OPINION

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OUR VIEW

As we enter the holidays, we offer gratitude to our veterans

Editor's note: A version of the following editorial has appeared on previous Veterans Days in this newspaper.

America is built on representative government and capitalism, two institutions that recognize how fickle humans can be.

The marketplace of ideas we call politics and the marketplace of products we call free enterprise both assume that people are pliable creatures, likely to change their minds in a hurry. We honor choice as a national birthright.

But the country's freedom is protected by men and women who give up a world of choices so we can continue to have ours. They are the Americans who serve in our military, a call that doesn't indulge inconstancy or caprice. They deserve our honor this Veterans Day — and every Veterans Day.

This year's commemoration is especially resonant because it comes in the year after the Marines, Army and Navy all celebrated their 250th birthday, and in the year this nation celebrates its official semiquincentennial. The conjunction of these birthdays reminds us that our freedom was bought through courage and sacrifice.

One cannot easily opt out once a commitment to military service is made. And when the battle is joined, we ask brave men and women to risk their lives to defend this nation's interests. It's not a sacrifice that can properly be undertaken on a whim, shaped by the latest poll numbers or focus groups.

That's why those long rows of white tombstones at our nation's military cemeteries are such a resonant part of the American landscape. They demonstrate, in a country touched by flux and equivocation and the endless mutability of opinion, that there have always been warriors who embrace principle as a fixed star, not a fashion statement.

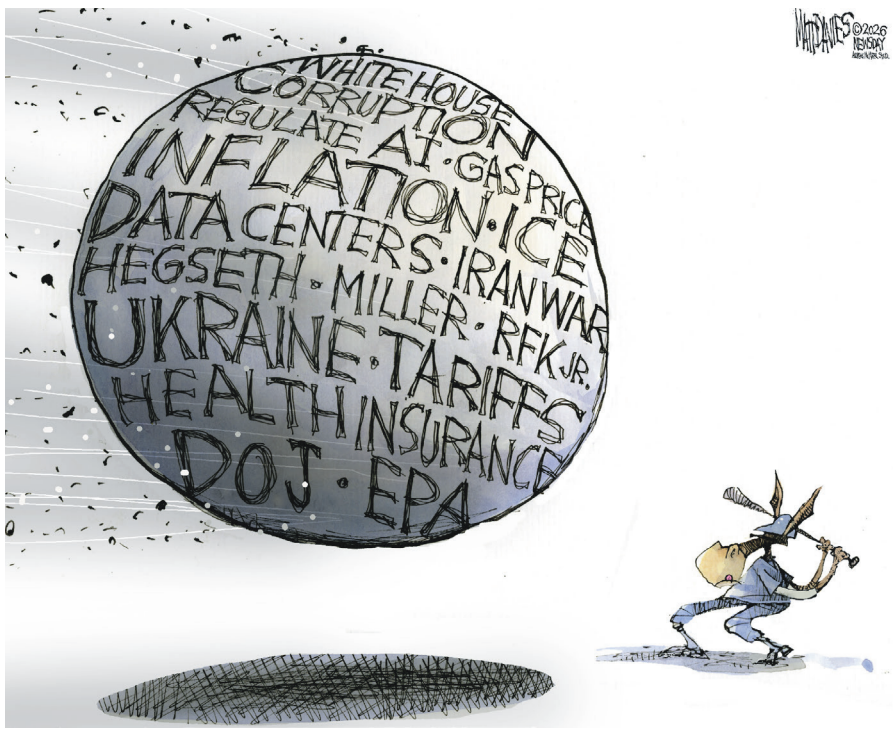
Tiny American flags bloom from those cemeteries every Memorial Day, the day we set aside to honor the nation's war dead. Veterans Day recognizes both the heroes who have passed and the veterans yet with us — the ones we can still find in our neighborhoods, our churches and temples, the grocery store. They bear living witness not only to the privilege of liberty but to its costs.

Not all members of the military see battle during their service, but there are other hardships in serving in America's armed forces. The profound pain of separation from family, the loss of privacy, the boredom — these are no small things. It is right and good that we should acknowledge those sacrifices each November, as the holidays approach. This Thanksgiving and Yuletide season, as in every year, soldiers and sailors and airmen will be serving far away from home.

Today, we pause, in a month marked by gatherings for gratitude, to say thanks to our veterans. Their contributions are easy to overlook, but we forget their service at our peril.

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YOUR VIEWS

Give non-college-bound kids a trade by eighth grade

I am a painter from Springfield, in Livingston Parish, writing about the schools that hand 18-year-olds a diploma and almost nothing they can use. They can compute tax on a purchase but not say where the tax goes; quote an interest rate but not read the fine print under it.

My proposal: Teach life's arithmetic (taxes, loans, real household budgets) alongside the basics and standard English for every child. Stop promising every child college; by eighth grade give the trade-minded a first-class trade track. In our parishes that means the plants: one grammar of pumps, pressure and process, taught to a standard specification.

Let industry fund the training it needs, and let companies bid on graduates before graduation day: a starting wage and a published ladder of advancement.

It will not erase inherited advantage. It puts the rest of our kids on average footing: a wage, a ladder and a skill that travels.

RICHARD MISTRETTA
Springfield

Industrial permit change would harm neighbors

Re: "Guest Column: Permitting reform at the federal level will help La. jobs," Nov. 6.

The Nov. 6 column's case for permitting reform leaves out the people living beside these projects. Black communities have disproportionately borne far more than their fair share of industrial burdens.

The bill, S. 5653, would weaken environmental and historic preservation review and communities' ability to challenge unlawful approvals.

Culture and heritage create jobs. Destroying historic places threatens those livelihoods and Louisiana's future economic viability.

Pollution also adds up. A new plant's effects come on top of what residents already endure from neighboring facilities. Reviewing each project separately hides the full burden on families already surrounded by industry.

Residents deserve a meaningful say before another project adds pollution to their neighborhood. Sens. Bill Cassidy and John Kennedy should oppose this bill as written.

VINCENZO PASQUANTONIO
human rights and policy adviser
The Descendants Project
Vacherie

Pay attention and stay involved

I am a registered independent voter from Louisiana, where my choice for senator lost. I am, however, relieved my country won.

Although recent elections nationally went overwhelmingly for Democrats, the real winner is the people who elected them — who cared about high prices, the war, healthcare, corruption and the rule of law.

Going forward, notice the priorities that Congress decides and how its time is spent.

How do they work with each other to get things done?

I hope in two years each of us will vote not on party but on the candidates and the issues that will come up in the next few years.

Meanwhile pay attention, stay actively involved.

JANE METCALF
Baton Rouge

Vote was about much more than war

It wasn't just the war in Iran, fuel prices, tariffs and inflation that drove the blue wave, despite the Republican Party attributing their loss primarily to the war.

It was a rebellion against the divisiveness, fearmongering, mean-spiritedness, unkindness, belittling, labeling, culture wars and disrespect that have been the practice of much of the Republican Party and their mouthpieces at state, local and national levels since the emergence of the "bomb-throwing," confrontational playbook in the 1990s.

The majority of patriotic Americans have just had enough.

RICHARD HIRSCH
Livonia

When will church reveal credibly accused abusers?

How ironic that the front page headline of your Nov. 7 edition reads "New Orleans Catholic Church adds 27 priests to list of credibly accused in sex abuse scandal," when the metro section features a story about Cardinal Wilton Gregory's visit to Loyola University. While here, Gregory engaged, according to your reporting, in a "question-and-answer session with university President Xavier Cole" and met with some local students.

This is the same Wilton Gregory who in 2004, when serving as archbishop of Atlanta and then president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, declared that the Catholic church's sex abuse scandal was "history."

Clearly, however, what's past is still present: the painful aftermath of many crimes of sexual abuse against children. Moreover, the pain caused by these crimes has been aggravated, to this day, by the bankruptcy filings of the Archdiocese of New Orleans and nearly 40 other dioceses across America, and by the Catholic church's refusal to accept full responsibility for its sex abuse crisis.

Full responsibility, of course, would entail the church telling the whole truth and nothing but the truth: that is, publishing in full and in a timely fashion the names of all credibly accused abusers in its ranks.

MICHAEL P. KUCZYNSKI
New Orleans

Our carbon dioxide is killing the planet

For most of our Earth's history, levels of carbon dioxide (CO_2) in the atmosphere have ranged between 180 and 280 parts per million.

When CO_2 levels were around 280 parts per million, the corresponding Earth temperature could sustain life. When CO_2 levels where around 180 parts per million it was the time of ice ages.

For the first time in the history of Earth, CO_2 reached 300 ppm in 1950. Today CO_2 levels have reached 425 ppm. It's an unheard-of rate of change to a level our world has never experienced.

Carbon dioxide in the Earth's atmosphere acts like a blanket, holding heat in and preventing it from being released back into space. The more the CO_2, the thicker the blanket. The thicker the blanket, the warmer our world gets.

And just like being under a blanket, it takes a while to warm up. Earth has just gotten under the blanket and temperatures have just started to rise.

It is very clear: As the species that is killing our planet, we must be the ones to save it. Please take action today. Our world needs you.

RON SADLER
Baton Rouge

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