

Opinion

The Wilson Times

WILSON'S 24/7 NEWS SOURCE IN PRINT AND ONLINE

MORE THAN A NEWSPAPER — A COMMUNITY INSTITUTION SINCE 1896

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THOUGHT FOR TODAY

So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another. (Romans 12:5)

PRAYER: Dear Father, help us to set aside our differences and work with Christians around the world, worshiping, serving, and glorifying you. Amen.

IN OUR OPINION

Reading banned books celebrates our Constitution

From national holidays and awareness months that highlight the battle against deadly diseases to the more offbeat designations — think International Pooper Scooper Week in April or Air Conditioning Appreciation Day in July — every day of the year carries some special significance. Occasions with local observances might merit a mention in the newspaper, but we couldn't name them all if we tried. September alone includes 615 holidays, according to the National Day Calendar.

When dedicated days for closely related causes overlap, however, it's worth reflecting on what those relatively rare calendar coincidences may be trying to tell us.

Saturday marks the first day of Constitution Week (Sept. 17-23), while Sunday is the start of Banned Books Week (Sept. 18-24). The former commemorates the U.S. Constitution's signing on Sept. 17, 1787, while the latter celebrates the founding document's First Amendment by promoting the freedom to read.

The Daughters of the American Revolution, the group that petitioned Congress to formally recognize the Constitution's anniversary, say the week is intended not only to study our history, but also to "emphasize citizens' responsibilities for protecting and defending the Constitution."

Enter Banned Books Week, an American Library Association project that combats censorship by cataloguing the latest book challenges and other misguided efforts to have materials removed from public libraries and school media centers. Many books that stirred controversy upon their release are now considered literary classics, and challenges often reflect the social or cultural concerns of the moment.

Here are a few banned and frequently challenged titles to ponder: James Joyce's "Ulysses." Ernest Hemingway's "A Farewell to Arms" and "The Sun Also Rises." Harper Lee's "To Kill a Mockingbird." Alice Walker's "The Color Purple." Not even the Good Book has escaped would-be censors' scrutiny. The ALA lists the Holy Bible as America's sixth most-challenged book in 2015.

This year and last year, books dealing with race, gender and sexuality — particularly those meant for young adult readers — have been the most frequently challenged works. In Granbury, Texas, law enforcement officers initiated a lengthy investigation into several Granbury High School library books in May despite the chances of a traditionally published mass-market book meeting the legal standard for obscenity ranging from infinitesimal to nonexistent.

"Free societies do not send police officers into libraries," Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression attorney Adam Steinbaugh wrote in a letter to Hood County Constable Chad Jordan following up on the Granbury High probe this week. "Doing so raises concern for the First Amendment rights of students and teachers who use school libraries and the librarians who serve in them."

Since public libraries are funded by American taxpayers, citizens feel uniquely invested in these important institutions. That's a positive that can be twisted into a negative when library users feel entitled to impose their personal tastes on fellow patrons by demanding that specific titles are dropped from a branch's catalog.

Libraries often rely on community support to supplement the public money they receive for operating expenses. That requires them to be responsive to patrons' concerns, and sometimes those stakeholders overstep, asking librarians to be gatekeepers rather than guides.

No one wins when books are yanked from the shelves due to public pressure. Whatever your politics, philosophy or viewpoints, the cudgel you wield today can be turned against you tomorrow.

