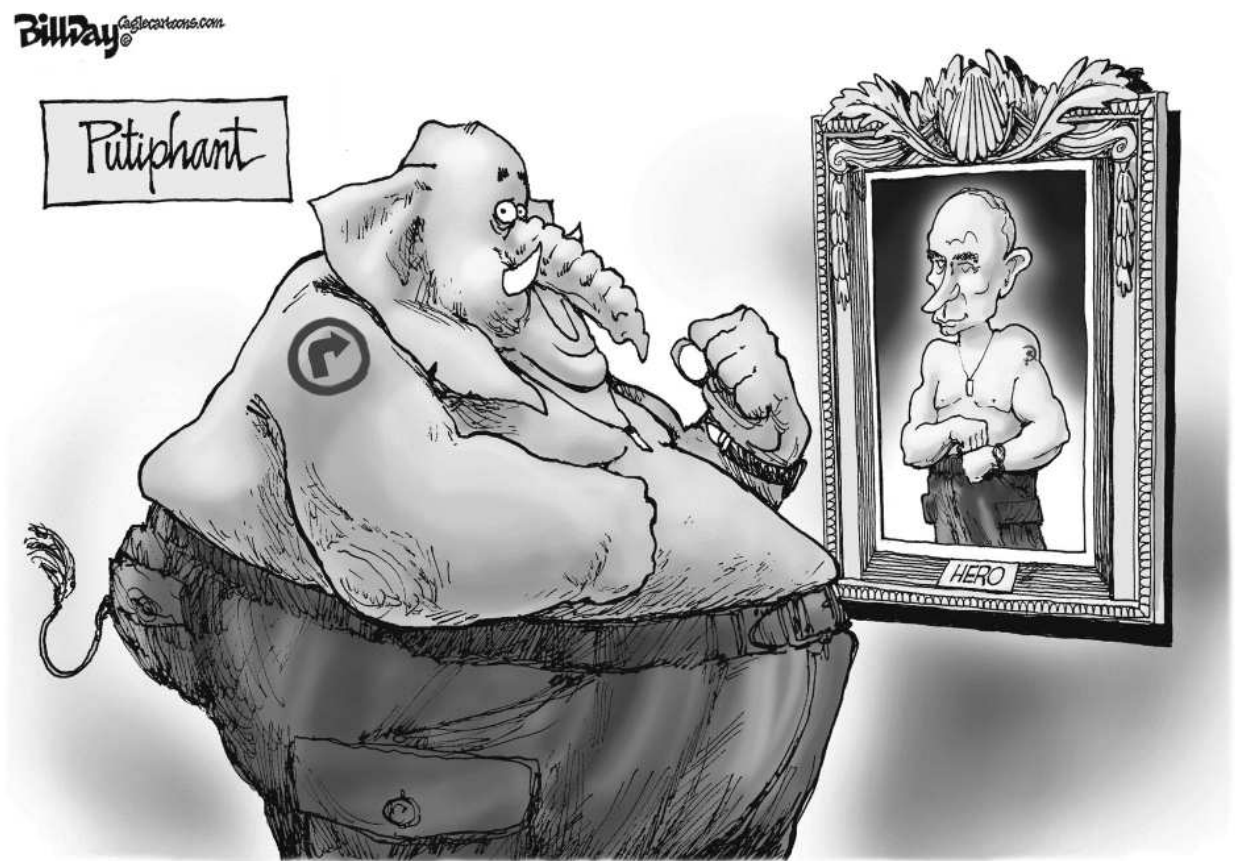


OPINION

OUR VIEW

Measuring the benefit

There's no doubt that the woods and water that is Voyageurs National Park are valued by this community. Many of us have spent time boating, fishing, camping, beaching and picnicking in the park. But many people have long wondered about how many visitors enter the park and how much money they spend in the local economy. A report just released by the National Park Services gives us a information we can use to measure those economic indicators as we move forward. The report said 214,841 visitors to Voyageurs National Park in 2012 spent more than \$16 million in communities near the park. And, it said, that spending supported 225 jobs in the local area. To download the report visit <http://www.nature.nps.gov/socialscience/economics.cfm> VNP Superintendent Mike Ward said the report shows that for every \$1 spent by taxpayers to operate VNP, \$4 is returned to those gateway communities. Clearly, the numbers and the methods to collect them can be questioned. But no one can question that people visit the park and those people spend money in the communities of International Falls, Kabetogama, Ash River, and Crane Lake because of the park. And jobs are supported by those visitors and their money. The report's finding can be used to determine whether the park and the agencies and people tasked with promoting it are helping to increase the number of visitors and to grow the amount of money spent in these communities. And these numbers can be used to help publicize the park to other people and places. It's a measure we've never had before and can now be used as a benchmark, as pointed out by Falls Chamber of Commerce Director Faye Whitbeck and Pete Schultz, director of the local Convention and Visitors Bureau. VNP with the three other park service sites in Minnesota drew more than 600,000 visitors, supported 500 jobs, and spent more than \$34 million in 2012, the report said. Again, we now have a baseline to measure the economic value of these sites. Those of us who live here already know the aesthetic and recreational value of the site in our backyard.



