

OPINION

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THE BLOOMFIELD DEMOCRAT 5A

GUEST EDITORIAL

Candidates are trying to scare you. Don't fall for it.

By Kathie Obradovich, Iowa Capital Dispatch

It's the spooky season. We love to be scared. Halloween decorations dot lawns across Des Moines. Over the weekend, I spotted a giant, inflatable baby on a north-side lawn with a mouth full of blood-smearred fangs. Magazines are full of directions for making cheese-cloth ghosts and punch-bowl ice in the shape of severed hands. Horror movies rake in hundreds of millions at the box office. Halloween spending is expected to reach a record \$10.6 billion this year, according to the National Retail Federation.

Most of the time, it's all in fun. It's fake fright — we get a rush of adrenaline, perhaps, but no actual peril.

It's also the season for fear on the campaign trail. Candidates are spending millions on attack ads that often feature dark, unflattering images of the opponent, alarming phrases in garish colors and voiceovers that sound like the grim narration of a true-crime show.

Most of the claims in these sorts of ads are fake, too — or at least misleading — but nobody's having fun. Except maybe the consultants, who are laughing all the way to the bank.

Candidates who focus on fear want voters to act out of emotion, not information.

Iowa isn't immune. Republican Rep. Ashley Hinson, for example, claimed her Democratic opponent, Liz Mathis, "supports government employees facilitating gender transitions for kids at school without their parents knowing."

The ad refers to a transgender inclusion policy at Linn-Mar high school, which is about allowing teenagers to use the pronouns and restrooms of their choice. Children aren't getting sex-change surgeries in the cafeteria, as the ad seems to imply. Perhaps they will get acceptance that is crucial to their mental health and that they may not get at home. Regardless of where you stand on the policy, though, it's not an issue for Congress. It's being raised in the campaign as a scare tactic.

Gov. Kim Reynolds also tells spooky stories in an effort to terrify parents, claiming Democrats want to "indoctrinate" children. "Indoctrinate" in this context, apparently means "teach them history" and "encourage them to be themselves and respect others."

The prospect of Iowa schools treating kids like humans with some of their own agency may not be sufficiently chilling for all Iowa voters. So she and other Republicans are cranking up the scream machine with a tried-and-true tactic: An exaggerated focus on violent crime.

It worked for George H.W. Bush back in 1988, when the infamous Willie Horton ad inflamed racial fears. Reynolds borrows from that playbook in her recent TV ad by featuring a Black congresswoman from Missouri talking about defunding the police and then rolling alarming videos of mob violence — also in other states.

Iowa's rates of violent crime and property crime are both low compared to other states. Even so, there was a spike here, along with the rest of the country, in homicide rates during the pandemic. Republicans want voters to believe, despite evidence to the contrary, that the increase was tied to anti-police rhetoric, liberal criminal justice reform policies and weak, Democratic prosecutors.

The Brennan Center found that murder rates in 2020 and 2021 were roughly equal in cities run by Republicans as those run by Democrats, and that some "red" states had the highest homicide rates. One factor that likely did fuel the increase was a record surge of firearm-related violence in 2020, bolstered by 4.3 million "excess firearm purchases nationally" between March and July 2020.

But Iowa Republicans want more firearms on the streets, not less. That's why voters will be asked to amend the state constitution to create higher legal barriers to restrictions on firearm ownership and use.

You won't see any of that context amid the images of rioting and arson in campaign ads. Candidates who focus on fear want voters to act out of emotion, not information.

Boo.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Vote to maintain democratic republic

As Benjamin Franklin said, "We now have a democratic republic if we can keep it."

Veterans Day, the day we honor and show respect to those who've served in armed forces of the U.S. of A., is only three days after election day. My father and thousands of other WWII veterans fought to rid the world of fascist dictators.

Let us honor "the greatest generation" and other veterans by NOT voting for candidates who espouse fascism or would enable it to grow into something we do not want as Iowans.

Please vote to maintain a democratic republic and honor veterans by doing so.

By Stephen Tews
Bloomfield

For your consideration

My reasons to support these candidates. Mike Franken is a retired admiral from the U.S. Navy, proving he has leadership skills. He has proven he won't bend his knee to a false go.

Debra Dejean will support public schools by properly funding them. She won't sue the federal government to stop them from helping low- and middle-income families to pay off student loans.

Cindy Axne has worked diligently to make regular people's lives easier. She has pushed for legislation supporting families instead of corporations.

Matt Griener has lived his entire life in rural Davis County working on behalf of local citizens in many capacities. He understands the unique difficulties farmers face because he is a farmer.

I have lived in ru-

ral Iowa my whole life but because I've never farmed I can't understand all the intricacies of farming.

Recently, it has come to our attention that national Republicans want to put Social Security and Medicare up for a vote every year, putting these programs in jeopardy. Just because we've become used to these programs, don't think they won't take them away if they take control of congress.

