

OPINION

10P | SUNDAY, JUNE 18, 2023 | Des Moines

With AI, whither English degrees?



Your Turn
Michael Bugeja
Guest columnist

Iowa has two prestigious English departments, one of the largest at the University of Iowa, known for its writing program, and another at Iowa State University, known for composition and applied linguistics and technology.

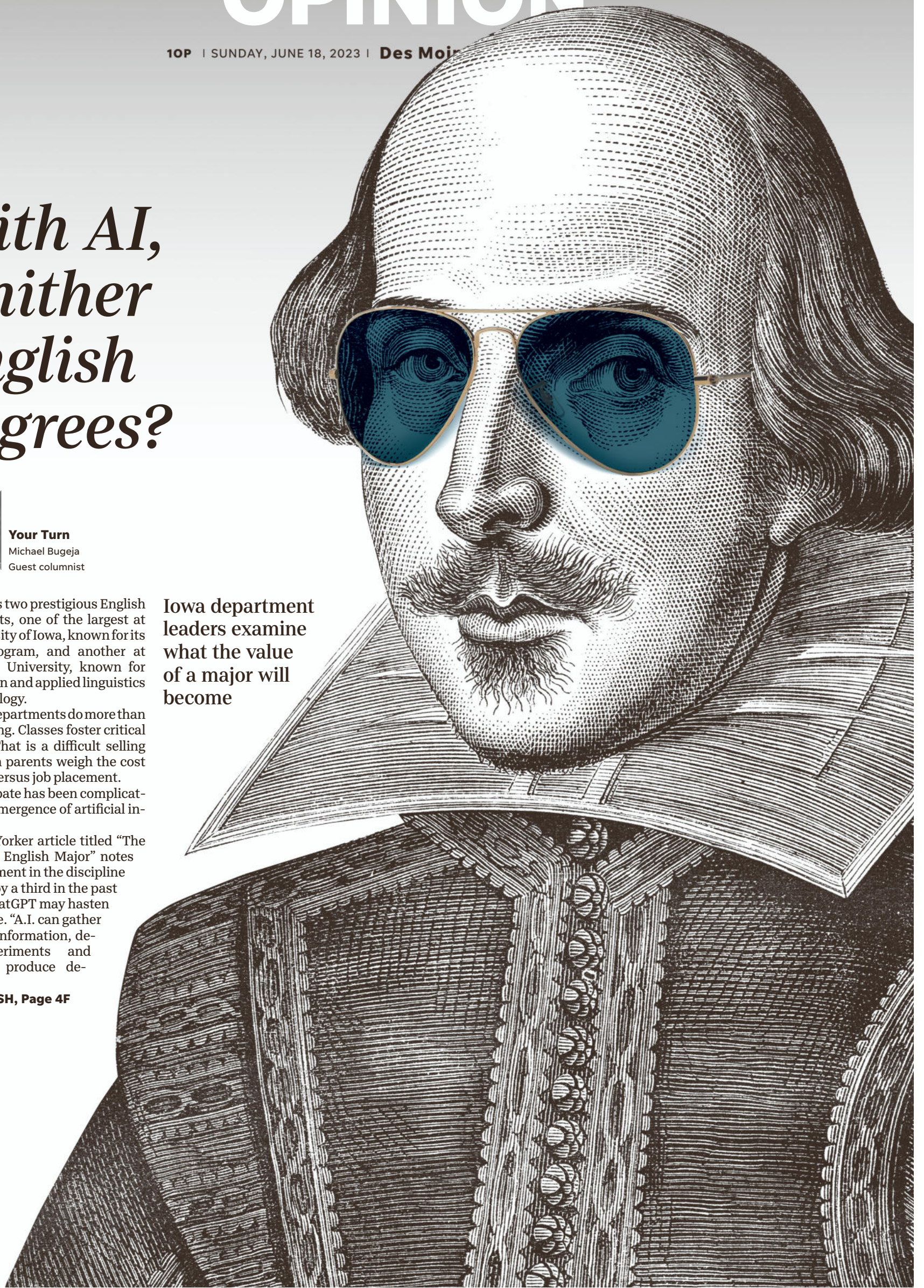
Those departments do more than teach writing. Classes foster critical thinking. That is a difficult selling point when parents weigh the cost of tuition versus job placement.

That debate has been complicated by the emergence of artificial intelligence.