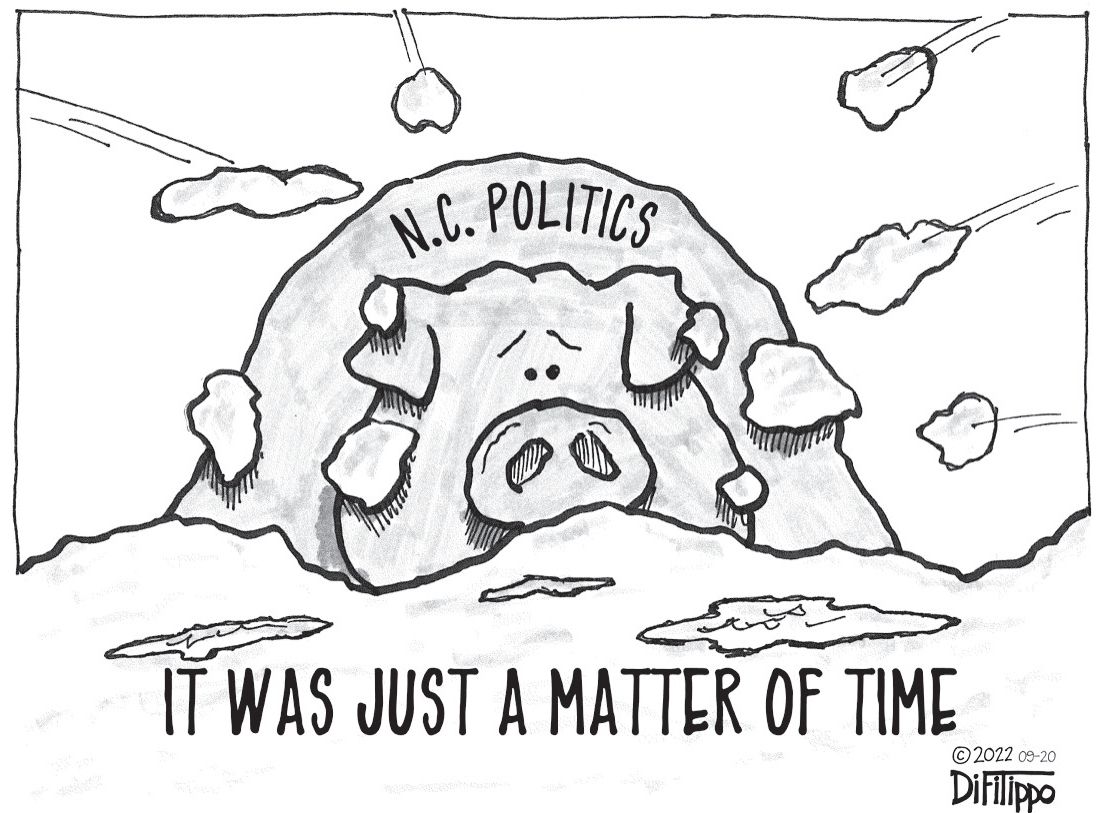
We endorse the ALA's Library Bill of Rights, which states that "all libraries are forums for information and ideas" and that "Libraries should challenge censorship in the fulfillment of their responsibility to provide information and enlightenment."

Libraries stock millions of titles for millions of readers. Every patron won't be interested in every book, and that's OK. Don't like it? Don't read it. Leave it on the shelf for others to peruse.

Parents have the authority to determine what their young children may read, but they shouldn't get to decide what's appropriate for others' children. If you're concerned about your kids' selections, skip the complaint form and make library visits a family outing so you can supervise.

Libraries are here for all of us. They promote no agenda beyond literacy, freedom of expression and freedom to read, and that's a message folks of all backgrounds, all faiths and all political stripes can get behind.

Thanks to serendipitous scheduling, Americans who are proud of our Constitution and the freedoms it guarantees can celebrate Constitution Week and Banned Books Week together this year. Maybe that will reinforce the fact that suppressing information and blocking access to books is an un-American tradition we'd be better off to retire.



LETTERS

Listen to Wilsonians pleading for their pools

There have been many talks and written words about political workings and decisions made at all levels and the governmental structures of our city, state and union. Dr. Susan Bane of the Barton College staff and our city manager, Grant Goings, have used misinformation and disinformation in recent written articles.

While most politicians and occasionally government offices use these words for their manipulation of the audience's opinion, Dr. Bane gave an excellent definition of misinformation as "mis- or wrong" and disinformation as "dishonest" information on purpose ("Medical facts to understand in a post-Roe America," WilsonTimes.com, Aug. 11). While Dr. Bane's subject is a major topic to our state and nation, my subject for this letter focuses on the public's right to have an opinion and share it with the representatives, even if the information may not have some "mis-es."

During a meeting of the City Council, six brave souls wore blue shirts and discussed a subject of local importance about closing the pools in our neighborhoods shared in an Aug. 23 Times printed copy ("Public presses city on pools," by Nicholas Schnitker, front page). They were justified in sharing their opinions, and I am proud of them. I was also pleased to see the "Keep showing up" opinion article (editorial, Aug. 23). I am also proud of the young man David Taylor and others who made the pool available for many through financial donations this past summer.

A subsequent article in a Sept. 6 printing ("City delays decision on pool bubble," by Nicholas Schnitker, front page) was so confusing that I'm not sure who or what was missing or dissing — disingenuous may be a better word. When Councilman Tom Fyle asked if the pool bubble was budgeted for the winter of 2022-23, and the answer was "we were never going to run a bubble alongside the Y after the Y was operational." The answer, hum? Then I read that the confusion and decision to delay a project was based on a meeting at the Reid Street Community Center.

So regardless of how much mis- or disinformation has been spread, it would seem that there was a plan for a splash pad and the end of certain aquatic services by the city parks and rec department when a local nonprofit could assume the responsibility for a fee. Maybe it wasn't voted on to "close the Reid

Street pool," but it certainly was in plans and attractive drawings that I seem to remember were presented to the City Council as the next best thing to reduced fees for city services.

I believe that the staff of the city of Wilson, like the staff of Wilson County Schools or the preachers and deacons of church, think that their ideas and plans are the right thing to do and will win the national award, highest scores and stars in their crown. But sometimes it's not what the people, our people, want or need, so they — our people — must use our voices in public settings to be heard.

We have all watched dreams shatter and felt the responsibility for failure. If we learn it is the time to listen, to hear — that may be the most difficult — and rethink our motivation and plans, then we can succeed.

As our local newspaper tells us, it is our responsibility to be involved. I'm am still proud of Sandra Lucas and Sandra's six swimmers in blue.

W. Barrett (Barry) Page
WILSON

Return our dogs

For the Love of Dogs has a particular problem right now. There are four dogs we would like returned to us from the Wilson County dog shelter that they are refusing to give back to us. We even have forms from the county saying we could pick up three of the dogs by Aug. 31 or the dogs will be considered abandoned.

Let me say that the dogs we are talking about were in quarantine for biting. All dogs will bite you. Most people have been nipped by their own dog. Only one of the four dog bite situations required stitches. However, if you go to the doctor with a bite, doctors must report the bite. That is the law.

The fourth dog did require stitches, and Della and I disagree about that particular dog returning here. That fourth dog was scared because he was tangled, and when they put the muzzle on him, they did not do a good job. He was scared, and when the muzzle came off, he bit Della and she needed stitches. When scared, a dog either covers or defends himself, just as people do.

I am writing this letter because I have no other recourse than to publicly protest the fact that these dogs are not going to be returned to us. I do not want to see those dogs killed because they are not adoptable. I am fighting to have these dogs returned. I hope the reason why the dogs can't come back is not personal.

There needs to be a way that a citizen can raise

objections to these kinds of decisions. Public opinion matters. There have been other people whose dogs have been killed even though they believed the decision was wrong. Many just would not speak up for their own dog.

Let's face it. Even if every person in Wilson County agreed with me that the dogs should be returned, there is not much I can do about the fate of those dogs.

That is why I propose a citizens review board made up of independent animal owners. That review board should have the muscle to make decisions. People who disagree with the disposition of the decision from animal control should have the opportunity to bring the facts to this board and have that board make the final decision.

In the meantime, I only want the return of the dogs. I don't want them to die. The county said they would return the dogs, and now they won't. Why not? The dogs don't deserve to die. Please return the dogs.

Max Fitz-Gerald
WILSON

Editor's note: Original claims of fact made in letters to the editor are subject to verification. The Wilson County Sheriff's Office said Max and Della Fitz-Gerald signed forms surrendering the four dogs to its Animal Enforcement Division and had 72 hours to revoke the surrender, but allowed that time to elapse without doing so. "Neither party contacted Animal Enforcement within the 72 hours they were given," sheriff's Chief of Staff Wanda Samuel told the Times. The sheriff's office says a veterinarian evaluated the dogs, determined they were too aggressive to return and recommended that they be humanely euthanized.

Vote for the candidate, not the party

If I've learned one thing over the last two administrations, it's to vote for the candidate, not the party — and that's what I'm doing.

I've been pretty much a Democrat my whole life until I met and got to know Ken Fontenot, a Republican.

He's a pastor.
A Marine.
A teacher.
He's served our country.
He's serving our church and community.

And he has served our children.

Now he wants to serve North Carolina.

In November, I'm voting for Ken Fontenot. You should, too.

Fred Campbell
WILSON

Tell us what's on your mind

The Wilson Times welcomes opinions from readers on topics of public interest. Letters that promote a commercial product, contain either libelous material, personal attacks on individuals or vulgar language, and those addressed to a third party, will not be published. Consumer complaints and letters containing unverifiable factual claims are ineligible for publication. Letters should be no more than 350 words, must be signed and should include the writer's address. A telephone number, which will not be published, should be included for verification purposes. Letters selected for publication may be edited and all letters become property of The Wilson Times.

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