

OPINION



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Editorial Board

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Never again; we must ensure our buildings are safe

Three people are still missing and families of two believe them to be dead inside the rubble of the partially collapsed building at 324 Main St. in downtown Davenport.

Those still missing as of Saturday morning are Branden Colvin, Ryan Hitchcock and Daniel Prien.

The six-story apartment building partially collapsed at 4:55 p.m. Sunday, May 28, a day that won't be forgotten in the Quad-Cities. This never should have happened. The safeguards failed.

The days that followed brought many questions about how this happened. Why didn't inspections detect the apartment building with some 84 commercial and residential units was on the verge of collapse? Why wasn't the building condemned and the residents evacuated? Some 50 people are expected to have been living there. Had the building collapsed at 4:55 a.m. instead of 4:55 p.m. the casualties would be much higher.

We must work exhaustingly to find these answers. The building is owned by Andrew Wold's Davenport Hotel, L.L.C. who bought the building in 2021 from Waukeel Investments, L.L.C. for \$4.2 million, county records show.

We know from documents released Wednesday, including structural engineering reports, that city officials and Wold were warned that portions of the building were unstable. The west wall that collapsed was of particular concern, especially in the past five months. A report days before the collapse noted that the wall appeared to be losing stability and was visibly bowing.

Residents who moved out days before the building collapse told us of complaints they made of unsafe conditions and cracks in floors and walls. A contractor who had once bid on repair work said he warned workers two days before the collapse, "Get away. You're going to die."

And a 911 call was made the day before the collapse because of concerns about the façade crumbling.

In a report March 1, the city deemed the "site is secure." Work on the building passed city inspections April 12, April 21, and May 1.

The recent history of the building, built in 1907, included many red flags, coming as early as January 2020 when it was owned by Waukeel Investments, L.L.C.

None of the warning signs triggered evacuations. One of the developments during the week was the announcement that Chief Building Official Trishna Pradhan stepped down. Pradhan had visited the building May 25 and mistakenly noted it had "passed" inspection, when it should have said "incomplete" because the work was ongoing. According to the city, Pradhan's effort Tuesday to change the status to "incomplete" resulted in a listing as "failed," because of a technical glitch.

Also, the city fined Wold \$300 for failing to maintain a safe structure in legal action the city described as an effort to make sure the owner couldn't transfer the property to avoid legal costs. And searches continued.

The city's messaging was misguided in the hours after the collapse.

On Monday morning, officials said they had no credible information that anyone was missing and planned to start demolition on the building Tuesday morning because of the danger the unstable building presented.

Meanwhile, people stood outside the building hoping the worst had not happened to loved ones. Were they alive in the building? A woman was discovered and rescued from the fourth floor of the building at about 8 p.m. Monday. The day's events led to protests at the site to hold off on demolition and search for those still missing.

The city delayed the demolition and brought in search teams along with local firefighters. Beloved pets were rescued, and survivors are now ruled out. The city has declined to say whether remains have been found.

The city has improved its communications by holding several news conferences and making building documents available.

Further, the city is offering residents of the building \$6,000, and businesses will be eligible for \$25,000. Adjacent businesses are being offered \$5,000. We applaud those moves and urge the city to move quickly with this relief.

Those residents fortunate enough not to lose a loved one in the collapse still lost all their belongings. Some immediate housing would have helped ease their burden.

Thanks goes out to the first responders who rescued seven people immediately from the scene, risking their own lives and the team who saved the life of Quanshia White-Berry by performing an on-site amputation of her leg above the knee to free her.

Officials cleared the area to keep those standing just outside out of danger from the unstable building.

And we appreciate the state search teams who swept the building, rescued pets and looked for survivors as well as bodies. They risked their own health for the greater good. They are heroes.

The aftermath of the collapse has brought to light the poor conditions that people were living in, including, at times, no heat or hot water. Some 146 actions were taken at the property in the past three years. More diligence is clearly needed to assure residents are offered livable conditions that are safe.