A New Yorker article titled “The End of the English Major” notes that enrollment in the discipline has fallen by a third in the past decade. ChatGPT may hasten that decline. “A.I. can gather and order information, design experiments and processes, produce de-

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Iowa department leaders examine what the value of a major will become



MERRY ECCLES/USA TODAY NETWORK; GETTY IMAGES

TOP 10 DES MOINES CITY COUNCIL FINANCIAL DISASTERS SINCE 2000



Your Turn
Jack Hatch
Guest columnist

David Letterman famously developed the “Top Ten” list format to skewer a topic of the day for his late-night television audience. It became a widely mimicked bit and a permanent fixture in the turn of the century culture from college graduations to Rotary clubs.

I wish the one I am offering was remotely funny.

For the past 20 years, the Des Moines metropolitan area has grown and prospered. But while the suburbs pushed the metro area to a 16.3% population increase in the past 10 years (the fastest-growing area in the Midwest), the City of Des Moines lost population by 1%.

Rankings and awards seem to come

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GETTY IMAGES

EDITORIAL THE REGISTER

City should stay course amid grousing over parking on Ingersoll

The city of Des Moines is on the right course with its aggressive modifications to various types of roads — thoroughfares, side streets, and retail strips such as Ingersoll Avenue.

Most importantly, the changes discourage speeding. But tools such as lane reductions, bike lane additions, speed bumps, and walkways and other aids for pedestrians also move the needle away from the only-cars-matter philosophy that drove development in America for decades.

One result: streets more friendly for cyclists, walkers and bus riders. Another result, especially in corridors such as Ingersoll: a little less parking for people driving personal vehicles. Nobody is

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Republicans have opportunity to rid themselves of Trump

June 9, according to Gov. Kim Reynolds, was a “sad day for America.” Her response to Donald Trump’s indictment was indeed sad and shows her lack of and style of leadership and is in itself sad.

And for the record, President Joe Biden has not been accused of the same thing for which the government is prosecuting Trump. Far, far from that, Trump has 37 federal felony counts for which he is indicted, having sufficient evidence of federal law wrongdoing to bring him to trial.

Republicans could use this opportunity to rid themselves of the toxic conspiracy-based cult that is Trump politics. They have much to gain by unloading that burden. It is a burden that has and continues to threaten the democracy of this country. The door is open for that great opportunity. Republicans should not slam it shut.

— Phillip Thien, Des Moines

Reynolds isn’t describing equal justice

Gov. Kim Reynolds calling Donald Trump’s federal indictment a “grave warning sign for the state of equal justice” is indeed a warning to the state of Iowa that our governor believes the laws of our country need not apply to everyone and that politics should override equal treatment under these laws.

— David Dahlby, Bettendorf

Name-calling is central for Trump

D.C. Larson’s June 11 guest essay was puzzling. He’s sampled a full 360 degrees of populist politics in his life, but he can’t seem to offer anything but platitudes.

He paraded a lot of them, but one of the last blew a hole in his logic. He wrote, “Gratuitous name calling is not a tool of serious thinkers.” That immediately calls into question why Mr. Larson chose to twice vote for a man, Donald Trump, who literally built his campaigns on gratuitous name calling.

— Jamie Lewis, Charles City

Likely culprits easy to name

I am pretty sure that trans children are not the problem.

A new election is brewing in which both sides will excoriate the other with accusations. An arrogant ex-president has been indicted for thumbing his nose at national security. A sitting president is being investigated for using his family to benefit from his office. Neither of these men nor their actions are exceptional as politicians go. No one knows who to believe because both parties have moved beyond a world where belief matters.

Black lives continue to be lost at the hands of those who are supposed to protect them.

People of all skin colors continue to die at the hands of a gun-loving populace. White men continue to be the most dangerous people in America. We arm



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other countries to carry out wars that benefit only the wealthy among us. The Supreme Court is doing the bidding of billionaires posing as religious zealots posing as representative of the people. Wildfires envelop our forests; smoke envelops our cities leaving our people gasping for relief. Water is wasted in the never-ending search for profit and growth. Books are being banned because some people are so repressed, they cannot conceive of more than one way to live. Iowa’s governor openly wishes for a one-party system. The Legislature kills oversight in an effort to protect cronies.

I am pretty sure that trans children are not the problem.

— Lonnie Cleland, Des Moines

California didn’t think through pork rules

Sometimes legislation passed in ignorance is worse than no legislation at all. We have people who think hogs should not be confined. I grew up in the era of free-range hogs.

The hogs could be dangerous when not confined. I once had a sow charge me with teeth bared. I had a club with which I gave the sow a sharp blow to her snout to get her to back off. I knew a man who picked up his brother in a wheelbarrow in a hog lot. The brother had been killed by hogs. Farmers knew to be careful when feeding hungry hogs not to let the hogs get them down.

Sows are really large compared with newborn pigs. They frequently lay on one or more of their little pigs and killed them. It was not unusual to race to the hog house and grab a pitchfork to get a sow off a squealing little pig.

