeding program makes sense. It establishes criteria for how and when the deer feeding program kicks in. It said the winter severity index, a measure of the snow depth and cold temperatures, must hit 100 points by mid-February, and a group must request it, which MDHA did. The WSI last week in Borderland was 143. The DNR approved feeding in certain permit areas below deer population goals and in identified sites. It also requires groups like the Trails End Chapter keep track of feeding sites and volunteers to ensure the feed is being properly used. Mother Nature can appear cruel to animals in winters like this. It’s human nature to want to help animals, like deer, that provide so much enjoyment, whether it be watching them interact with one another or a tasty steak on the grill. Regardless of the debate, we say kudos to the people who are making an effort at distributing the feed to Borderland deer based on the DNR’s guidelines. We believe it will make a difference between life and death for some of our deer.



GUEST COLUMN

Pay attention to this

BY PETER FUNT

HENDERSON, Nev. — I happened to be doing a 20-hour road trip in a rented car when Apple announced CarPlay, a system that will soon allow motorists to text, check email and be entertained via their mobile devices, while roaring down the highway. The same week it was reported that Google has hired lobbyists to fight legislation in several states that would ban drivers from wearing Google Glass while operating a vehicle. Some carmakers will begin syncing with Google Glass next year. Not surprisingly, Apple and Google, along with several other tech companies with billions at stake, claim that creating hands-free devices for use in cars will combat distracted driving, not contribute to it. No one really knows. But here’s what we do know: Over 1,000 people are injured every day in the United States as a result of distracted driving, and nine of them die. The Centers for Disease Control, which supplies the data, said all kinds of distractions contribute — even onboard navigation systems. Seems the more functions we have in an auto the more distracted we are likely to be, and while hands-on is worst, hands-free devices are still problematic. The Lincoln sports model I rented didn’t have GPS or a phone connection, yet the array of center-console push and touch options was overwhelming. With CarPlay, owners of Apple devices will be able to use voice commands to send

and hear text messages, get directions, answer calls and utilize numerous third-party apps. With Google Glass, which will first be interfaced with Hyundai models next year, motorists can access similar data, but it will appear in visual form before their eyes, rather than as audio only. And yes, Google Glass allows wearers to watch videos — even if they’re driving a car. This has prompted lawmakers in five states to write legislation that bans Google Glass for anyone behind the wheel. Google maintains that the glasses allow motorists to keep their eyes on the road instead of having to divert their attention to the center console. This strikes me as a massive, high-stakes confrontation between parties each claiming to be working in the public’s best interests. Perhaps hands-free devices are safer than the hands-on kind, but what if they also inspire vastly more people to use them — folks who wouldn’t otherwise be using any device while driving? It’s somewhat like the e-cigarette debate. Are they good because they make it possible for people to quit smoking? Or are they bad because they allow smokers to continue the habit, and even prompt some others to start? When it comes to distracted driving, Americans are already hooked more than motorists in Europe. According to the CDC, 69 percent of Americans say they use their phones while driving. In Britain it’s about 21 percent, and in Spain only 15 percent.

Would systems like CarPlay and Google Glass help? Not really, according to Christopher Chabris, a psychology professor at Union College in Schenectady, N.Y. Drivers using hands-free devices may trick their brains into thinking they’re paying attention, he told Bloomberg News. It’s actually an “illusion.” During my drive through Nevada, where 70 mph is no big deal, I did take a hands-free call on my cellphone. Ten minutes and roughly 12 miles later, I finished the call and realized I had no recollection of anything I had seen out the window or done behind the wheel during the conversation. Was I distracted? I never took my eyes off the road, but clearly I was not paying full attention. Similarly, many of us have used GPS — a great aid in finding our way — while discovering that the more dependent we become on the audio commands, the less in touch we are with the exits, turns, and other elements in our travels. We become less inclined to think and focus on the specifics of the task. Nothing is going to slow down technological innovations in our cars. The business interests are huge, and the public demand is great. But make no mistake: the way we’re headed, there are dangerous curves ahead. Funt is a writer and speaker. His book, “Cautiously Optimistic,” is available at Amazon.com and CandidCamera.com. Funt columns are distributed exclusively by Cagle Cartoons, Inc., newspaper syndicate.

How to contact your lawmakers

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WHAT OTHERS SAY

Teacher exams key for licensing

BY THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Prospective teachers in Minnesota may soon have one less hurdle to jump before becoming licensed. The Minnesota House Education Policy Committee is considering eliminating the difficult college-level skills test in reading, writing and math. While the test may not be a solid indicator of a prospective teacher’s skills, it serves an important purpose and should not be dropped without a comparable replacement licensing requirement.

Everybody wants highly qualified teachers in Minnesota schools, and it’s important that these educators are knowledgeable in core skills regardless of what subject they teach. These tests do a good job of weeding out many of those who shouldn’t lead a classroom of children; however, there should be a better way to go about allowing only qualified teachers to be licensed. In the classroom, the most important thing is that a teacher can connect with kids on a psychological level. Under the current system, a prospective

teacher who plans to teach 6-year-olds can’t be licensed without passing a math test that would leave the vast majority of the general population dumb-struck. The tests serve an important purpose, but it’s OK that the state committee is considering a change. License qualifications should ensure Minnesota fills its classrooms with only well-prepared teachers, but the best answer is probably not a one-size-fits-all test. The Albert Lea Tribune, March 4

The Journal welcomes letters from readers

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