Mayor Mike Matson promised to improve inspections and to investigate what happened. This is a must.

In the days ahead, we need to use this tragedy as a lesson. Just as we changed our approach after the breach of the Hesco barriers in 2019 to prevent the Mississippi River from devastating downtown Davenport earlier this year, we can learn the steps forward to prevent such tragedies.

May 28 was a dark day. Let's honor those injured and lost by making sure this never happens again.



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Repealing Republican tax breaks a path to fiscal responsibility

Wednesday evening, just before 8 p.m., I turned on the TV and tuned in C-SPAN to watch the House of Representatives at work. A fortuitous choice: they had just started voting on HR 3746, the "Fiscal Responsibility Act."

That meant I had been spared the oratory and got to see our representatives in action. It reminded me of the times I spent watching my Illinois senate colleagues when controversial bills were up for a vote.

Wednesday night, I could see Congressional members massing in the back, waiting to cast their votes when it was safe to do so. It was a familiar sight. Far-right and far-left members quickly voted against the measure. Those in swing districts were waiting to cast a safe "No" vote to quell rabid primary voters, once it was clear the bill's passage was assured. The margin was 314 to 117.

Whenever a legislator votes, he or she usually keeps two things in mind: the need for the bill and how voters will think of their choice. The public mind is easily swayed and tough choices can give your next opponent campaign ammunition.

If you are convinced that a bill must be enacted or defeated, you have to be ready to lose an election if your vote doesn't correspond with public perception of it. Which is why it's so hard to pass tax bills. No matter the need, it will be used against you — and it usually works.

Once I stood in the Illinois House with a colleague, discussing the absolute need to defeat a bill which had inflamed public opinion, thanks to unscrupulous proponents. He agreed, but said, "The problem is that it's too hard to explain." With that, he voted "Aye." He coasted to reelection.

Years ago, the Supreme Court decreed that political campaigning cannot be censored, which is why so many lie so easily. The only

recourse is to sue for defamation if you have lost — a waste of time and money. It won't put you back in office.

The run-up to Wednesday's Congressional vote had been a long-drawn-out drama that had the nation's financial institutions on edge. Many of them had been engaged in risky dealings to raise quick profits, counting on interests rates remaining near zero.

Unfortunately, that low interest rate had long outlived the need to overcome the negative effects of the 2008 financial collapse (blame the banks for that one, too) and banks took advantage of it to go on a borrowing binge. It was risky, but only if the Federal Reserve decided to raise interest rates.

In the event, the Fed did. A major part of its job is to keep inflation under control. When Covid-19 hit, it upset the delicate links of supply and demand which characterize modern international trade. Add ongoing wars in the Middle East, the Covid pandemic, and some plain price-gouging and inflation soared worldwide.

Meanwhile, the national debt ballooned, thanks in large measure to the 2017 tax relief bill for the wealthy, which cost as much as 2022's 1.9 trillion COVID relief measure. Satisfying greed is as expensive as serving real need.

The Federal Reserve purchases and sells Treasury securities as a means to influence federal interest rates and the nation's money supply. As the largest holder of such debt, it is in the position to change interest rates to keep the economy on an even keel. It met its prime responsibility by raising interest at a slow but steady rate. Over-extended banks were caught out. Two had to be taken over; others failed.

It was a dicey situation, Not raising the ceiling would result in a downgrade by credit rating agencies, increased borrowing costs for businesses and homeowners, and a drop in consumer confidence that could rock the United States' financial market and tip its economy — and the world's — into immediate recession. The bill had to pass, but members could vote

against it, if needed. 117 did: 71 Republicans and 46 Democrats.

Why is it necessary? Why has Congress chosen to go through the pro forma business of agreeing to pay the debts it has incurred? It doesn't seem necessary: the Constitution, as amended, requires it.