The birthing crates saved a lot of little pigs and reduced financial losses for farmers. People need to look at both or more sides of an issue before making decisions with limited knowledge. California seems to have completely ignored

farm safety when passing “feel good” pork legislation.

— Dennis Havran, Milo

Haley offers candor

I attended Nikki Haley’s town hall in Ankeny and was impressed by her willingness and ability to offer real solutions to real problems: our out-of-control debt, record-high inflation, and the crisis at the southern border. I also admired her honesty. She didn’t beat around the bush. She doesn’t tell people what they want to hear—but what they need to hear.

While a lot of other candidates just talk about the issues we face, Haley is clearly a person of action who will fix our broken government. That’s what our country needs.

— Liz Lee, Urbandale

Senators fall short with Trump reactions

I was disappointed by the responses Sens. Chuck Grassley and Joni Ernst offered to the indictment of Donald Trump. As a nation we already put too much energy into being angry partisans, and not nearly enough energy into being thoughtful patriots. Apparently it’s now the fashion for Iowa Republicans to write off the value of thoughtful discussion and reach instead for raw passion. If we Americans are to become a people good at moving the nation forward, we will be better served by politicians who value a “Thoughtfulness First” approach to civic life. As Iowans, Grassley and Ernst should have reached for a far higher standard.

— Steven H. Johnson, Ames

Society rejected Trump’s outlook 800 years ago

On June 15, 1215, the barons, burghers

and bishops of England forced King John to promulgate Magna Carta, accepting that even the king is not above the law. Many of Donald Trump’s claims regarding classified documents and document retention are based on the idea the law does not apply to presidents. Magna Carta made it plain King John was wrong 808 years ago. Donald Trump is wrong today.

— Ivan T. Webber, West Des Moines

Embrace short-term pain for a vibrant Ingersoll Avenue

The transformation of Ingersoll Avenue into a pedestrian and bicycle-friendly boulevard may bring short-term traffic and parking challenges, but the long-term benefits for the neighborhood are worth it. By investing in increased density, walkability, bikeability, and transit, we are creating a more vibrant and attractive community.

While some business owners express concerns about the loss of parking spaces, it is important to remember that change often comes with temporary inconveniences. Prioritizing pedestrians and alternative transportation modes has been proven to drive economic growth and enhance quality of life in cities across the country. Ingersoll Avenue can be a thriving hub where people can stroll, cycle, and enjoy the vibrant mix of boutiques, restaurants, and bars.

We should not lose sight of the bigger picture: The revitalization of Ingersoll Avenue offers an opportunity to shape a more inclusive, sustainable, and people-centered neighborhood. Let us embrace the short-term pain for the long-term gain of a vibrant and livable community that attracts visitors, fosters community, and promotes active lifestyles.

— David Jennings, Des Moines

Republicans focus on wrong issues

Kathie Obradovich, in a recent commentary in the Iowa Capital Dispatch reporting on Sen. Joni Ernst’s Roast and Ride event on June 3 where she hosted eight Republican presidential contenders, indicated that none of the candidates spent any time talking about issues most concerning to average Iowans.

I’ll bet the average mother in Iowa is less concerned about her neighbor getting gender-affirming health care for her trans daughter than she is about finding health care for her own three kids now that the local hospital has closed down and she has to drive over 100 miles one way to a provider. This may be made even more difficult because more middle-class people have to work a second job just to pay rent and put food on the table. Did any of the potential candidates have a solution to rising inflation besides to cut billionaires’ and corporations’ taxes?

With over 600,000 Iowans on Medicare, were they asked if they would protect Medicare as president? Obradovich reported that Florida Gov. Ron De Santis used “woke” four times in his speech. It’s time we elected better leaders focused on solutions rather than name-calling

— Kim Thompson, Fruitland

Editorial

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setting out to make things more difficult for people who want to take a personal vehicle to shop, grab lunch or go out. But challenging — gently — the idea that you’ll always find a space right next to your destination is a feature, not a bug, of the plans elected officials have been signing off on for years.

Those officials should hold steady with this strategy, even in the face of grumbling, including in their own ranks, that some changes are a net negative.

Concern about removed parking stalls came into the open a couple of weeks ago when the City Council got a start-of-summer review of current and planned building projects. Mayor Frank Cownie, whose family business Cownie Furs is on Ingersoll, and other council members debated what’s been learned from several years of heavy construction and road rebuilding on a mile-plus stretch of the street west of Martin Luther King Jr. Parkway.

“We’ve created a real nightmare for businesses,” Cownie said. Other council members said they’d heard concerns about maintenance and snow-removal problems, difficult left turns and parking headaches that turn off both longtime and prospective visitors, to the detriment

of shops. The mayor told the Register’s Virginia Barreda that the plans need a new look before new phases of reconstruction farther west get going.

