

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

Money talks

We urged the U.S. Supreme Court in this space to overturn the 2010 Citizens United decision that basically gave corporations the rights of people in making political contributions.

On Wednesday, we were disappointed the same court overturned a federal law limiting how much donors could give to candidates, parties and various other committees over the course of an election cycle. The law was intended to make it more difficult to skirt limits on direct donations to candidates by funneling them through other channels.

Wednesday’s decision held a donation ceiling is an unconstitutional infringement of free speech. Chief Justice John Roberts said fighting the purchase of political influence and access is not a worthwhile goal.

What changed with Wednesday’s decision? Now, individuals, corporations and other lobbying groups can spend vast amounts of money to impact elections without the appearance of doing so.

Members of the court said there are other ways to tighten up the system and we urge lawmakers to seriously consider them. One of those ways include requiring quicker reporting about the sources of political money and where it is going. At the very least, American

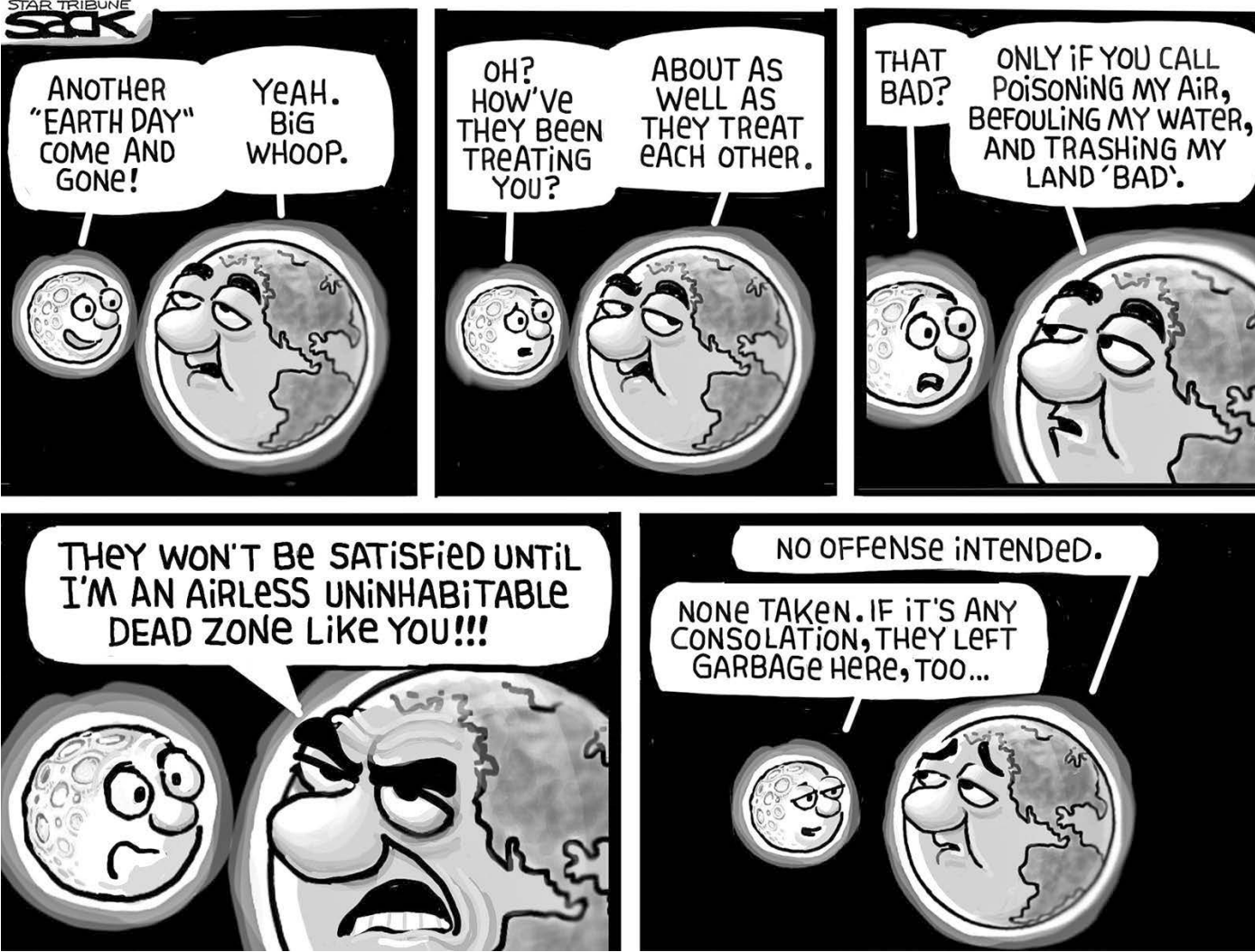
voters could consider the interests behind the candidates vying for their votes.

Lawmakers could also consider limiting fund transfers between committees and candidates and prohibiting candidates and other party leaders from soliciting large contributions from big donors.

8th District Congressman Rick Nolan has often called on the nation to revamp the way candidates and their campaigns are handled. Having the most money should not mean getting the most votes, he has said, and he’s rejected pushes from his own party to put in time at call centers seeking contributions.

We agree with Nolan and those who oppose and criticize the impact of the Citizens United and this most recent Supreme Court decision. The money mom and pop or the small town business down the road scrimp and save to contribute to a candidate who shares their views should be viewed differently than the millions of dollars corporations budget to donate to the candidate who they can most easily influence.