The debt ceiling bill was an artifact of the First World War: the Second Liberty Bond Act of 1917. That bill allowed the Treasury to issue bonds and take on other debt without specific Congressional approval, as long as the total debt fell under the statutory debt ceiling. It was increased when needed. Since that time, passing such a bill has been strictly pro forma.

That is, until the Clinton presidency, when a Republican Congress tried to force a reduction in public spending with a budget-slicing bill and a threat not to raise the debt ceiling. It was a bluff and Clinton called it. Obama had a tougher time, but managed to get past it.

This time, there are about 20 anarchists among House Republicans who seem to imagine themselves Samsons, ready to bring the temple down around them. They managed to exact some small victories at the expense of welfare recipients and to reduce the IRS's ability to go after wealthy tax evaders. But the ceiling limit is suspended until January 2025, past the next presidential election.

The whole business is an elaborate charade, but one that will be sold to persuadable voters as "fiscal responsibility." At a post-session press conference, House Speaker even McCarthy put the vey best gloss on it while blasting President Biden and Democrats.

The most realistic maneuver would have been to rescind the last two Republican tax breaks for the wealthy. That would constitute true "fiscal responsibility," but a move our money-soaked politicians would find too risky.

Don Wooten is a former Illinois state senator and a regular columnist. Email him at: donwooten4115@gmail.com.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

If age is really a concern, why support Trump?

This is a response to a letter printed on the editorial page May 23 from Tom Wilcox. He expressed concerns about Biden's age. It is true many people do experience some decline in their 80s, but many are fine in their later years.

Mr. Wilcox didn't mention that in June, Donald Trump will be 77, close to 80 also. His mental abilities seem questionable to me. Upon leaving a cabinet meeting when Trump was President, his own Secretary of State, Rex Tillerson called Trump a f--- moron! Later, when asked about the comment, Tillerson would never deny he said that.

In answer to your final question, Mr. Wilcox, asking if I would be satisfied to have Kamala Harris as President, my answer is — yes, I would be just fine with that. She was a lawyer, a prosecutor in the state of California and a senator before she became vice president. You did not mention what exactly would concern you if she became

president. Is your concern that she is bi-racial, or just the fact that she's an intelligent accomplished woman?

**Helen Drain
Coal Valley**

Don't understand the outrage about bathrooms

I am writing in response to Senator Anderson's reported comments about the unisex bathroom law that recently passed in Illinois. This law allows businesses to create multi-occupancy, gender-neutral bathrooms.

It doesn't require this, but allows them to use their judgement about their facility, community, etc. in deciding how to set up their bathrooms. Stall dividers must have functioning locks and partitions for urinals, if they have urinals. This system is common in many other countries, both in their public restrooms and in their schools. I couldn't find any reported incidents of sexual assault in my google search of gen-

der-neutral bathrooms. However, there have been many reports of verbal and physical assault of gay, bisexual, and transgender students/citizens in bathrooms.

I'm confused by Senator Anderson's response, because his concerns could be avoided by a simple step. He can accompany his daughter into the bathroom and wait for her by the sink. It's a gender-neutral bathroom, after all. He could scan the cubical before she enters, and wait for her to come out.

The most frequent abusive situations occur with people the parents and child trust, and in situations that seem safe. Heck, over 4,000 priests have been accused of sexual assault in the United States. Of course, parents should be vigilant in protecting their children, but threatening someone who is just going into a bathroom to do his business seems excessive. I don't understand the outrage. I hope that our representatives try to be logical when reviewing pending legislation.

**Lori McCollum
Rock Island**

Street gangs a return to barbarism and the Dark Ages

At the end of the first century, or at the beginning of the second, an unknown Christian moralist wrote an instructional tract known as the Didache. It begins as follows: "There are two ways, one of life and one of death, and there is a great difference between the two ways."

Recent events on the streets of Davenport demonstrate that that statement still rings true nearly 2,000 years later. It puts in focus what happens when segments of society opt for "revenge," rather than working within our criminal justice system, based on our U.S. Constitution.