There’s nothing wrong with talking. But several things are worth keeping in mind before that turns into any kind of significant backtracking.

1. Construction hassles won’t last forever.

Does anybody really have the clairvoyance to say exactly how shoppers’ habits will play out when Ingersoll is finally completely free of the dissuasive orange cones and lane shifts associated with years and years of major sewer projects that have coincided with the streetscape work? It’s true that the streetscape work is permanently taking away dozens of street parking spots. But it seems unlikely that the average person ever distinguished that endgame from the general construction mess.

2. This work has been publicly debated for years.

Even people with a negative opinion of the streetscape concept and parking reductions could not credibly criticize the project as half-baked or rushed. The designs and contracts associated with it have been a part of the city engineering office’s focuses for years, and they’ve come before Cownie and the council and other city

boards numerous times. Private lobbying to improve conditions for pedestrians began in 1998. Preston Daniels had just become mayor. Kurt Warner had just left the Iowa Barnstormers. The ideas that informed the streetscape plans percolated for a long, long time.

3. Some people applaud the changes.

The traffic effects, particularly for overall safety and accommodation for non-drivers, are a goal that enjoys broad support. Some Ingersoll retailers are pleased with how things have been working out, pointing out that parking challenges reflect still-high demand.

Changing car-centric behavior won’t happen overnight. Perhaps the city should give more nudges, by finding a way to sweeten the pot for surface parking lot owners to reconsider allowing off-hours use. Or it could seek solutions that would allow the Des Moines Area Regional Transit Authority to schedule more frequent Route 60 bus trips on Ingersoll.

Some discomfort should be expected with initiatives to more widely adopt innovations such as roundabouts and to move away from catering to drivers’ every need. Des Moines shouldn’t waver on its commitment to those goals.

— Lucas Grundmeier, on behalf of the Register’s editorial board

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VOICES & COMMENTARY

160 years later, Juneteenth's call for freedom is far from realized



Your Turn
Walter Suza
Guest columnist

Enslaved Africans should have been free after President Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863, but the enslavers refused to yield.

Even after Confederate Gen. Robert E. Lee surrendered to the Union Army in March 1865, the enslavers refused to let the enslaved go. More violence was their answer. A Confederate sympathizer assassinated Lincoln six days after Lee's surrender.

Even after the news that Lincoln had proclaimed enslaved persons were free reached Galveston, Texas, on June 19, 1865, the enslavers unleashed more violence against enslaved Africans. The Equal Justice Initiative, a nonprofit organization working on racial justice, suggests that more than 2,000 persons of African descent were killed between 1865 and 1876.

The enslavers' mindset is mind-bending. Many were Christians but used the Bible to justify slavery. The mindset was rooted to times before the first group of enslaved Africans arrived in America in 1619. The times are as early as the 1400s when the Portuguese spread Christianity into Central Africa. But even the Catholic Church was supportive of slavery in those times in

spite of 13 million enslaved Africans being extracted from the region between 1517 and 1867.

How was it possible to ignore the God of Moses who hears the cries of the oppressed? How was it possible to justify slavery using the Book that talks about a God who said to the Pharaoh, "Let my people go"?

Why did the enslaver ignore that the God of Moses is a God of love and justice? Why did the enslaver refuse to let the enslaved go after he discovered she had his child? Why did the enslaver refuse to let the enslaved go after he discovered he also bleeds red? Why did the enslaver refuse to let the enslaved go after declaring that all men are created equal in 1776?

The answer is simple. Slavery was a lucrative enterprise.

An essay in Mississippi History Now, an electronic publication of the history of Mississippi, talks about slavery and cotton production. It is titled "Cotton in a Global Economy: Mississippi (1800-1860)" and authored by an economic historian, Eugene R. Dartel. In 60 years cotton production in Mississippi rose to 535 million pounds. But the number of the enslaved also rose. From 3,000 in 1800 to 440,000 in 1859.

"The cotton boom was the main cause of the increased demand for enslaved labor," Dartel adds in his essay. Yet slavery was more than cotton for America. It turned the United States into a global economy.

According to the Virginia Museum of History & Culture, in the late 1850s an

It is 2023, and the Black struggle continues.

enslaved person was worth about \$1,450. "Males were valued 10 to 20 percent more than females; at age ten, children's prices were about half that of a prime male field hand." According to the Library of Congress, there were as many as 4 million enslaved Africans in the United States during that period. That's \$6 billion in assets.

The enslaver did not want slavery to end. This is why Juneteenth came late, in 1865, two years after the Emancipation Proclamation.

