

opinion

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The Telegraph Herald's mission is to be the preferred provider of local news, information and advertising content in the markets we serve.

letter from the editor

TH stories highlight importance of community journalism

BY AMY GILLIGAN

Telegraph Herald executive editor



Sunday's Telegraph Herald carried an example of community journalism at its finest with our in-depth reporting on the culture within the Dubuque Fire Department.

One of the challenges that our newsroom faces as we provide deep coverage of the tri-state area is determining how to best use our resources.

Each week, we weigh which government meetings, which community happenings, which court cases and other events are the best use of our journalists' time to cover in person. The biggest determining factor is how great the interest to the public will be in those meetings or events. That helps us plan our weeks and stay on top of local news.

When it comes to court cases, attending the entirety of a trial that runs for multiple days or longer isn't always the best use of our time. Instead, we sometimes report on key cases based on court documents and attending some parts of a trial.

Such was the case with the February civil trial involving a Dubuque firefighter suing the City of Dubuque and Fire Chief Rick Steines for sexual harassment, discrimination and retaliation. Following the eight-day trial, a jury found that Jami Boss proved her claims of sexual harassment and discrimination and awarded her \$575,000.

Reporter Kayli Reese attended the trial's opening arguments, covered closing statements and was there for the verdict, while also reading available court documents. That allowed us to write about the trial's start, share both sides' final arguments before the case went to the jury and report the verdict moments after its announcement.

But we knew that didn't tell the whole story. And following the plaintiff's verdict, Kayli began digging deeper into the culture in the Dubuque Fire Department. We took the unusual step of purchasing hundreds of pages of court transcripts — at a price of \$3.50 per page as set by state statute — to comb through the testimony of both the fire chief and Kelly Larson, who recently transitioned to development and training manager for the city but who previously served as the director of the Human Rights Department.

Kayli also interviewed — or tried to interview — other key sources to develop a nearly 5,000-word story, painstakingly edited by Managing Editor Dustin Kass.

It was important to us to present a more complete picture of what was brought to light in the trial, even though we weren't in the courtroom for all of it.

Then, we strived to go beyond what emerged in the trial to seek answers regarding what happens next. In response to repeated requests for comment, City Manager Mike Van Milligen and Chief Steines provided nine pages of responses to 20 questions posed by Kayli, as well as 10 pages of related documents.

I think our coverage provided an eye-opening look at the fire department, and sharing city officials' plans to address those issues provides a benchmark for the community's future evaluation of those efforts.

I'm proud of the work our team did on this. I believe shining a light on concerns in government can raise awareness of issues and make our great community even better. It's the kind of coverage you won't find anywhere else.

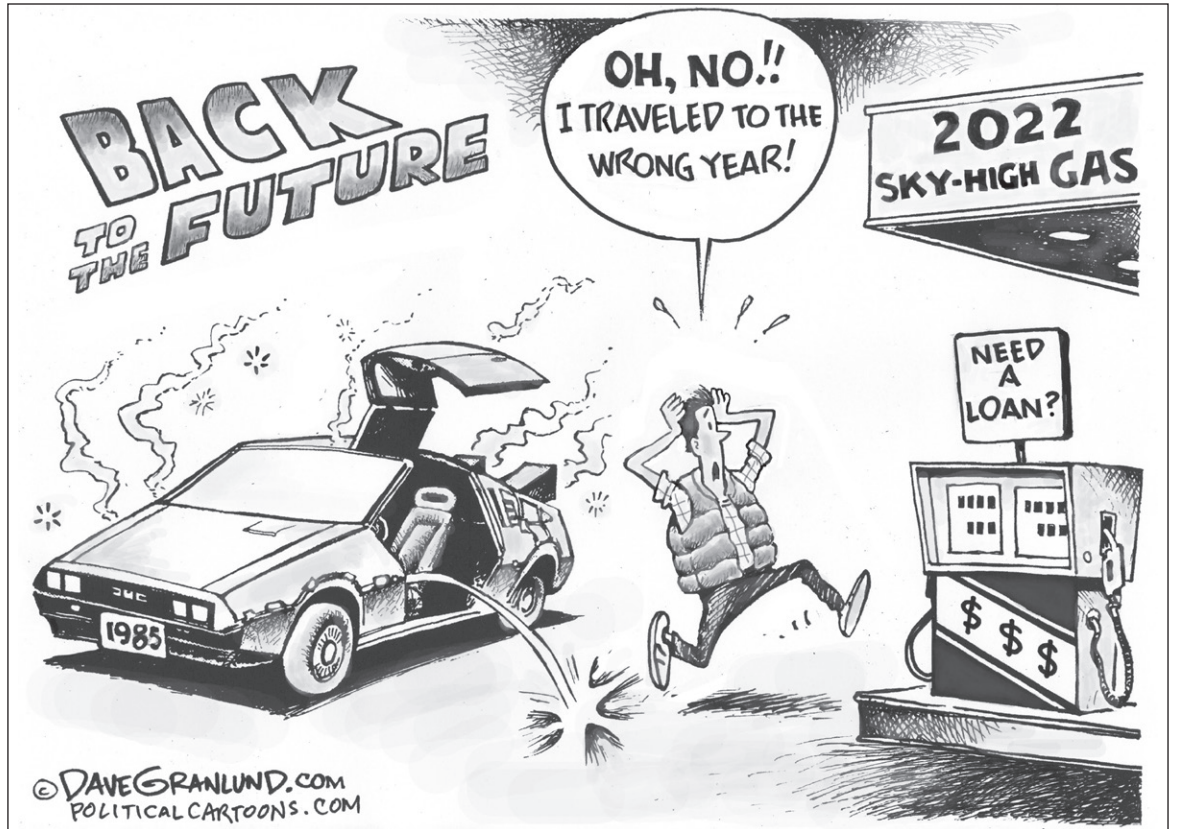
Meanwhile, the City of Dubuque has hosted budget meetings, department by department, throughout the month of March. Tonight, City Council members are scheduled to meet to give final approval to the 2023 budget.

