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 DuPage County
Daily Herald
 Paddock Publications Inc.
 Employee Owned
 Founded in 1872

Opinion

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“Our aim:
 To fear God,
 tell the truth
 and make money.”
H.C. Paddock
 1852-1935

Eyesore no more

Redevelopment of Aurora site highlights the benefit of public-private partnerships

The former Copley Hospital stood as an eyesore for nearly a quarter of a century on the east side of Aurora.

Its vacant buildings attracted vandals and trespassers. The deterioration of the 9-acre property at Lincoln and Weston avenues was affecting the neighborhood and community.

Our View
 “No one knew what to do or had the resources or where-withal to make something happen,” Aurora Mayor Richard Irvin said.

But that changed, thanks to some visionary and resourceful cooperation between a private company and several public agencies.

The city planned to spend as much as \$10 million to demolish the roughly 340,000 square feet of buildings and turn the site into green space. However, Irvin says he always



COURTESY OF FOX VALLEY DEVELOPERS

An artist's rendering depicts the Bloomhaven redevelopment of the former Copley Hospital site in Aurora.

hoped the property could be something more.

Then Fox Valley Developers LLC got involved in late 2017. The group

of local investors envisioned converting the campus into senior housing, residences for adults with disabilities and medical offices.

Fox Valley Developers started by removing asbestos, lead and other toxins from the buildings while securing and preserving the campus for redevelopment. It then worked with the city, Fox Valley Park District and East Aurora School District 131 to continue a \$128 million investment into what is now being called Bloomhaven. The city, for example, offered financial incentives for the project.

“This is the largest development ever on the east side of the city of Aurora,” Irvin said.

There has been significant progress made on the project. A former nurses' dormitory has become the new headquarters for District 131. And the park district has opened a small park with a playground and splash pad on the east end of the property.

Bloomhaven is providing a boost to the surrounding neighborhood.

City officials say there's been “a domino effect of positivity” because of the improvements made to the property.

Homeowners have a renewed sense of pride in the area.

Meanwhile, the housing on the campus is poised to open in the spring.

“We are where we want to be considering delays from COVID,” said Michael Poulakidas of Fox Valley Developers. “It's a testament to the public-private partnership and everybody working in unison.”

Bloomhaven is a prime example of what local governments can do if they work with the private sector to tackle big problems.

Neither the city of Aurora nor Fox Valley Developers could have transformed the historic campus alone. By working together, they breathed new life into the property.

Your Views

Local example of inept government spending

A recent insightful article highlighted the city government of Libertyville, which took taxpayer money, borrowed \$25 million to build a sports and recreation facility, which drained more taxpayer money every month, and is now close to selling it to a well-run capitalist company, for \$3.75 million.

One of many recent examples of government overreach, costing taxpayers the freedom of using their hard-earned money on things they want to spend it on, instead forced to pay higher taxes so it is spent on collectivism ideas in a Marxist Socialism structure.

Arrowhead banquet hall comes to mind, with government supported restaurant and party facilities that compete against free market businesses like Abington Banquets, Moments on Main and Medinah. Reserve 22 at Village Links is another example, where millions of taxpayer dollars were put to use to directly compete against the taxpayer business owners of Fire & Wine, Noble House, Marinellas, etc. Putt-putt golf, horseback riding camps, health clubs, the list goes on ...

What's next, The Salon & Barber-shop of Wheaton/Glen Ellyn Park District to compete against The Busy Bee? The Marxist Socialist possibilities are endless. As they consider a multi-trillion-dollar government spending program, Congress should study history like the Libertyville example to learn. Save America and kill the bill.