Juneteenth came, but enslaved Africans were not finally free. The 13th Amendment meant to abolish slavery was not ratified until Dec. 6, 1865.

Juneteenth came, but enslaved Africans were not finally free. They were lynched, segregated, denied the right to vote, denied access to the public spaces occupied by whites.

Juneteenth came, but Black soldiers were not finally free. They were free to die in World War II but not free to eat in canteens designated for white soldiers. They were free to return home to America after the war, but not free from racial abuse and being excluded from GI Bill benefits.

Juneteenth came, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 came, the Voting Rights Act

of 1965 came, but Black people still must walk the long road to freedom from many issues connected to systemic racism.

Juneteenth came, and the 13th Amendment still proclaims: "Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States," which remains a recipe for mass incarceration of Black persons in 2023.

We are in 2023, and according to the NAACP, 65% of Black adults feel they have been targeted because of their race, poverty affects 71% of children of color, 60% of Black Americans live near toxic waste sites.

We are in 2023, and Black mothers and their newborns are dying more than their white counterparts.

We are in 2023, and Black children are more likely to fall into the school-to-prison pipeline due to racism.

We are in 2023, and Black residents in places like Jackson, Mississippi, do not have reliable access to clean water.

We are in 2023, and Florida returns to the past to become what NAACP warns is "openly hostile toward African Americans, people of color and LGBTQ+ individuals."

It is 2023, and the Black struggle continues.

Walter Suza of Ames, Iowa, writes frequently on the intersections of spirituality, anti-racism and social justice. He can be contacted at wsuza2020@gmail.com.

Fringe animal groups work to fan flames of food inflation



Your Turn
Jack Hubbard
Guest columnist

According to the latest data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, food inflation remains stubbornly high with prices rising by 7.7% in April compared to the year before. While most Americans are anxiously hoping costs will moderate, fringe animal extremist groups are actively working to keep prices rising.

Exhibit A is a Supreme Court decision that was handed down in May. The high court's majority upheld a California law that forbids the sale of conventionally raised and veterinarian-approved pork and egg-laying hens in the state. Well paid animal nonprofit executives who are working towards upending American dinner tables predictably applauded the news.

While California raises little pork within its borders, state residents consume an estimated 13% of the country's supply — meaning the decision will have wide-ranging consequences for farmers nationwide. For California families, the decision will mean higher prices at the grocery store. And to everyone else, it is

a cautionary tale. Misguided policies that start in California rarely remain there.

Case in point is the 2023 farm bill.

As lawmakers debate components of the legislative package that will influence how farms operate, animal activists are pushing for Congress to tuck on provisions that target farmers. Efforts to halt the construction of large farms, phase out existing ones, and put in place even more government red tape that could strangle food producers are prime examples.

As someone who served as the chief operating officer at the country's first national humane organization, I am no enemy to animals. But this anti-farmer movement is not pro-animal. It is extremism that promotes regressive policies that will chip away at America's historically stable — and affordable — food supply.

Decades of innovation in farming, engineering, transportation, and animal science has made the U.S. home to some of the most affordable food in the world.

In fact, the share of disposable income Americans spend on food dropped from 17% in 1960 to roughly 10% in 2000 — where it has remained relatively steady ever since. Compare that to people living in other countries that spend

as much as 40% of take-home pay to feed their families.

Food production is America's golden goose, and animal activists are threatening to slaughter it. And efforts in Sacramento and Washington are only one part of the equation. An offensive is brewing in the boardrooms of corporate America.

Animal activists are targeting food industry companies, including McDonald's, Hormel, and Kroger, with shareholder activism. It is similar to the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions playbook, where institutions are squeezed until compliant with activist demands. In this case, the goal is to pressure corporations into adopting policies that prohibit them from buying most eggs, pork, or chicken produced in the country.

The backdoor corporate approach to implementing a de facto prohibition on traditional farming is primed to explode over the next year. The Open Philanthropy Project, an activist grant maker financed by a Facebook co-founder, has directed more than \$50 million to animal activism since 2021 to fund a wave of corporate campaigns against food providers.

Consumers will ultimately pay the price.

Many European countries have al-

ready adopted the food production policies of the animal rights movement. One study found that an average trip to the grocery store to buy staples like milk, eggs, chicken, and cheese costs Americans \$28, compared to \$35 for the same cartload in Norway and \$48 in Switzerland.

When food costs balloon, the most vulnerable — including low-income families, minority groups, and young people — get kicked the hardest. It is akin to subjecting the economically disadvantaged to an additional tax. Does anyone think that is a good idea?