Senior reporter John Kruse was in attendance at all seven of those lengthy meetings, reporting the details on the city's plans for the spending of taxpayer dollars.

Oh, and did I mention that reporter Olivia Garrett interviewed the 16 candidates running in contested races for Grant County Board of Supervisors seats? That's right, 16 candidates.

Providing that kind of information about local government to thousands of citizens through our reporting is the bedrock of community journalism. And you won't find any other news organization undertaking any of these reporting efforts, much less all of them. We're proud to be the news leader in the tri-state area.

Email Gilligan at amy.gilligan@thmedia.com.



other view

Railroad merger would be bad for Iowa farmers, environment

BY EMILY MANDERS

Environmental advocate



A proposed \$30 billion merger between two of North America's large railroads will jeopardize the environment, potentially delay getting critical

agricultural goods to market, and threaten communities throughout Iowa unless federal leaders act fast.

The mega-merger involving Canadian Pacific and Kansas City Southern would lay the tracks for 20 additional trains carrying Canadian tar sands crude oil through our state each month.

Unfortunately, the type of oil that would be speeding across Iowa is extracted from the earth in large, open pit mines, which is a more carbon-intensive process than oil produced in other regions. As a result, it is particularly bad for the environment.

In fact, much of the reason the Biden administration killed the proposed Keystone XL pipeline was because the pipeline would create a continuous pathway for this dirty Canadian crude oil to reach new markets. This rail merger would do something similar, while putting local communities at even greater risk due to the inherent dangers of transporting fossil fuels and CP's shaky safety record.

Just last summer, 1,200 gallons of diesel fuel spilled near the Mississipp-

pi River when two CP locomotives collided with two other trains in Saint Paul, Minn. In December 2021, another CP train derailed, spilling potash and blocking a major highway in British Columbia. CP was responsible for an environmental disaster in 2019 when 34 train cars derailed, creating a massive fire and spilling 400,000 gallons of oil near a small town in Saskatchewan.

It's not just the environment that Canadian Pacific disregards. It disregards the needs of Iowa farmers, as this merger could also make it more challenging to get critical agricultural goods to market in a timely manner, something the administration's own USDA suggested deserves more study in a recent letter on it.

And CP also disregards human life. For example, a 2019 negligent derailment cost the lives of three CP crew members. The accident was followed by a lax investigation and CP executives receiving worker safety bonuses the same year.

If congressional lawmakers, the Surface Transportation Board and the Biden administration allow the merger to take place, the number of trains going through Iowa's railroad communities will increase by as much as 50 percent. Risk of accidents will increase at least that much as well.

The increased rail traffic will lead to serious delays and severe traffic backups at railroad crossings — particularly in small towns with

just a few main roads. Emergency response vehicles could get stuck at these crossings, potentially costing lives due to the time wasted waiting for trains to pass.

Clearly, there are a number of serious reasons to be concerned about the proposed merger. But there have been almost no opportunities for in-person, public hearings to allow Iowans to learn more about the plan, engage with regulators and voice their concerns. Worse still, there has yet to be a thorough environmental analysis and review of this proposed merger by the Surface Transportation Board or the Biden administration. So it's impossible to know just how bad the merger could be for the environment.

Our members of Congress, led by Iowa's respected senior U.S. Senator Chuck Grassley, need to speak up and oppose the merger — for the sake of the environment and public safety. Any small economic benefits that might come from the merger simply don't outweigh the risk.

Emily Manders is an environmental activist who graduated from the University of Iowa with a degree in environmental policy and planning. While at UI, the Cedar Rapids native served as co-president of the University Environmental Coalition, the director of sustainability for Undergraduate Student Government, and the project lead intern for the UI Office of Sustainability and the Environment.

letters to the editor

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Anderson would add needed perspective to council

John Pregler,
Pego Court, Dubuque

Dubuque is becoming a city of the haves and the have-nots. Watching the City Council budget sessions, it is clear the have-nots do not have representation or a voice in our current City Council makeup. And if the affluent Katy Wethal is elected, this will not change.

Case in point, during the March 23 budget hearings, a citizen who is a friend of Council Member Susan

Farber praised the efforts of his friend on council, and the city in going above and beyond in responding to his complaints about odors coming from our sewer treatment plant.

A resident of Shady Oaks Drive all but told the council it was the taxpayers' responsibility to protect his investment in an expensive home he bought on the hill next to a treatment plant.

You don't have to be educated to know you'll frequently smell waste if you live 2,500 feet from a treatment plant or livestock farm. I live less than 1.5 miles from the plant, smell the odors, and understood this before

buying my home. Simple common sense.

Carla Anderson will bring a missing perspective to our current City Council. A perspective that considers the struggles of the average Dubuquer who is finding it more and more difficult to fund \$35K-\$60K studies regarding city office space or mitigating natural odors from an established treatment plant to prop up the property values of friends of council members.

I urge my Ward 4 neighbors to vote for Carla Anderson on Tuesday, March 29, for Dubuque City Council.



The 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 the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances."