

Editorials are the institutional voice of The Free Press and independent of the newsroom reporting staff

OUR VIEW

MANKATO SPORTS COMMISSION HOLDS POTENTIAL

Mankato and North Mankato have much to be proud of when it comes to attracting top-notch sporting tournaments and events.

Caswell Park is known as a premiere venue for softball tournaments. Minnesota State University, the Verizon Wireless Center and many other school and outdoor venues are home to everything from soccer and horseshoe tournaments to amateur and college sporting events.

And in recent years, Mankato has positioned itself as a major player in marathons and bicycling events.

Now, with the announcement of the creation of the Mankato Sports Commission, the area can better tap the rich vein of sporting events.

The commission will operate under Visit Mankato, the visitors bureau that operates within Greater Mankato Growth. Visit Mankato President Anna Thill has long

worked on creating a sports commission to help existing groups better promote and expand their organizations and events and to attract new tournaments and events to the region.

The volunteer board will be made up of people from a broad range of interests, including those involved in local sports groups and people from the hospitality industry.

One of the other goals of the group will be to advocate for any new sports facilities. For years groups have been clamoring for more ice sheets for youth hockey, more soccer facilities, swimming pools and other sports facilities. Still, the proposals quickly come to a standstill when the discussion turns to how any new construction would be funded.

A study commissioned by the city last year concluded that a pool and hockey rink complex would offer the best chance for financial support. Other facilities, such as basketball and volleyball courts or a domed turf field, are "needed but probably too costly to justify," according to the report.

Whether a substantial new facility can gain financial support is still up in the air. But having the Mankato Sports Commission act as a leader in proposing any facilities makes sense. It would allow various groups to offer input with the commission serving as a respected promoter of the best route to take.

Visit Mankato has made it clear the new commission would not be financing or owning any new facility, but rather serve as an advocate only.

The commission is also not being formed to take over anyone's current events, but rather to help them if they ask and to look for new events.

Targeting new events to the area is not a haphazard endeavor. First, the commission will need to look at the facilities available for use that can match up with events. And the commission will need to figure out when all the established tournaments are so that they can know what parts of the calendar not to focus on.

The commission begins as competition for such events is becoming increasingly fierce.

While helping to promote new sports facilities and helping existing groups promote their sports are important, the Sports Commission's more vital work will be in recruiting new events to the area.

In many ways, sports tournaments or other big events, such as bicycling or marathons, are among the best short-term economic engines for a city. They generally last several days and bring in participants and their families from across the state and Midwest. The money they spend on lodging, eating out and shopping is money that often would not otherwise find its way into the local economy.

And sporting events promote a healthy, family atmosphere — the kind of thing a city can be proud to promote.

The new Sports Commission should also be able to help increase cooperation between Mankato and North Mankato, as well as area communities in offering a unified marketing effort to attract new events. A recent report commissioned by Visit Mankato found the area has great assets for hosting events, but suffers because of a lack of coordinated efforts between regional partners.

The Mankato Sports Commission has plenty to tackle and should be a valuable asset for creating economic development and improving the area's quality of life.

FOUNDED IN 1887

The Free Press

1st Amendment: Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

JAMES P. SANTORI, Publisher

EDITORIAL MANAGEMENT

JOSEPH SPEAR, Managing Editor
KATHY VOS, News Editor
TIM KROHN, Business Editor
TANNER KENT, Currents Editor
JOHN GROSS, Photo Editor
JIM RUEDA, Sports Editor

