

## Star News Editorials

### Arts education continues to be important

On September 11, 2001, terrorists crashed planes into the World Trade Center in New York, the Pentagon in Washington, D.C. and a fourth plane was brought down in rural Pennsylvania. In reaction, U.S. air space was closed and all flights grounded. This resulted in nearly 7,000 airline passengers forced to land in Gander, Newfoundland until air space reopened.

While those incidents are sharp memories for many adults, for high school students, many of whom were born a half a decade or more after those events, they are ancient history up there with the moon landing and the Wright Brothers flight.

During last weekend's Red/White Spotlight show, Medford choir students sang "Welcome to the Rock" from the musical "Come From Away" which was written about those events. Through the power of music and song and dance, what had been just an historical footnote in a textbook came alive.

The ability of the arts to broaden understanding and appreciation of cultures and histories as well as promoting civic engagement are core reasons why arts need to continue to play an important role in all levels of education.

The selection was just one of many songs and skits that showcased the talents of these young performers and which challenged them to go outside their comfort zones and rise to the challenge and take the spotlight.



ELIZABETH WILSON/THE STAR NEWS

Performers sing a duet during the recent Rib Lake Showcase event which featured the musical and singing talents of students at Rib Lake Middle and High School.

Putting yourself out there on center stage is a terrifying aspect to many people, regardless of age. The arts give an opportunity for people to break out of their introverted technological bubbles and emphasize other

areas of social and emotional development. Young people involved in music and theater are able to find their voice and the confidence to stand up and be heard.

These same skills will come into play later in life when, as adults, these individuals are called on to a leadership position in their workplace or become involved in their community.

Beyond this, the arts have the ability to bring people together in a shared experience. This was true for the hundreds who shared in one of the four Red/White Spotlight performances last weekend or who came and enjoyed a community dinner and celebration of music at the Rib Lake Showcase on March 10.

Tight budgets have become the standard for schools in Wisconsin and across the country. In times of fiscal belt-tightening there are those who would look at the arts as being "extras" and not essential to the education of students.

This type of thinking is short-sighted. The arts remain vitally important to the education of today's young people and to communities as a whole.

The students who performed in Rib Lake and Medford in recent weeks demonstrated the importance of the arts in education and well-represented their schools and communities. Community members must do their part and ensure the arts continue to be priority in education.

### Ballot measure is more about playing politics than seeking solutions

The welfare ballot question is a referendum in search of a problem.

Wisconsin voters are being asked to weigh in on a problem that doesn't exist.

In addition to the local municipality and school board races in the upcoming spring election on April 4, voters will be asked to weigh in on a non-binding statewide referendum asking if welfare recipients should be required to look for employment to receive benefits.

On the face of it, this seems like a common sense thing to support. Just as the saying goes, "The Lord helps those who help themselves." So, too people should be willing to work if they want to receive support.

In fact, this was such a common sense thing to support in Wisconsin, that it was a key component of Gov. Tommy Thompson's Wisconsin Works welfare overhaul that was signed into law in 1996.

The Wisconsin Historical Society describes the program as "a pioneering piece of welfare legislation that became a national model for welfare reform. Signed into law in 1996 by Wisconsin Governor Tommy Thompson, W-2 replaced Wisconsin's benefits-based system with one that required individuals to find work while providing money for both school and child care."

This begs the question of why, 27 years later, Wisconsin voters are being asked to weigh in on a statewide referendum asking if we still think it is a good idea?

The referendum is a blatant political

stunt targeting those who have the belief that there are vast numbers of lazy people sponging off the state's welfare system rather than seeking gainful employment.

Proponents of the Republican-backed referendum say the question is necessary to address worker shortages across the state.

There is no doubt that Wisconsin is seeing a labor shortage, especially among traditionally low-paying jobs in the service sector. However, the factors aggravating that problem have little to do with welfare reform, and much more to do with people being able to earn a living wage working one factory job rather than stringing together multiple minimum-wage service sector part-time jobs. Compounding this is the ticking demographic time-bomb, especially in rural areas of the state, where there are simply not enough young people entering the workforce to replace older workers.

Wisconsin has already required people who get public support to be employed or seeking employment. A new statewide referendum has the sole purpose of agitating a group of voters to get them to come out to the polling places on election day.

