



Soon, everything worth saving will be under concrete

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The proposed completion of Highway 141 from Ladue to Maryland Heights Expressway represents only an extension of poor judgment, outdated planning policies and short-term solutions. The officials involved are singing the party song, "Jobs! Progress! Safety! Rainbows! Unicorns!" Why are we listening? It's the same song and dance they've been doing for decades.

A project isn't justified just because it has been "on the books" for more than 30 years; that should be a judgment against the project. To promote a plan that is decades old without updating the data and assumptions on which the plan was founded is irresponsible. Many things have changed since the red line known as 141 was first penned on a map.

We now know:

- Building bigger and wider roads increases, not lessens, traffic.
- More traffic increases, not lessens, pollution.
- The proposed 141 extension is routed through existing high-grade wetlands and heavy woodland. Those in favor of the project say that this six-lane concrete highway will have little if any impact on the environment, yet they have no environmental impact study to prove it. The three to six years of construction will scare off or kill most of the wildlife, plant and animal. Whatever isn't destroyed by the construction process will be by the pollution, run-off and litter.
- More concrete increases, not lessens, flooding.
- Adding this new highway will continue to degrade the quality of our drinking water, which in part, comes from the creek that will be collecting all the oil and fluids leaking from the vehicles driving over it; put the surrounding population at an even higher risk of flooding and increase the likelihood of hazardous materials getting transported along 141.

— There has not been a hydrology or environmental impact study or even an updated environmental assessment.

When are we going to demand that our politicians and regional planning organizations stop listening to the siren song of easy money? When are we going to stop letting bankers, developers and politicians erode our quality of life so that they can build more buildings? There are plenty of empty buildings and office parks that could be redeveloped if stopped allowing new development on land that now holds our farms, parks and clean water — our future.

If we don't do it now, everything unique and worth saving will be buried under a couple feet of concrete.

Kim Cuddeback — Maryland Heights

Citizens for Responsible Progress

Health care reform sounds simple; it's not

A doctor's recent letter about reforming health care seemed reasonable and simple. Her ideas: If you have money, you get health care; if you don't, you're out of luck. She suggests that patients should have some financial responsibility for their medical treatment, and that's true.

But her solution prefers continuing a system in which insurance bureaucrats continue to make decisions about what treatment people should receive; they just should be more restrictive, eliminating reasonably cheap co-pays. The effect, of course, would be going without treatment or care that is really needed. And she offers absolutely nothing for the estimated 50 million people without insurance.

It sounds so simple.

From the comfortable environs of Ladue, it probably looks that way as well. Fortunately, hundreds of physicians, nurses and other health care professionals understand that a single-payer system is not the bureaucratic nightmare the good doctor describes.

I do not agree with her about tort reform. We spend more per capita on health care in this country because of what is wasted on the private insurance

bureaucracy and the unnecessary tests and procedures that an out-of-control legal system imposes on the health care system.

Marvin A. Huggins — St. Louis

Securing the border, protecting gun rights

Regarding the story "U.S. weapons found to fuel violence in Mexico" (June 22): This rumor is like the Energizer Bunny; it just keeps going and going, even though it has been debunked.

The truth, as related by U.S. Rep. Connie Mack, R-Fla., in a congressional hearing this month, is that Mexican authorities submitted only 7,200 of the 30,000 firearms seized for tracing. Why? U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement Special Agent Matt Allen told Fox News recently, "Not every weapon seized in Mexico has a serial number on it that would make it traceable, and the U.S. effort to trace weapons really only extends to weapons that have been in the U.S. market."

So, we only trace guns that we believe came from the United States. That's not exactly a representative sample with which one might develop a defensible assertion. It sounds as if the worst case is that 90 percent of the 7,200 traced guns came from the United States. That's 6,480 guns, or 21 percent of the 30,000 total seized guns — a far less dramatic number.

The Mexican authorities may have cherry-picked that group of guns to send to us for tracing. With pressure from all quarters to "do something," it is easy to see how the beleaguered Mexican government might be tempted to point the finger outward.

Interpol says that Russian crime organizations traffic guns in Mexico. Mexican congressman Robert Badillo says that more than 150,000 soldiers deserted from the Mexican Army in the last six years. If as few as 15 percent of them took their gun, then that's 75 percent of the guns seized.

Stop the rumor-mongering. We need to get on with some real solutions.