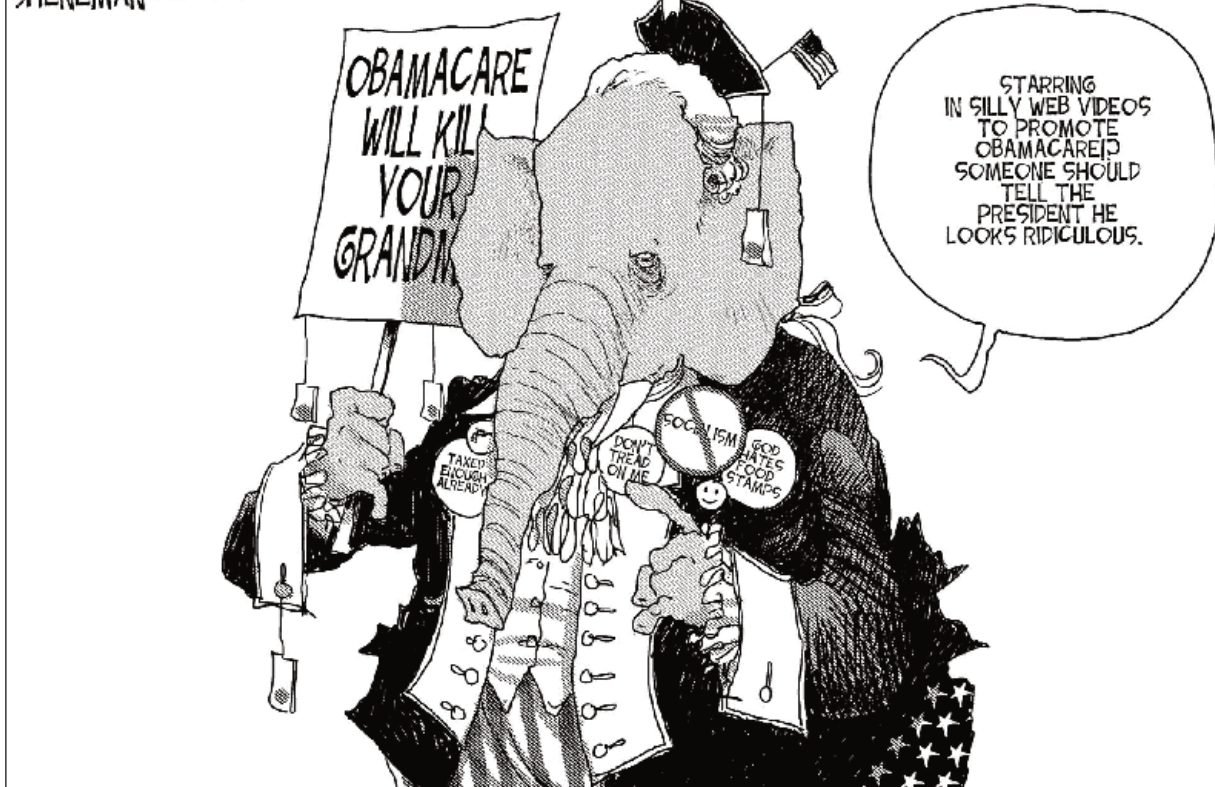
BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

GINNY BERGERSON, Sales Director
DENISE ZERNECHEL, Reader Services Director
GLEN ASLESON, Facilities & Technology Manager
LON YOUNGERBERG, Press/Post Press Manager
KATHY CONNELLY, General Manager - The Land

Letters Policy

The Free Press welcomes letters on any issue of general community interest. Please limit your letters to no more than 275 words, typewritten or clearly printed. Letters or emails citing facts that are not commonly known should include the source. Letters must contain the author's name, address and phone number for verification. All letters will be edited for clarity, grammar, spelling and space. You may email letters to the editor to editor@mankatofreepress.com.

SHENEMAN THRUILL CONSULTING AGENCY



Obamacare support grows. GOP hates it

Extreme laws aimed at disabling helpers

Here's a disconnect for you.

Sixty-four percent of Americans now say they want to keep the Affordable Care Act around, either with some "small modifications," (51 percent) or as it is (13 percent). Only 34 percent still want to repeal the law, according to a new Bloomberg National Poll.

Yet Republicans in Congress and state legislatures remain obsessed with Obamacare and spend vast amounts of time coming up with creative ways to undermine the law.

Just last week, the Kansas Senate passed a truly obnoxious bill targeting "navigators," the workers who help people register for health insurance in the on-line exchange marketplace.