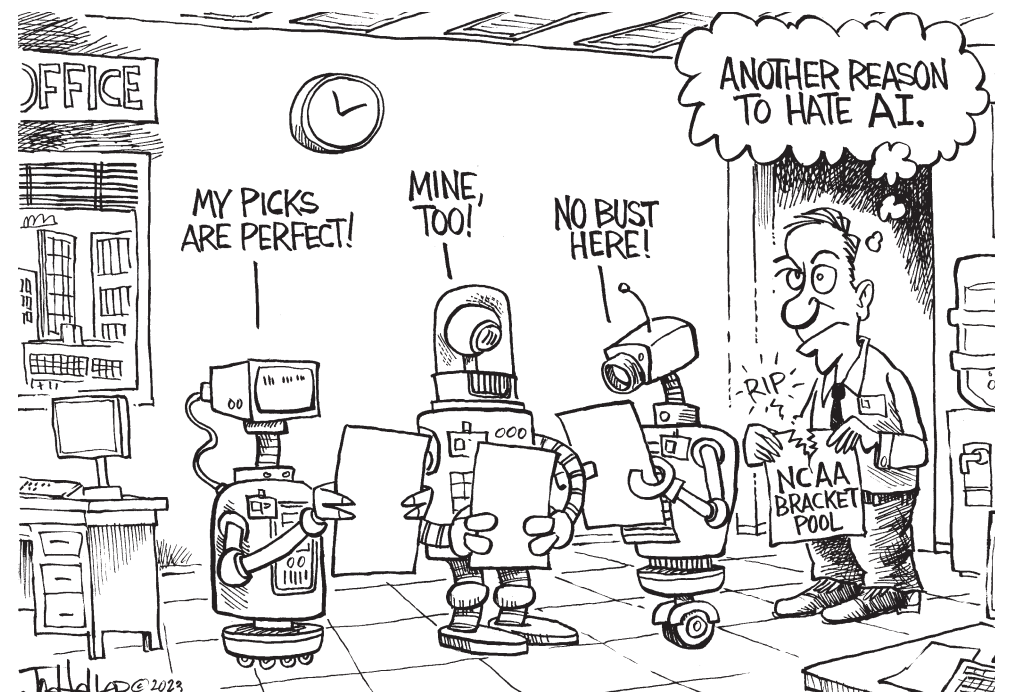
The state's time and energy would be better spent toward addressing real issues that keep the working poor from climbing out of poverty. Things such as finally accepting the federal Medicaid expansion would allow people access to health benefits while working at lower-wage jobs, or allow them to take the raise or promotion

without losing all benefits. Under the current cut-offs, there are arbitrary income levels at which support payments for things like childcare cut off. This effectively greases the rungs and causes those attempting to climb out of poverty to fail.

Rather than using the tired bugaboo of

welfare free riders to rile up apathetic voters, Wisconsin leaders should instead be focusing efforts on how to allow all those in the state to have jobs which ensure a quality of life for themselves and their families.

Members of *The Star News* editorial board include Publisher Carol O'Leary, General Manager Kris O'Leary and News Editor Brian Wilson.



### Star News Quote of the Week:

"This is an employee driven idea. When employees come up with an idea that consolidates and makes it run more efficiently, I think they deserve the chance to make it work."

— Lester Lewis, about a plan to combine the real property lister office and surveyor office into a land information office.  
See the full story on page 1

**Write a Vox Pop:** Vox Pops, from the Latin Vox Populi or Voice of the People, are the opinions of our readers and reflect subjects of current local interest. All letters must be signed and contain the address and telephone number of the writer for verification of authorship and should be the work of the writer. Letters will be edited. No election-related letters will be run the week before the election. E-mail: [starnews@centralwinews.com](mailto:starnews@centralwinews.com).

The mission of *The Star News*, as a local, community newspaper, is to support democracy by publishing editorials and letters to the editor that stimulate thought and discussion. Due to the ongoing divisiveness following the recent U.S. presidential election, we have decided to put in place a moratorium on editorials and letters that would further inflame partisan rancor and ill-will within our community of readers. We need a period of quiet so we can begin to listen to one another. The newspaper will continue to run editorials addressing issues that have local impact on our communities and readers. *The Star News* welcomes Vox Pops (letters to the editor) from our readers that address local issues and things that we cover in *The Star News*.