Mr. Mack says the United States should station more federal agents at the border to check for southbound gun shipments. What a great idea! While they are

watching what's going south, they can watch what's coming north and actually achieve a secure border without further erosion of U.S. citizens' right to bear arms.

Tim Keeney — Webster Groves

Illinois should support

three Rs in its budget

Child care workers in Illinois are calling on state lawmakers to act on the Three Rs: Revenue, reform and responsibility.

Our state has a strong network of early childhood programs that meet the needs of children and their families. They provide safe, quality child care and early educational experiences for working families.

Programs for at-risk infants and toddlers, preschoolers and parents will be cut back severely or eliminated if the so-called "50 percent state budget" is approved as proposed. It will have a devastating domino effect on families. Untold numbers of parents, unable to afford the full cost of child care, will be forced to quit their jobs.

State policymakers have not committed significant new revenues to fill the state's multi-billion-dollar budget hole. This mammoth deficit cannot be solved solely through budget cuts. Lawmakers must not place the burden of the budget deficit on the backs of children and families!

A balanced solution demands not only spending cuts but also capturing new revenue. A balanced solution would avoid budget cuts so drastic that they harm children, families and the state's economy.

We urge lawmakers to take actions that are appropriate and necessary to bring in new revenues and accountability so that families in need can continue to access affordable, quality child care.

We need to get back to the basics. We all need to share in a solution. We urge support for the Three Rs: Revenue, reform and responsibility.

Janet E. Maruna — Bloomington, Ill.

Executive Director, Illinois Network of Child Care Resource & Referral Agencies

Telecoms are no watchdog

against scammers

Matthew Hathaway exposed scammers in "Scammers are taking advantage of third-party billing on phone bills" (June 20). Those scammers cheat Missouri consumers out of big bucks. The seemingly intentional complexity of today's telephone bills makes them an excellent place to conceal fraudulent charges.

Mr. Hathaway could have added that the billing telephone company may be complicit with the scammer when it repeatedly issues reminders of failure to pay the fraudulent amounts and each monthly bill contains written or implicit threats of telephone disconnection for non-payment of the charges.

I have for 18 months resisted paying a fraudulent \$7.92 directory assistance charge which my telephone company, which claims to be "third party" directory assistance and because it is "third party" claims its is uninvolved. But it hardly is uninvolved.

Telecommunications industry revenue separations are a complex procedure of credits and offsets. As is the case for most charged calls, when I pay this fraudulent charge, these procedures will credit a significant share of that \$7.92 to my telephone company for originating, switching, billing and collecting for the fraudulent directory assistance call.

Not all of the \$7.92 will go to the scamming third-party company. Does this make my telephone company uninvolved or complicit in the fraud?

Similar sharing of scamming revenue would be in play in all of Mr. Hathaway's third-party billing illustrations. Even when it is only a commission for billing and collecting for a third party, the company has an incentive to achieve that collection and no incentive to expose or combat suspected scammers.

That arrangement neuters the company as the best positioned watchdog of third-party billing and, in fact, makes detection and exposure of scammers

unlikely.

Scamming has been around for a long time. When will honorable telephone companies and our attorneys general rid consumers of these never-ending threats?

Wayne Clark — Lake Saint Louis

Institutional bias

Regarding "Nursing homes get old for many with disabilities" (June 22): A basic understanding of civil rights leads to the conclusion that state schools warehousing people with developmental disabilities have outlasted their questionable utility; they are a shameful relic of failed public policy and outdated attitudes toward people with disabilities.

Even with newly signed legislation to improve conditions, the conditions of the institutions will remain deplorable and will also continue to be the most glaring example of badly spent money.

The facts remain. Institutions warehousing people with disabilities across the country are the focus of failed inspections, horrendous findings letters that detail sub-standard care, class action lawsuits and de-certifications.

There are many other existing and proposed initiatives that support de-institutionalization: the Americans with Disabilities Act, the New Freedom Initiatives, Olmstead Plans, the Lifespan Respite Care Act, Expanding the Promise for Individuals with Autism Act, Pathways to Independence Act and the Family and Workplace Balancing Act, to name a few.

The institutional bias is not reflective of American attitudes; people want to stay in their homes and communities, regardless of disability at any age.

Robert Stack — Princeton, N.J.

President and CEO, Community Options Inc.

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