Despite rhetoric from animal rights activists — whether they are playing judicial advocate, lobbying on Capitol Hill, or organizing corporate shareholders — their goal is far from achieving the humane treatment of animals. The movement seeks to impose extreme beliefs on the American diet by inflating the price of food until the products they deem harmful are out of reach.

There is a brawl at the dinner table. Americans need to put up a fight.

Jack Hubbard is the executive director of the newly formed Center for the Environment and Welfare. He previously served in executive roles at the country's first national humane organization.

The search for meaning spans a lifetime



Your Turn
Tim Trenkle
Guest columnist

The inner ear whispers an echo after the phone rings. You hear the faint voice of youth and it tells you the days pass, but the heart, that eye in your heart for friends and mischief, that lives forever.

An old friend says he was thinking of you and the two of you laugh and in reminiscence you're 15 again. The calls are like this anymore. At 15 the stars were brighter on the weekend nights, and you remember maneuvering your school work, telling your parent it was done, and you left with friends and stayed out late. You remember the sky held tiny peepholes of fire, an infinite number of fires that rolled away into the varying blackness of that infinite space that the priest tried to turn into a metaphor but couldn't because he lost his own youth along the way and bought what the traveling carnival sold, mir-

acles not mysteries and you knew you were young and you knew you would never forget.

Now, in the afterglow of truth that was sacred to you and all your friends, you remember you asked those questions that only the very old do. You wondered about anyone believing that a man walked on water and you were afraid for those who did. But you were believers then and still find awe in the mystery of it all.

Life holds meaning.

You responded to the Q&A your friend brought like a gloved fist that your friends were the true believers and that always made sense, that it was love of friends and standing for something more than a fairy tale and as real as a Friday night fight, these things were true even if they seemed foolish, it was the depth of faith and the acknowledgement of mysteries that glued you all like everlasting cement.

The two of you went to sneak a beer, to race that hot Camaro another friend bought, the friend who went to work at the factory and aged so fast he dropped out of the group conversation. You went

to college, but you were all the same. It was like that when youth knew more than age and sometimes it was sad because that was what age did, still, you and your friend wanted to remember.

It could not have been a cliché that your friends tried a little bit of everything. Life then began with doing the right thing. Sure, you could rationalize that it was right to drink a beer, heck, a few of you smoked weed, and that was illegal then, said to drive a person insane and you all laughed at that, though it would only be a few years later, closer to age 20, that one of you was taken away to a psychiatric unit. None of you ever heard from him again. Those of you who prayed offered your hope for years, though nothing was ever heard, even with the family.

One of your friends returned from Southeast Asia, then died after drinking too much. You named your eldest son after him.

These days you remember your father tried to tell you about life but all he could give you was the repetitions.

"Stick with it" and "What's the good word?"

So now, you find you're a grandfather and still that never fills the missing answers about life, about how being a father seemed natural yet all it took was caring and there you were. You could see generations now and you had to decide, like your dad and his and backwards forever, what were the meanings?

At the end of the conversation with the old friend you tell him to say hey to another friend and you each speak about your times as others countless had done, about love, and committed to another call. But in the time and the telling, neither now knew if there would be another call.

You each knew now, as if the word had been made flesh, that whatever came next couldn't compare with what you friends had and what mattered. None of the old friends would ever say, what about what's next except to add, that doesn't matter, because we had each other.

Maybe that was the real psalm from Jesus. We have each other.

Tim Trenkle is a northeast Iowa writer.

City

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easily, but when we peel back the veil of our political leadership, we find disturbing results. When any growth strategy is analyzed, the question must be: Were the outcomes worth the cost? For Des Moines, the answer is just not funny. The ambivalence and lack of due diligence on the part of elected leaders of Des Moines generated mistakes and debacles, and revealed outright incompetence at a level not previously seen in the city.

Of course, not all present council members have been in office throughout the period (except for the mayor, who has been here for all of it, but he alone cannot be blamed for this list). I ran against the mayor in 2019.

And now, here is a list of the 10 most costly mistakes the Des Moines City Council has made since 2000:

10. Forfeiting the most valuable land in the city to the federal courthouse and giving up millions of dollars in future property taxes. The old YMCA site on the Des Moines River was unceremoniously forfeited to the federal court system after the city couldn't convince the chief judge to choose another site and allow a local developer to build an apartment complex. As a result, the city lost approximately \$2 million annually in property tax revenue to an entity that pays no taxes. So, instead of a private, taxpaying, commercial and residential building, the highest valued land in the city goes to the federal government.

9. Handing millions of dollars of financial incentives to Wells Fargo. In 2000, the Des Moines City Council approved a \$15 million grant to help the bank build a new office structure at 800 Walnut St. The bank also built a parking garage as part of the deal. Wells Fargo is due another \$750,000 from Des Moines as part of the development agreement for 800 Walnut St. The city owes another \$2.9 million as part of a separate agreement for 801 Walnut St. Unfortunately, the company's commitment to downtown hasn't lasted as long as the tax breaks did.