There is a fine line between a civilized society and barbarism. That line is crossed when citizens discard our criminal justice system, with its built-in safeguards for victims and defendants alike, and opt instead for "revenge." In doing so, they discard civilization and choose instead a "system" of survival of the fittest — might makes right — the ends justify the means.

There was a time in human history when there were no written laws and there were no courts to punish criminal acts.

Moses and the Jewish people wandered for 40 years in the Sinai Desert. Moses realized that when the Jewish people reached the "Promised Land" they would need laws to punish murder, theft, perjury and interference with established marital relationships.

The Mayflower Compact of the Pilgrims was a similar acknowledgment.

In the absence of the criminal law, to obtain justice for a wrong done, the injured party, his family, or his tribe relied upon "revenge." Our newspapers daily show that that can happen even in a modern American city. Street gang killings are generally "revenge" killing. "Revenge" is their justification.

A recent Dispatch front-page article by Tom Loewy, "It just a fact of life," demonstrates the point.

With no little effort the following facts can be extracted from the article.

1. On May 19, 2018, 16-year-old Jovontia Jones was shot to death outside Hilltop Liquor during a drive-by shooting. No one has ever been charged in connection with his murder.

(Note that his death is posed as the justification for the following criminal acts).

2. On Tuesday, May 22, 2023, John E. Hanes III was found guilty of the 2021 murder of Jamon Winfrey (age 14).

3. Nessiah Clark is presently on trial for the August 2022 attempted murder of Delmont Thomas. Clark is also charged with additional offenses, including possession of a firearm by a felon.

To understand, how revenge fits into this equation, consider the following:

1. A woman present as a spectator at the trial of Nessiah Clark, identifying herself as Nessiah Clark's mother, told Mr. Loewy, "I will say this: the violence of that day happened because of what happened in the past. Nobody shot anybody that day out

of the blue, for no reason. Nessiah has been shot at before, and his half-brother (Aden), was shot at in the same incident. Did he carry a gun. Yes, he did.

"I would rather Nessiah to have a gun and not need it, rather than need a gun and not have it. ... Maybe people don't understand it, but there are killers out there. The threat of violence is very, very real for these young men.

"It's when he's out on the streets that I worry. Every time I hear sirens I wonder if he's the one laying somewhere dead."

2. Davenport Police Sergeant Jordan Sanders said Hanes was a member of the MMG. Street gang. Hanes fired on the car Whitney was in, because he believed them to be members of Savage Life street gang. Sanders continued, "MMG and Savage Life had a "shoot on sight" policy, when the spotted each other."

3. According to Jovontia's aunt, Sylvia Abbey, "MMG was basically a gang formed to avenge Jovi's death.

Any rational writer or reader, of course, must be cautious when accepting the statements of street gang members, their family members, and their "associates." People who are willing to justify revenge murder, attempted murder, and possession of firearms by convicted felons, might just be inclined to lie when it serves their purposes.

But my point is this: Street gang violence is a return to an age before criminal justice systems were known. It is a return to survival of the fittest, and might makes right. It is a system which affords no rights whatsoever to the accused, and provides no safeguards for the innocent. Street gang violence, to be blunt, is a return to barbarism — and to the dark ages, where each killer is his own judge, jury and executioner.

The people who eschew the criminal justice system, turn their backs on assisting the police and tolerate street gang violence, deserve exactly what they get.

Is it really possible to claim "Lives Matter" when guys with guns, probably acquired on the "Black Market," gun down a 16-year-old boy standing outside liquor store? A 14-year-old boy riding in a car? Another male outside a city gas station?

Is it really possible to claim that "lives matter" when rival gangs have a "shoot on sight" policy? When a mother "would rather her son, a convicted felon, have a gun and not need it, rather than need a gun and not have it? And why did the convicted felon "need" a gun? Here, if the state's allegations are true, he "needed" a gun to attempt murder.

