

OPINION & COMMENT

"Congress shall make no law ... abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press." — From the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution

PENNSYLVANIA VIEWPOINTS

Guest editorials do not necessarily reflect the views of The Meadville Tribune

Pa. House GOP stifling debate

Republicans in the state House control the chamber with a 113 to 89 majority.

With those numbers in their favor it should not be that difficult for Republican state legislators to get bills passed

So why are Republicans in the state House using — or should we say abusing — a rarely used rule to stifle debate and ram through legislation?

When Philadelphia state Rep. W. Curtis Thomas, a Democrat, met with the editorial board of the Philadelphia Tribune recently, he expressed his concern with the use of House Rule 61, a rule in the House bylaws used to immediately stop any debate, bar further amendments and force a vote.

We share his concern.

Thomas said Rule 61 was invoked nine times between January and October 2011. He acknowledges that Democrats also invoked Rule 61 when they were in power but not nearly as frequently.

However Republican state Rep. Daryl Metcalfe of Butler County sees nothing wrong with the increased use of Rule 61.

Metcalfe said Republicans used the rule sparingly, "not even once a month," and charged some members with wanting to drag on debate to paralyze the House.

This is an incredible claim. Metcalfe is saying the rule is not being abused simply because it has been used "not even once a month." It is clear to see the abuse when you consider that it was only used 30 times in the 50 years between 1961 and 2010.

As far as debate dragging, the attempt to limit any debate on hot-button issue is the crux of what's wrong with the state Republicans abuse of Rule 61.

Rule 61 has been used on some "troubling issues," said Thomas including using it to get the voter ID bid to the Senate and to expand the Castle Doctrine allowing homeowners to shoot intruders.

Metcalfe said hot-button issues trigger more debate which he said make the use of Rule 61 necessary.

"When you're having more substantive debates, and having more substantive issues considered and brought before members, you're going to have more debates," he said.

Metcalfe and his fellow Republicans in the state House should remember that debate is essential to democracy.

— The Philadelphia Tribune

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Big 'plus-side' to this CATA ride

I am writing in regard to a service for seniors in the Townville-Guys Mills area. Perhaps many of you know about it, but it surprises me that very few take advantage of it. It's called the shared ride program offered by Crawford Area Transportation Authority. That, along with Active Aging, provides you with a nice trip into Meadville and a good meal for \$3 on Thursdays.

I never thought I would avail myself of the service, but I gave it a try and was surprised at how well I enjoyed it. The people are friendly, the food is good and you can't drive to town from this area for \$1, round trip. If you are ambulatory, Valesky's grocery store is a short block away, so I even am able to pick up a few staples for the week. I know others do some banking and shop at Rite-Aid and other merchants as well.

I have found myself look-

ing forward to Thursday knowing that I don't have to brave the roads, I get a day out, save on gas and, most importantly, someone else is doing the cooking and the dishes!

Should you be interested, contact the ladies at the senior center.

MARGARET PEER

Townville

City firefighters solve gas leak

My family and I would like to commend our Meadville Central Fire Department. A gas odor became apparent in our home the day after Christmas. I called the fire department and the response was immediate. They verified the leak and took all the proper precautions to make sure the house was safe.

I am extremely grateful to the department for handling this crisis. They provided peace of mind.

SUSAN SHEETS and

FAMILY

Meadville

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Meadville Tribune file photo

Veteran writer Joe Hurley's upcoming Route 6 travelogue is tentatively titled "10,000,000 Steps" and should be available in early March.

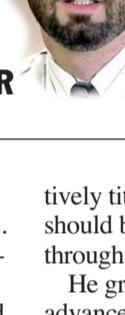
10 million reasons to like us

You know how you want to feel that your town is a special place, but there's always this nagging feeling that comes with that thought? You're never quite sure if all the good things you see are just you looking on the bright side. You're also never quite sure if you've experienced enough of elsewhere to have an informed perspective.

Affirmation from outsiders, particularly those who are well-traveled, is key to wiping away those doubts. And for Crawford County, one big, pat-on-the-back thumbs up is about to go nationwide with the publication of veteran writer Joe Hurley's upcoming Route 6 travelogue.

Tribune readers will remember Hurley's 2004 walk from Atlantic to Pacific on Route 6, America's longest and one of its oldest highways. From March to December of that year, the Tribune published weekly columns from Hurley as he described the interesting and unusual people, places and things he encountered along the way. It proved to be one of the most popular features we've published in years, and it was used for more than just entertainment — some teachers incorporated Hurley's journey into their classes. I still have vivid memories of the day Hurley

PAT BYWATER



walked through Lanesville, where local schoolchildren came out to line the route and welcome him to their town.

Well, after a delay caused by having to change publishers mid-project, Hurley's coming out with the book he planned to write after the journey. It's tentatively titled "10,000,000 Steps" and should be available in early March through his website, route6walk.com.

He graciously gave us access to an advance copy, and I can tell you that the quality of the writing and photography exceeds even that of the popular weekly features we published.

Formatted as a series of essays featuring stunning pictures, the book is equally prepared to keep you company for a few moments or hours at a time.