8. Selling 42 acres of prime devel-

opment land in the East Village to the mayor's cousin without competitive bidding, two weeks after the Mayor squeaked by in a run-off election in 2019.

7. Removing \$2 million from the property tax rolls by purchasing the 360,000-square-foot corporate headquarters of Nationwide Insurance at 1200 Locust St. for the assessed value of \$30 million for a potential new police headquarters. In addition, the city included the purchase of the Nationwide parking ramp at 1200 Mulberry St. for an additional \$10.6 million. As a bonus to Nationwide when it was built, the city paid for construction of three skywalks for \$2.3 million and gave Nationwide \$1.2 million in tax abatement. And if that isn't enough, the city negotiated giving Nationwide \$7 million in grants over 20 years. Quite a deal for one of the world's largest and most profitable insurance companies.

6. Deferring maintenance and security concerns in the 4.2-mile Des Moines skywalk system. This creates a deteriorating and unsafe infrastructure out of a Des Moines landmark. Once proclaimed as the "sidewalk in the sky", the system made downtown a viable employer attraction and an employee-friendly place to walk from building to building without battling the cold winters and scorching summers. It also had something the suburbs didn't have: art and cultural activities. The skywalk was supposed to provide a place to see and hear the creative side of a community. With sections closed and repair needs ignored, the skywalk neighborhood is becoming an eyesore and unsafe. And no one group is in charge, creating confusion and adding to the decay.

5. Ignoring the council's responsibility to ensure the proposed regionalization of the Des Moines Water Works. While the DMWW is a separate legal entity organized by the Legislature, the mayor appoints all six members of its board of trustees. For five years, the trustees have been discussing reorganizing into a regional authority. That is a good idea — but what's troubling is the City Council and mayor have left this major reorganization to six non-elected trustees with no accountability to the citizens of Des Moines. As of today, there is a proposal to regional-



A rendering looking up from the intersection of 5th Avenue and Walnut Street at 515 Walnut Street. The building could replace the Kaleidoscope at the Hub at 515 Walnut St. DES MOINES URBAN DESIGN REVIEW BOARD/NEUMANN MONSON ARCHITECTS

ize but no record of the city council having a public discussion.

4. Somehow losing Des Moines University to West Des Moines along with 1,600 medical students who previously lived, worked and played in the city. The council ignored the school's growth potential, offered no legitimate incentives, and left DMU no choice but to leave its Grand Avenue campus. The college has been involved in a months-long dispute with "South of Grand" neighbors over efforts to add a parking lot. An agreement with the city dating back to 2000 restricts development on the property. The retail, residential and commercial impact of this loss will be felt for decades.

3. Being sued by Des Moines citizens for illegally charging a franchise fee for cable TV installment and being forced to return more than \$31 million to Des Moines residents the city illegally took. Former State Treasurer Michael Fitzgerald said in 2017 that his office was asked to help find the over 50,000 people who have unpaid claims. He said Des Moines had to repay around \$31 million in franchise fees; about a third was yet to be claimed then. Fitzgerald started the Great Iowa Treasure Hunt in 1983 to return unclaimed property to Iowans.

2. Agreeing to a \$133 million, 33-story multi-use apartment and commercial building that was never built, by a developer who went bankrupt. The developer promised to build on the old Younkers site on Walnut but traded that site for the vacant Kaleidoscope building. It's been seven years since Des Moines-based developer announced it would build a high-rise residential tower in downtown Des Moines; six years since it requested a change in height by seven stories to 33 after splitting with an investor who wanted it scaled back; five years since it transferred to another site, four years since it was scheduled to start; and three years since termination

of a development agreement under which the city would have provided financial help to build the project. Now, another developer cannot secure financing after the city agreed to millions of dollars in tax incentives, but the development is not happening. Confused? So is the council.

And the No. 1 catastrophic decision the Des Moines City Council has made in the past two decades is:

1. The \$170 million, 40-story downtown condo building that has never been built. So far it has cost the city \$42 million for a parking garage that will never be filled at a prime location in the Court Avenue entertainment district. Why? The developer and city are suing each other for \$100 million, each blaming the other for renegeing on promises and planned payments. With the goal of replacing an aging parking garage and taking advantage of a prime site in downtown Des Moines, the city began working with the developer to create a landmark project in exchange for millions in taxpayer funding. After all this negotiating, all we have is a parking garage and an artist's rendering of the 40-story condo.