The residents of a community have a choice. There are two ways: The community can assist the police in bringing criminals to justice; or, they can put their trust in street-gang gunmen who operate a system of "revenge."

I spent most of my professional life around police officers. A very few were not fit to be police officer. But no cop that I have ever known has had "a shoot on sight policy" toward any group of people.

John Donald O'Shea, of Moline, is a retired circuit judge and a regular columnist.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter writer wrong about Crisis Pregnancy Centers

As I read the letter to the editor by Rue Monroe of Davenport a few weeks ago I chuckled to myself. In the letter, Rue objected to Gov. Reynolds giving \$500,000 to Crisis Pregnancy Centers. This statement was followed by Rue saying that she/he, doesn't know what a

CPC does, then followed this by a list of several things that CPCs do.

I also didn't know all of what a CPC does so I went to one and talked to the director. What I learned was that all of the statements Rue made about CPCs were wrong.

I challenge Rue to visit one of the centers with me so she/he can be educated concerning a CPC.

**Richard Phillis MD
Rock Island**

Letters to the Editor policy

Quad-City Times welcomes letters to the editor. Each submission should be no more than 250 words and include the author's name, city of residence and phone number for verification. Each writer is limited to one published letter every 30 days. Letters can be emailed to opinions@qc-times.com or mailed to: Letters to the Editor, Quad-City Times, 500 E. 3rd St., Davenport, Iowa 52801



Fairness and the debt ceiling bill

By the time this piece runs, Congress will probably have acted on the bipartisan debt ceiling bill. It is not a good piece of legislation, but



DAN LEE

it is probably the best that can be expected in the political cauldron that Congress has become.

There have been many analyses of who will benefit and who will be hurt by this legislation, what the political implications will be, etc. There is nothing to be gained by commenting on what others have already said.

What has been missing in this discussion, however, is serious discussion of the notion of fairness. That is the topic of this week's column.

I begin by noting that the budget crisis involves some fundamental issues of intergenerational justice with our huge federal budget deficits significantly shortchanging our children and grandchildren in the years to come. It is not realistic to assume that our national debt will be paid off in the foreseeable future. That's not going to happen. The problem is that the carrying costs of the national debt — that is to say, the interest costs pertaining to financing our national debt — will chew up an increasing share of federal revenues in the years to come, to the detriment of funding that would otherwise be available for other programs.

A few months ago, the Peter G. Peterson Foundation, a non-partisan organization established to address our country's long term fiscal challenges, issued an alarming report that was largely ignored. They projected that within 10 years, net interest costs will exceed federal spending on federal programs such as national defense and Medicaid.

Their projection for 30 years down the road is even more dismal. If current trends continue, in thirty years net interest will become the largest line item in the federal budget, exceeding expenditures for Medicare and Social Security. That's the mess that we are leaving for our children and grandchildren.

If the bipartisan debt ceiling bill slows down the increase in rate of federal spending, that would be a step in the right direction, perhaps even resulting in our children and grandchildren thinking more kindly of us (as long as it is not done at the cost of eviscerating environmental programs intended to slow down the rate of global warming, a matter that also involves issues related to intergenerational justice.)

The debt ceiling bill is not without its flaws. It does nothing to address the issue of welfare for the wealthy. In fact, it moves in the opposite direction, taking aim at one of President Biden's biggest priorities — increasing Internal Revenue Service (IRS) funding to go after tax cheats and ensure that wealthy individuals are paying what they owe.

The nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office (CBO) estimated that the Biden administration proposal to increase IRS funding by \$80 billion over 10 years would increase revenues by approximately \$200 billion during that period of time, which would be a good deal for taxpayers and help reduce federal budget deficits.

However, the wealthy donor class, many of whom support Republican candidates for office, do not take kindly to being audited, the result being that Congressional Republicans have strongly opposed increasing enforcement appropriations for the IRS. In the debt ceiling negotiations, Speaker of the House Kevin McCarthy did not succeed in getting the entire \$80 billion eliminated but did succeed in getting it substantially reduced.