Chris Gould
 Wheaton

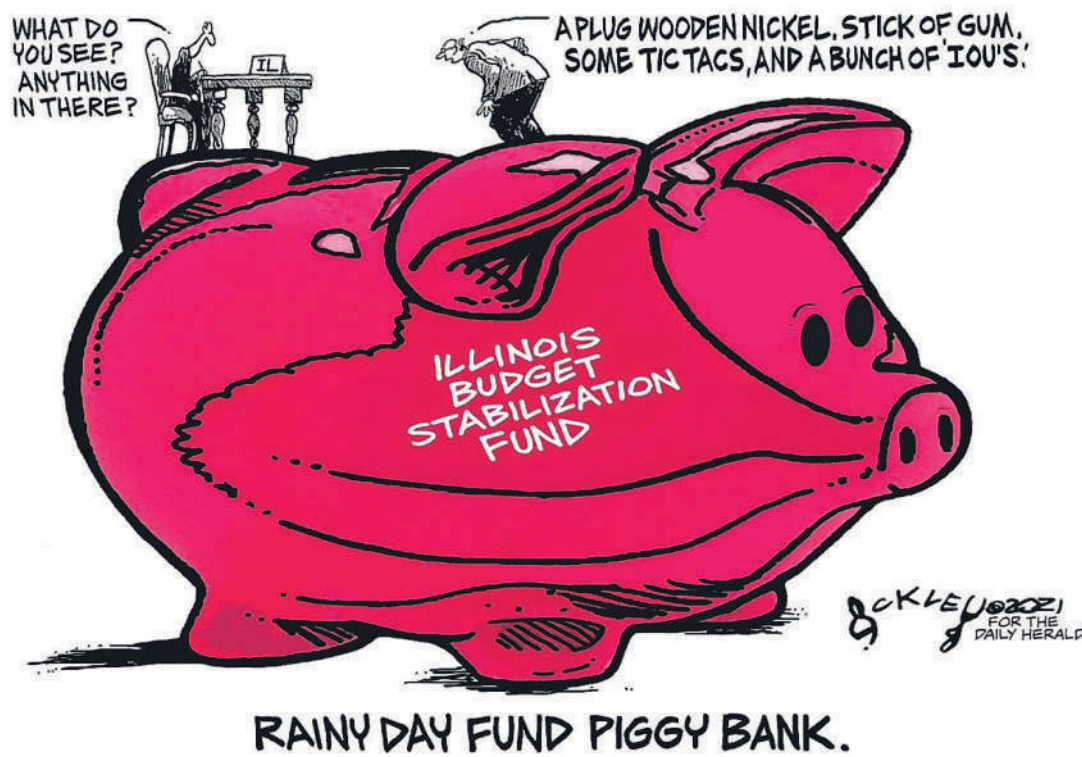
A different view of school boards

If I weren't certain that Mr. Casey's letter to the editor “A crackdown on parents” was real, it would be laugh-out-loud funny. Is he talking about the same “elitist school board members” who spend countless hours, with no compensation, working toward the betterment of the districts they support? Or the schools they represent? Or the children their science-based decisions impact?

Is it possible the school board heard the pleas of the vocal minority and found them without merit?

The puppets I see here are those who listen to conspiracy theorists, and right-wing media while failing to learn the truth. The crackdown on parents should be on people who put not only their children at risk, but also the school staff and the children their children are in contact with every day.

Bruce Parker
 Arlington Heights



Don't let Congress jeopardize Illinois' medical miracles

COVID-19 brought with it not just sickness and death when it hit America early last year, but also great national gloom. In fact, when Dr. Anthony Fauci said at the time that it would take 18 more months to develop a COVID-19 vaccine, the scientific community thought he was being “ridiculously optimistic.” Vaccines take years to develop, they said, not months.

Turns out the good doctor was actually being too pessimistic. Just eight months after he made his prediction, we had not one but two vaccines approved for use in this emergency. In the United States, 57% of the population has been fully vaccinated, with 66% receiving at least one dose. The figures for Illinois are comparable: 54% fully vaccinated, and 69% with at least a single dose.

All this may seem miraculous, but there was no miracle involved. The speed at which U.S. scientists were able to develop vaccines for a novel virus was the result of decades of painstaking research in industry labs. Financed largely by the industry itself, this fund of knowledge has vastly expanded our understanding of disease and created breakthrough treatments and cures once thought impossible.

For more than 30 years, the U.S. biopharmaceutical industry has been the world leader in the research and development of new medicines. In 2018 alone, the industry invested an estimated \$102 billion in research and development. As a result, nearly three-quarters of the drugs currently in development are first in class — meaning they represent entirely new

approaches to fighting a particular disease. There are 4,395 clinical trials underway for many of these drugs in Illinois alone.

The COVID-19 vaccines developed by Pfizer and Moderna were created using a new technology based on messenger RNA — a way to provide antibody-making instructions directly to a cell. As one expert described the process, “the human body itself is effectively turned into a vaccine-making factory.”

The benefits of this breakthrough are incalculable — particularly for our most vulnerable populations. The science used to create these vaccines will spin off new lifesaving treatments and leave us far better positioned to take on future infectious outbreaks. In fact, Moderna just announced that it'll soon launch clinical trials for an HIV vaccine that harnesses mRNA technology.