These disasters not only cost the residents of Des Moines over a hundred million dollars of tax revenue that went down the drain, but will forever prevent more worthy projects from being proposed, better developers from taking action, and stronger investors from investing in the city, not to mention the loss of more activities our citizens would be able to enjoy.

We have an election for City Council and mayor coming up in November. We need to choose our candidates wisely and ask questions about our city's future.

Jack Hatch of Des Moines is a former state senator. He was Democratic nominee for governor in 2014 and lost a runoff election for Des Moines mayor in 2019.



The downtown Des Moines skywalk system has no standards or enforcement for cleanliness and corridors can vary, depending on where they're located or who owns them. On the left is a city-owned skywalk bridge on Fourth Street between Court Avenue and Walnut Street. On the right is the corridor that passes through EMC Insurance Co. at Seventh and Mulberry streets. NOELLE ALVIZ-GRANSEE/THE REGISTER

English

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scriptive writing and mediocre craftwork, and compose basic code, and those are the careers likeliest to go into slow eclipse."

The writing profession is among them.

AI has been a concern of the Writers Guild of America, whose 11,500 members went on strike May 2. The Guild is asking for increased pay as well as better residuals and more staffing. It is unlikely to get that because streaming services and emerging technologies have altered the profession, eliminating tasks and positions.

The strike also has shut down late-night talk shows whose monologues are main attractions.

I asked ChatGPT to write one for Stephen Colbert's "The Late Show." I googled Associated Press news June 6 for top stories. These included possible indictments of Donald Trump, a deep fake video of Vladimir Putin, and revelations about UFOs.

You can read the full transcript on my research site, interpersonal-divide.org. You also will find there an illustration by DALL-E 2, an AI program creating im-

ages based on text. My request was "an illustration of Colbert crying because of the writer's strike."

Here is an excerpt:

First up, Donald Trump. Just when you thought he couldn't get any angrier, he's now enraged on Truth Social about his indictment for the Mar-a-lago top-secret documents. I guess he's not a fan of his own "Truth" when it comes to legal matters. Perhaps he needs a new social platform called "Fiction Social" where he can make up his own reality.

And speaking of fakes, let's talk about the fake double of Vladimir Putin who played a little game on Russian TV, calling for martial law because of Ukraine. Well, Putin, we've got a message for you: "Hey, Vlad, you might want to check your TV, because I think you've been watching 'Prank Wars' instead of 'Game of Thrones.'"

And in other out-of-this-world news, there's a report that the U.S. government has recovered non-human intelligent UFO vehicles and is reverse engineering them. It's like "E.T." meets "Fast and Furious." I can already hear Vin Diesel saying, "I live my life a quarter light-year at a time."

Had Colbert said this on air, he might have earned some laughs.

"We have to grapple with this," says Volker Hegelheimer, ISU's English De-

partment chair. "It probably took ChatGPT 20 seconds to do that monologue. It's not the best writing, but it is far from the worst. And it's only going to get better."

Hegelheimer understands the fate of English degrees. "We must do a better job identifying paths to careers," he says. "In journalism there is a clear path. But not necessarily in English."

The value of writing is critical thinking. "You don't get that by using ChatGPT." Nevertheless, Hegelheimer believes that English departments have to incorporate AI technologies into pedagogy. "They are here to stay."

Iowa's English Department chair Loren D. Glass views the situation similarly. ChatGPT will affect the writing profession but not devalue it, he says. In time, writers will view AI as another tool for effective communication.

Change is apt to come sooner than we anticipate.

Already ChatGPT has doomed the required term paper in the humanities and social sciences. It writes essays lickety-split. Students view writing as a chore. So of course they use AI.

In commentary for the Poynter Institute, I celebrated the demise of the essay. It doesn't foster critical thinking.

Blaine Greteman, incoming chair of Iowa's English Department, felt likewise

in a Newsweek essay. "ChatGPT is ushering in the essay apocalypse," he wrote. "I'm happy to say good riddance to the college essay and other 'skills' that we've come to see as proving the value of the humanities."

Greteman believes it's time for English departments to return to "deeper humanistic questions like, What is truth? What is beauty? How do we know what we know?"

Those are crucial questions. We contemplate them long after we leave school. News media explore them in daily reports. We debate them in private with spouses and significant others.

Although I am a journalism educator, I earned a Ph.D. in English.

The study of literature helped me intuit potential stories affecting the human condition and articulate them via compelling narratives.

In the end there may be no viable way to measure the value of critical thinking informing lifelong learning, prudent decision-making and conscientious views about social issues.

We used to call that higher education. English departments still foster that, which is why we should support them.

Michael Bugeja is a distinguished professor of liberal arts and sciences at Iowa State University. These views are his own.