One additional observation. The debt ceiling bill would impose new work requirements for those receiving food stamps. Currently the work requirement only applies to those age 18-49 who are physically able to work. The debt ceiling bill would extend the work requirements for food stamps to those age 50-54 who do not have children living in their homes.

I am fine with that. While I believe that food stamps should be available to those who need them, I also believe that those able to work who do not have child care responsibilities should be expected to work for them, even if the work includes nothing more than picking up the litter along our nation's highways.

Intergenerational justice and questions of fairness are far from being resolved by the debt ceiling bill. Instead, the debate about these matters is just beginning. What is important, however, is that we look beyond our narrowly defined self-interest and think about what fairness involves. There's way too much "what's in it for me" and far too little attention being given to what is fair for everyone involved.

Dan Lee, a regular columnist, is the Marian Taft Cannon Professor in the Humanities at Augustana; danlee@augustana.edu.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Repurpose closed schools in Davenport

As the city of Davenport races to demolish two of our schools for more green space, they might pause. They could not wait to tear down the old YMCA, what a beautiful green space. Instead, they could have reused the building for veterans to rehab, exercise and swim or the elderly to do the same or both.

Now with the collapse of an apartment building, gee more green space. We need to think first.

These schools could be repurposed for senior or veterans housing. This city claims to be concerned with homelessness but what are they doing? People can't be housed in more green space, they need shelter.

As you raise taxes, forcing many out of their homes, the vultures are circling for more rental property. With the lower rents around \$800 a month where are people to go? Is that a bulldozer I hear?

**Steven Collier
Davenport**

Here are Joe Biden's foreign policy failures

One good thing about President Biden's feeble domestic policy is it hides his foreign policy. Russia downed an American drone in international waters, actually an act of war. Reports indicate they

have recovered it and are in the process of dissecting it. Joe and secretary Blinken are invisible.

Iran is seizing tankers in international waters and lobbying missiles at U.S. troops in Syria and Iraq. Iran now supports Russia with drones and soon ballistic missiles. Crickets from the White house.

China is driving hard to become the dominant global power. It is building carriers and other warships while under Biden the U.S. Navy will shrink.

Under Trump, Saudi Arabia was a security partner. Biden has destroyed this relationship. The Saudis are now moving closer to Iran, with the guidance of China....

A strong energy policy is the basis of strong foreign policy. Either unaware or ignoring this, Biden weakens U.S. domestic energy while making deals with illegitimate Venezuela to provide oil. We lose jobs and pay more for oil.

In Brazil's recent election, Biden successfully worked against Bolsonaro. Now that the leftists are in power, Brazil is distancing itself from us and moving toward China.

In Central America all the immigration agreements Donald Trump had finalized have been nullified. Some 4,000,000 people have entered the U.S. illegally with the flood expected to increase shortly.

Is there a bright side to Biden's foreign policy? If there was, I'm sure the media would report it, no matter how small, no matter how insignificant.

**William Bloom
LeClaire**

Leave nature alone whenever possible

Recently, I watched a nature program on Iowa PBS in which a group of scientists traveled around the world, picking areas at random for their study on nature. They took all predators away on land and water to see what would happen.

The study revealed that Nature took a sharp downturn. They then replaced all the predators, and everything returned to normal. They proved that nature plays an important role in the way we live.

However, we are quick to drain all of the wetlands that are home to amphibians and rare and endangered plants. Also, wetlands are a big factor in flood control and ground water purity.

We cut down our rain forests that almost eliminates all nature, including wildlife habitats. We create chemicals that kill unwanted plants, so the needed plants grow bigger and better. This pollutes our waterways and causes havoc on wildlife, such as the honeybees.

It's not the burning of fossil fuels that some say is destroying our lives, but the thousands of other things that we do wrong, but think are right.

It would be advantageous to our planet whenever and wherever possible if we left nature alone. We would all be better off for it.

**Don Griffin
Moline**