More importantly for Crawford County, however, is what Hurley writes about what he found here. You have to keep in mind that this is a fellow who walked 3,500 miles step-by-step through countless small towns like those here. He's got a wealth of experience to measure a community by.

As best as I could determine, only once in his 200-page-plus book does Hurley break out of his essay format and present what amounts to a personal note. It's titled "Meadville Heroes"

and is accompanied by a picture of Hurley being mobbed by the press and well-wishers the day he made it to downtown Meadville. It reads: "If I could, I'd personally thank all of the people who made my journey through Meadville and Crawford County a pleasure. People greeted me on the street, walked with me, beeped as they drove by, waved from their homes and offered gifts."

"Hundreds, perhaps thousands, of people welcomed Travis (photographer Travis Lindhorst) and me. It was beyond our expectations. I've been inspired by the kindness of people I met throughout this adventure, but in Crawford County I was overwhelmed by generosity."

Hurley's five essays on our area highlight examples of strong work ethic, the forgiving and generous nature of the people, a dedication to preserving the past, features that make our community distinctive and efforts to maintain and improve those features.

Taken in context, Crawford County really does stand out among the many tales told in this book. Maybe we are well justified in feeling good about our corner of the country. Certainly that's Hurley's message, one that he is soon to share nationwide.

Bywater is editor of the Tribune. He can be reached at 724-6370 or by email at pbywater@meadvilletribune.com.

Netherworld: U.S. as bad as ever

At the same time as President Barack Obama's State of the Union address to Congress last Tuesday night, a less publicized speech — no less significant — was being delivered before a joint session of Hades.

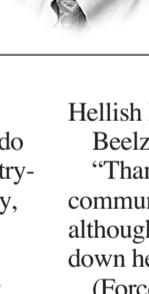
The hell you say? The Prince of Darkness does indeed give his State of Disunion speech on the same date. (He would do it earlier, but he's busy in December trying to spoil Christmas.) Unfortunately, some of you may believe that Mr. Obama's appearance and that of Beelzebub are one and the same. For that grubby partisan thought, you will one day have a front-row seat to see the sulfurous spectacle for yourself, unless you repent and turn off talk radio.

It has been seven years — a span of time wrapped in biblical significance — since I last reported about the infernal State of Disunion Speech. Because I have friends in low places, I was able at that time to secure an exclusive report.

But like Joseph's dream, the past seven years have been lean — although this is America, so they have also been fat — and my sources appear to have disappeared into the fiery pit. Don't you hate it when that happens? Of course, it is diabolically hard to report the news from the underworld. Its inmates can't tweet or send text messages, except when they are driving. For more substantial messages, they must use Fed-Hex or UPS (United Perdition Service).

By whatever means, the following report was delivered to me by a pitchfork-bearing messenger (not Newt

REG HENRY



Gingrich, although he does carry a pitchfork to ward off media types asking embarrassing questions).

The Master of Severing Arms welcomes His Foulness: "Disorder, disorder. Please rise for the Prince of Darkness and President and CEO of Hellish Enterprises Inc."

Beelzebub takes the podium.

"Thank you, members of the demon community, for your warm welcome, although, of course, it's always warm down here."

(Forced laughter from goblins) "It is my low honor and nefarious privilege to be able to give you the good news, which is to say, the bad news, that up on Earth there is an imperfect state of disunion!"

(Wild cheering from all levels of torment)

"Thank you, fiends, thank you. Everywhere you look, our disreputable cause is prospering, and no more so than in the United States, where the people have long bedeviled us by believing in American exceptionalism in matters of faith and freedom."

"Now it appears they are just exceptionally stupid. Between the party who couldn't organize a booze-up in a brewery and the one that is forever going on about morals but not actually living them, we are well placed — whoever wins the next election.

"In fact, we are taking no sides in that wretched contest, because when it comes to repugnant behavior, they seem to be doing fine on their own. Some of you young devils should nev-

ertheless take a leaf out of their book and form a super PAC for future evil-doing purposes.

"If it's one thing that we can verify in the Bible, it's that money is the root of all evil. And thank badness for us."

"While I could tell a lie for poor form's sake, I'll confess that the universal health care program pushed by the current president has been worrisome. Some say the road to hell is paved with good intentions, but in my experience bad intentions always do a better job."

"The idea that his medical insurance plan might cause families to avoid bankruptcy brought an acid tear of regret to this old jaundiced eye — and just when we are enjoying all the pain and suffering from the terrible economy."

"But the many attorneys who now enjoy our hospitality down here assure me that later this year we can depend on certain members of their Supreme Court to reject the law by reading the Constitution rigidly, so as to avoid any intelligence, common sense or humanity, let alone any remnant spirit of those wretched Gospels."

"And, no, we are not turning down the boiling water in their pots in exchange for the legal advice. If we went down that path, they'd soon be back to charging by the hour."

(Resounding cheers) "There's lots of bad news we can look forward to, and I will close now on that cheerful note because I know you are busy torturing souls."

"Remember, sometimes the darkest night is just the dawn of a darker day."

(Wild applause from cloven hooves)

Henry is a Pittsburgh Post-Gazette columnist. Email rhenry@post-gazette.com.

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