Having the most money doesn’t make you the best candidate, but it may make you the candidate most obligated to do the bidding of their largest contributor.



LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Saving money, keeping healthy

To the editor,

This article was written for the Mental Health Association of Minnesota April newsletter. I was asked by a person who lives in International Falls to submit it for publication in your newspaper.

Recently the closing of a five county mental health center just north of the Twin Cities caused a stir. Apparently, no one saw it coming, yet bankruptcy is being cited as the reason. Usually there are telling signs of bankruptcy. It doesn’t happen without warning. Meanwhile the crisis team isn’t working and people’s appointments have been canceled.

One thing people with

mental illnesses need is certainty. The counties are hustling to get services back in place as soon as possible. But, what about the meanwhile? Certainty has been replaced with uncertainty. Therapy replaced with talk radio. Home visits have been replaced with isolation. This is not a recipe for recovery.

It shows how fragile each one of our lives can be. Mental health professionals out of a job when they had been taking care of their clients. This while we have a shortage around the state. I’m sure they will all find jobs, but at what cost? Will they have to start building

new relationships with new clients? Stressful. Clients needing to find new mental health professionals? Stressful. Could this all have been avoided if someone in the know had stepped up?

We keep cutting rates for mental health services to save money. But, we still use hospitals for too long which is the most costly mental health service we have. We don’t provide enough support services along with housing to keep people stable and so we nickel and dime providers until we break the business model, and wonder why.

We all want to be independent and live in a home we choose. But

sometimes we need some help: cleaning services, home delivered meals, transportation, etc. All of these types of services are cheaper than institutional settings, yet decision makers cannot seem to understand how some of their decisions undermine them.

We need strong leadership who will look at and understand the importance of prevention, early intervention and support services. This saves money and keeps people healthier.

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GUEST COLUMN

Exploiting the American prom

Proms sure have gotten expensive these days.

According to the San Jose Mercury News, high school kids spend nearly \$4 billion annually for dresses, accessories, flowers, beauty products, limos and other prom-related items. The average couple spends upward of \$1,000 for the one-time event.

That got me thinking about my own prom in 1980.

I didn’t know my date very well. She was in my photography class, pretty and, more important, available. We arranged a pre-prom meeting to get to know each other. We played tennis on a blistering-hot day, then headed back to her house for something cold to drink. After she berated her sister for drinking all the Tang, she turned her turret on me.

“I heard about you, a regular class clown,” she said. “You better not show up in a limo, wear a top hat or cane or do anything else to embarrass me.”

I knew right away things were going to work out fine.

Still, I wanted to impress her. I was running a stone-masonry business in those years and was making a lot of money for a kid.

I figured I’d use some of



Tom  
PURCELL

my dough to impress her.

I bought her the finest corsage in our high school (it cost \$45, a lot of money then). I bought a box of frozen steaks, snacks and other refreshments for the after-prom party. But my investments turned out to be bad ones.

On the afternoon of the prom, my friend Gigs and I — we double dated — took a drive to the prom hall to make sure we wouldn’t get lost later. Later that evening, we picked up our girls for photos and false enthusiasm. We were late for dinner (we got lost) and the awful night was under way.

I’m certain my date didn’t spend hundreds of dollars on her dress as girls do now, though I remember she looked great. The truth is, I can’t remember what she was wearing because I hardly saw her all night

long. She and the girl Gigs came with spent most of the night in the ladies’ room while Gigs and I counted how many times the hard-rock band played “Cocaine” (nine).

Finally, around 11:30 p.m., the dance was over. Unlike teens these days, we didn’t use our credit cards to retire to the honeymoon suite. We took the girls home. But our suffering was just beginning.

We picked up our dates early the next morning and drove to a country cabin where my friend Cook was having an after-prom party. The cabin was a two-hour drive, but it took us five (we got lost). My date didn’t utter a word until about 2 p.m., when she challenged Gigs and me to a tennis match.

I took it as a good sign. It wasn’t.

Gigs is an outstanding athlete and I’m no slouch myself. Once the game got under way, our testosterone got inflamed. Every time we scored, Gigs and I high-fived each other, laughing loudly. We creamed the girls, and after the match they refused to talk to us.

Gigs and I spent the rest of the day tossing a football and eating the steaks I brought. Around dusk, the girls found us

and told us it was time to leave. We got home five hours later (we got lost) and the torturous affair was finally over.

So I have some advice for prom-goers this year: Hold onto your money. Don’t be the unwitting dupes of savvy marketers. They know that kids your age have big allowances and overworked, guilt-riddled parents who will cough up the dough if you ask them.

Through programs and advertisements on MTV, they’ve been rushing you into adulthood for years. They exploit the prom to cash in on your insecurity and peer pressure. They convince you to buy teeth whitener, expensive cosmetics and other unnecessary junk designed to fatten their bottom lines.

But don’t give in. Save your money. Be content that you’re about to experience one of the worst weekends of your life.

Purcell is a Pittsburgh Tribune-Review humor columnist and is nationally syndicated exclusively by Cagle Cartoons Inc. The above column is an excerpt from his new book, “Comical Sense: A Lone Humorist Takes on a World Gone Nutty!”

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