LETTER TO THE EDITOR

‘The Mill’ sparked memories, understanding

To the editor, The Backus board and Executive Director Ward Mill must be recognized for the process and tenacity needed to bring Jeannine Coulombe's play, 'The Mill,' to the Backus Community Center. I believe I am one of many whose memory was stirred by this production and also by the play bill handed out. I appreciate Ward Merrill's words about how intricately we are all connected. I am also grateful for Jeannine Coulombe's description of the play and her reasons for writing it. I do believe we become a closer and more perceptive community when we take time to engage in a presentation that tells even one chapter of our own story.

Pat Bjorum  
International Falls, MN

GUEST COLUMN

Obama, Ukraine, and Republican Amnesia

BY DICK POLMAN

Boy oh boy, the President of the United States is such a wimp! Russian troops have invaded a nearby sovereign nation, yet all he has done is respond with words: “Such an action is unacceptable in the 21st century...The Russian government must reverse the course that it appears to be on...These actions have substantially damaged Russia's standing in the world. And these actions jeopardize Russia's relations with the United States and Europe.” He wants to punish Russia with sanctions (big deal), and, worse yet, he doesn't have the stones to take manly military action. Unfortunately, the aforementioned quotes were actually uttered by George W. Bush. It was the summer of 2008, and autocratic thug Vladimir Putin had just sent his soldiers into Georgia. Bush's team decided to forego an aggressive response, while his secretary of state scoffed at the notion of “chest-beating.” Funny, I don't seem to remember Bush being tagged as a wimp by the Republican warriors, the keyboard neocons or the lockstep trolls. Nor did they ever seek to remind us of Bush's peerless analytical powers circa 2001, when he famously said of Putin, “I looked the man in the eye. I found him to be very straightforward and trustworthy. We had a very good dialogue. I was able to get a sense of his soul.” Yet today, naturally, it's an entirely different story. The right-wing chorale is singing with abandon, demanding that the Obama administration do something big about Putin's illegal dispatch of troops to

the Crimean peninsula in southern Ukraine. The McCain-Graham tag team is predictably agitated, the Fox News hawks are dissing Obama for merely warning Putin that “there will be costs”...you know, the usual stuff. It's a good thing that Obama never publicly vouched for Putin by peering into his soul — it would be deemed grounds for impeachment. But how would the president's knee-jerk critics police the Ukraine crisis? What are their bright ideas for compelling Putin to retreat? Marco Rubio, who's trying to reignite his prospective '16 White House bid by donning big boy pants, suggested some moves in an article this weekend. For instance: In a show of solidarity with the Ukrainians, send Secretary of State John Kerry to embattled Kiev; develop some “security assurance measures” to help the Ukrainians; boycott the G-8 economic summit meeting that's slated for June in Russia; and suspend “any and all discussions and negotiations with Moscow on any issue unrelated to this crisis, including trade and other matters.” Well, guess what: Obama is already doing virtually all that stuff — and more. He has sent Kerry to Kiev (offering a \$1-billion loan guarantee), called off trade talks with Russia, suspended military business with Russia, halted planning for that G-8 meeting, laid the groundwork for banning visas to prospective Russian visitors, begun plans to freeze the U.S. bank assets of Russian officials, and given the nod to congressionally-enacted sanctions, plus economic aid to the tenuous pro-western government in Ukraine. Would the Republicans care

to top that, perhaps by agitating for a U.S. military intervention? Nope. Even among the Obama-haters, there is nary a soul who pines for the guns of war. So perhaps we should all take a deep breath, and let this crisis play out in the economic and diplomatic spheres. In fact, Putin's country has already taken a big financial hit. When the international markets opened on Monday, Russian stock indexes got hammered, dropping \$60 billion in value in just one day, more than what Russia spent on last month's Olympics. Meanwhile, in just one day, the ruble fell to a record low against the dollar. Even a messianic tyrant like Putin might eventually recognize the cumulative economic pinch. Some of what Obama seeks to do won't be easy, however. He'll have a tough time pushing for draconian sanctions against Russia — given the American corporate community's heavy investments in the Russian market (for instance, Pepsi, Boeing, and GM); and given the resistance of our European allies, who do \$340 billion in annual business with Russia. So, at minimum, it would be nice if the right-wing Obama haters lowered the volume. For once. If only for a little while. Polman, distributed exclusively by Cagle Cartoons newspaper syndicate, is the national political columnist at NewsWorks/WHYY in Philadelphia (newsworks.org/polman) and a “Writer in Residence” at the University of Philadelphia. Email him at [dickpolman7@gmail.com](mailto:dickpolman7@gmail.com). This column has been edited by the author. Representations of fact and opinions are solely those of the author.

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