Republican officials complain about inflation but don't provide any ideas to reduce it. Most of the current inflation is driven by excessive corporate profits. A Republican congress won't do anything to address this because they depend on corporate donations to get elected and stay in office.

Please take all this under consideration when casting your votes.

Randy Scott
Albia



STRAY THOUGHTS

Hey, politicians, are loan bailouts good or bad?

By Randy Evans

I try to stay atop the day's news. But I must have dozed off last week — because I missed the response from Iowa Republican leaders to the Biden administration's announcement of \$1.3 billion in debt relief to 36,000 farmers who have fallen behind on their farm loan payments.

In making the announcement, U.S. Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack said, "Through no fault of their own, our nation's farmers and ranchers have faced incredibly tough circumstances over the last few years. The funding included in today's announcement helps keep our farmers farming and provides a fresh start for producers in challenging positions."

I am not here to question the wisdom of the federal assistance. But the silence from Gov. Kim Reynolds and U.S. senators Charles Grassley and Joni Ernst is markedly different from their criticism since President Biden announced in August that the government would forgive up to \$10,000 in federal student loans for most borrowers.

If you have forgotten, here's how Iowa's Republican leaders reacted to the student loan announcement back then:

Reynolds explained it this way: "Biden didn't cancel student loan debt. He sent the bill to you." She also tweeted, "The expensive, unlawful Biden mass debt cancellation plan is an insult to working people and must be stopped."

Grassley said that by forgiving student loans, Biden "continues to pour gasoline on the fires of inflation."

And Ernst said bluntly: "President Biden is rewarding the wealthy and penalizing working families."

Under the federal farm relief announced last week, each farmer/borrower who is delinquent on a direct government loan or on a farm loan guaranteed by the federal government will receive automatic payments to get them caught up on their loans.

Each farmer with a direct federal loan will receive about \$52,000,

the Associated Press reported. Each farmer with a guaranteed loan will receive about \$172,000.

Vilsack also announced 21,000 borrowers whose farm loans have been foreclosed on but who still owe money will share \$200 million in federal assistance. That is an average of \$101,000 each, the USDA said.

Don't forget, the student loan forgiveness tops out at \$10,000 for most borrowers and at \$20,000 for low-income borrowers.

There is no indication the student loan forgiveness will be repeated in the coming years. But the USDA said the farmer assistance announced last week is just the first round of payments to help struggling farmers.

Another difference worth mentioning: The student loan forgiveness is available only for borrowers whose income is less than \$125,000 (or, no more than \$250,000 for couples). But there is no income ceiling for the USDA's farm loan repayment assistance.

During the recent debate between Reynolds and Democratic challenger Debra Dejean, the governor was asked about her opposition to student loan forgiveness.

"It does nothing but encourage bad borrowing practices," Reynolds replied. "And if you're the truck driver or machinist or a nurse or a person that decided not to seek a college education, why should you be responsible in paying somebody else's off, especially when they often make more than you do? It's not right. It's not fair."

Of course, those same observations could be made about the loans and loan payments for farmer/borrowers. But this time, Republicans are not in a mood to ask those questions. They saw the college borrowers as a good target for political pot-shots. They don't see farmers that way.

Iowa needs nurses, accountants, teachers, physicians, social workers, and other college-educated workers who rely on student loans. Iowa also needs farmers — and many often need to rely on the federal government to provide or guarantee their farm operating loans.

A friend of mine challenged the governor to respond to the farm loan

assistance in the same manner as she did to the student loan forgiveness. He posted on Facebook: "I expect you to be in court on Monday morning, filing suit against Joe Biden to stop this irresponsible and unjust transfer of wealth from hard-working taxpayers to whining farmers. The message to farmers should be this: If you don't have enough money to farm, don't farm. Don't expect the taxpayers to bail you out."

He was being melodramatic. But the contrast between the Republican reaction to the loan assistance for college borrowers and for farm borrowers is inescapable — and maddening, especially if you believe there should be consistency in what our political leaders stand for and do.

We need farmers. But we also need lots of professionals who are in short supply in many communities in Iowa.

If a farmer goes bankrupt, someone else will acquire that land and keep producing crops and livestock. But there is no guarantee a school district will be able to fill a teaching vacancy or the local clinic or hospital will be able to hire enough nurses.

This is where we need more leadership — and less political theatrics.

A footnote: Biden's student loan forgiveness is being challenged in court. Supreme Court Justice Amy Coney Barrett denied a Wisconsin group's request last week to block the law from taking effect while the challenge is heard. Legal experts saw that as a sign she did not believe the legal issues were a close call.

A similar challenge by Iowa and a handful of states will be considered this week by the U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in St. Louis. In both cases, the government says Biden acted under authority granted by Congress 20 years ago to make changes in the federal student loan program in response to national emergencies, such as the Covid pandemic.

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