Now, you might think that lawmakers in Washington would be looking for ways to further encourage or at least preserve success on this scale. But there are those, including in this state, pushing for legislation that will do just the opposite. Congressional Democrats have included a measure in their budget reconciliation package that would impose price controls on virtually every brand name medicine.

While the proposal has superficial appeal — after all, pharmacy costs are too high — any

price-setting scheme would do more harm than good. Giving government bureaucrats broad authority to determine which medicines are available — and at which price — would inevitably lead to restricted access today and fewer medicines tomorrow.

That'd be devastating for our state's vulnerable patients. Millions of Illinoisans suffer from life-threatening chronic conditions, ranging from diabetes to Alzheimer's to cancer. Minority Americans often suffer from these diseases at particularly high rates — a contributor to the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on Black and brown communities.

Upending the nation's drug market would also hurt the economy. Our state serves as one of 10 pharmaceutical hubs in the country and is home to companies like Abbott Laboratories, Charles River Laboratories, AbbVie, and Baxter International. More than 290,000 jobs in the state are directly or indirectly tied to the life sciences industry.

So it rests with congressional Democrats who are interested in bipartisan and pragmatic policy making to stand up for funding for science and the benefits it brings our state.

We've been witness to one of the most profound benefits of scientific innovation. The last thing we should be doing now is to jeopardize our therapeutic ecosystem in pursuit of an illusion of lower drug prices.

• Jay Fisher, of Lisle Township, who served as a member of the Lisle-Woodridge Fire District Firefighters' Pension Fund and sat on the board of directors of DuPage Public Safety Communications.

A death and the American Dream

You could say he fell in the middle of the store because the store is so small that nearly every part of it is in the middle.

But the store is not in the middle of the block. It's on a corner. Where else would you open what has always and forever been called a “corner store”?

And the windows are covered with paper ads for off-brand cigarettes, and the state lottery has a sign up in the place telling you to call if you have a gambling problem. And there are 21 separate varieties of lottery tickets sold. Soon, it'll be time for happy Frosty the Snowman and jolly old St. Nick to start showing up on the tickets.

The store sells nothing much that's good for you, and if it does, that's not where it makes most of its money.

Baloney. Frozen pizza. Quarts of that cheap ice cream that's mostly air. One brand of everything except for the huge array of cigarettes. Cheap, little toys made of bright plastic that break on the walk home. Candy. A jar full of incense sticks. The label on the side of the incense jar says “Midnight Love.” Half a shelf of disposable diapers because midnight love has consequences. Soda, the tough full sugar stuff in grape and orange and coconut, far overshadowing the few covering bottles of juice. Nothing much that's good for you. No fresh vegetables. No “artisan” anything. Mass-produced sugar, salt, tobacco and the long-odds lottery ticket called “Set for Life.”

You come to America from another country, shaky hands rolling the dice in your head. You buy one of these stores. You do 20 years behind the counter, selling sugar, salt, tobacco and long-odds lottery tickets, you can wind up half rich, parking a Mercedes out in back of the store.

The guy who owned this store got gunned out a few nights ago by a robber the police say is light-skinned with a tattoo on the back of one hand. Nothing more.

Where did the store owner come from? Does it matter? Another brown-skinned man with a smile, making sure the drunk or high customers don't forget their keys or wallets in the counter. A name you couldn't pronounce from a country you can't find on the map.

“Is that near Iraq?” some chatty junky would ask the owner. “My cousin was in Iraq.”

“No. No.” the owner would answer and explain where he was from to a jittering pile of skin with poison in his blood.

His name was Lal Kishor Mehaseth. He was 54, a little pudgy. “Lal” is the word in Hindi for the color red. Two customers found him behind the counter. They called 911 and ran. They didn't feel safe. He was dying, then, in a room too small to have a middle or edges.

It's not much of a story. Happens too often. If you took a map of the United States and put a pin with a red knob on the end in every spot where an immigrant store owner got gunned out, you could close your eyes and run your hand over the map, and it would feel like you were caressing diseased skin. Which you would be.

I didn't do a lot of my shopping in that store. It's not like they sold steaks or lettuce or the good ice cream. I bought cigarettes there and grape soda and a popsicle when the weather was hot. Nothing much good for me. His fingers touched mine, brown on white, and he'd give me back two quarters and a dime in change. He'd say, “Thank you,” and I'd say, “Take it easy.”

The blood was behind the counter, under the rack of lottery tickets, chances at The American Dream.



Marc Munroe Dion

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We welcome your comments (300-word limit). Letters must include your full name, town and phone number. Letters are subject to editing and may be posted online. We do not guarantee publication of every letter.

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