The bill would require the navigators, most of whom are volunteers, to get fingerprinted, produce their credit ratings, undergo background checks and pay a \$100 annual fee for the privilege of helping their fellow Kansans.

Oh, and if someone filed a complaint about a navigator, the attorney general's office would investigate. (Why not the state insurance department?) The

AG's office could charge navigators for the cost of being investigated.

The Missouri Senate has also passed a navigator harassment bill this year, even though similar legislation passed last year has been struck down by a judge. The Missouri Senate bill would require navigators to get background checks and be bonded for \$100,000.

In Washington, the GOP-controlled House has passed a bill that makes necessary changes to Medicare's flawed system of paying doctors — but only if the mandate in the Affordable Care Act that individuals must purchase health insurance is delayed for five years. Just a few weeks ago, the House passed a bill, sponsored by GOP Rep. Lynn Jenkins of Kansas, to delay the individual mandate until 2015.

A delay in the individual mandate, as Republicans well know, would crater the entire health care law by keeping healthy Americans out of insurance pools. It's another of those great Obamacare-is-a-train-wreck opportunities, with Republicans sabotaging the rails.

The Obama administration has agreed to too

A delay in the individual mandate, as Republicans well know, would crater the entire health care law by keeping healthy Americans out of insurance pools. It's another of those great Obamacare-is-a-train-wreck opportunities, with Republicans sabotaging the rails.

many delays and extensions in the Affordable Care Act already. It must not cave on the individual mandate.

If you think the legislative obstruction is extreme — and it is — wait until campaign season heats up.

Republicans just won a special congressional election in Florida by relentlessly hammering the Democratic candidate about her support for Obamacare. Look for Obamacare to be front and center in legislative races this summer and fall.

Why are continuing attacks on Obamacare so effective even as growing numbers of people are benefiting from the law?

Well, there's been a barrage of distorted news about the Affordable Care Act since its birth in the U.S. Congress. We've gone from lies about "death panels" to breathless and mostly false stories about sick Americans forced to ante up thousands more for health insurance.

There's also the possibil-

ity that some Americans don't realize that the Affordable Care Act and Obamacare are one and the same. Actually, that's more than a possibility. TV host Jimmy Kimmel sent a reporter out to the streets to ask people whether they preferred one to the other, then aired some remarkably uninformed responses, like this man's interview:

"Do you think Obamacare is socialist?"

"Yes I do."

"Do you think the Affordable Care Act is socialist?"

"No."

And there's that word: Obamacare. Support for Obamacare indicates support for Barack Obama, the first black president of the United States. That's all it takes to send some voters running. Well-funded GOP interest groups recognize that dynamic and capitalize on it.

Barbara Shelly is a columnist for the Kansas City Star. Readers may email her at bshelly@kcstar.com.

Lasers may be answer to space junk

Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

If nothing else, the Sandra Bullock blockbuster "Gravity" made movie audiences aware of the very real problem of orbital space junk. What had once been an abstract possibility — floating debris triggering a cataclysmic domino effect that could endanger communication satellites, manned spacecraft and the International Space Station — seemed

real thanks to the movie's extraordinary special effects.

But even before the Oscar-winning film filled our heads with nightmare images of astronauts floating helplessly into the interstellar void, scientists on Earth were already looking at the problem. Later this year, the Space Environment Management Cooperative Research Centre in Canberra, Australia, will begin an ambitious

program of tracking an estimated 300,000 pieces of debris with the goal of zapping them with Earth-grounded lasers.

Using lasers to destroy a threat to the world's collective communications network is an elegant solution, given the sci-fi nature of the problem. Launching missiles at space junk would only generate more detritus for astronauts and satellites to dodge. But hitting it with lasers

would cause the scrap to slow down so that gravity could pull it toward Earth so it could burn up upon re-entry.

With funding from NASA, the Australian government and private investment, Australian scientists are confident they'll soon have a solution to this looming threat. If only the problem of climate change could be zapped as easily as space junk.

DOONESBURY



MALLARD FILLMORE

