

OUR VIEW

AN OBSERVER EDITORIAL

Controlling city cuts friends out

There's an old adage, "If it ain't broke, don't fix it." We believe that saying fits the war between the City of Rio Rancho and the Friends of the Library of Rio Rancho nonprofit, a war that appears to be over. The city won, but the Friends — though wounded — will continue to be an ally to book lovers.

Here at the *Observer*, where we really appreciate people who read and enjoy it, we are having a hard time deciphering what made this 37-year relationship dissolve. We can't see anything unfair or wrong with what the Friends have done in the city.

We don't have the advantage of being involved in the private negotiations, much less the ability to read minds. But as far as we can see, the issue seems to be the city administration getting more control, since control and more work to do are all it's gaining from the end of its relationship with the Friends.

City representatives complained about the Friends maintaining a reserve fund, but they take pride in the one the city maintains at levels far about what's legally required. Why can the city have a reserve when the nonprofit can't?

Yes, part of the Friends' reserve is for a third library, and we agree with city management that one isn't needed now. But the existence of that reserve doesn't force the city to build a library.

Friends gave far more money to libraries than it kept in reserve.

In June, the library director and an assistant Rio Rancho city attorney said the city would take all donations made to the Friends of the Library, take over Friends' monthly book sales and bookstores, and require all volunteers to be city volunteers.

But, fired back the Friends, a 2018 Memorandum of Understanding signed by the city and the Friends stated, "The city agrees that all donations from the public, and such materials culled from the libraries and donated to the Friends are the sole property of the Friends."

Last month, Acting City Manager Peter Wells terminated the MOU. So much for keeping promises, eh?

The Friends had to remove their donations and equipment from the libraries.

They're renting space with money that could be used to support libraries.

The city will use paid library staff or try to recruit new volunteers to manage library donations and book stores, since it has alienated many volunteers it already had. The city will also need to spend money to replace the Friends' equipment, which had been provided for free.

We don't see how the city and Friends having to spend more money on overhead costs, meaning less on programs, benefits anyone.

As an independent non-profit public charity, the Friends plan to continue to exist, have book sales when the pandemic eases and support literacy in a new location.

That, of course, is good news for the reading public. But how and where the book sales will be held will be problematic, unless an owner of an empty building allows that space to be used, or something similar can be worked out.

The Friends have thousands of books stored and hauling them to and from the Loma Colorado auditorium for sales has been an ordeal. To move the books and book carts a longer distance will be back-breaking.

With the demographics of the Friends — senior citizens, for the most part — back-breaking could be more of a literal than figurative statement.

We hope Rio Rancho's libraries continue to be gems, and we're glad the Friends are still around to support libraries and literacy. It's unfortunate they aren't doing it together.

Gov. does not follow science from COVID-19

Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham has stated repeatedly that "science" is guiding every decision she makes. Efforts to obtain the "science" driving her public-health orders have been unsuccessful.

Is that because there isn't any?

Since the governor continues to claim she is following science, the question is: What and where is the scientific evidence influencing her policy?

As an example, in a letter sent July 22 to New Mexico Human Services Department Cabinet Secretary David Scrase, I asked what scientific evidence the governor or his agency follows to support the closure of indoor dining service in New Mexico restaurants and breweries in every county and municipality.

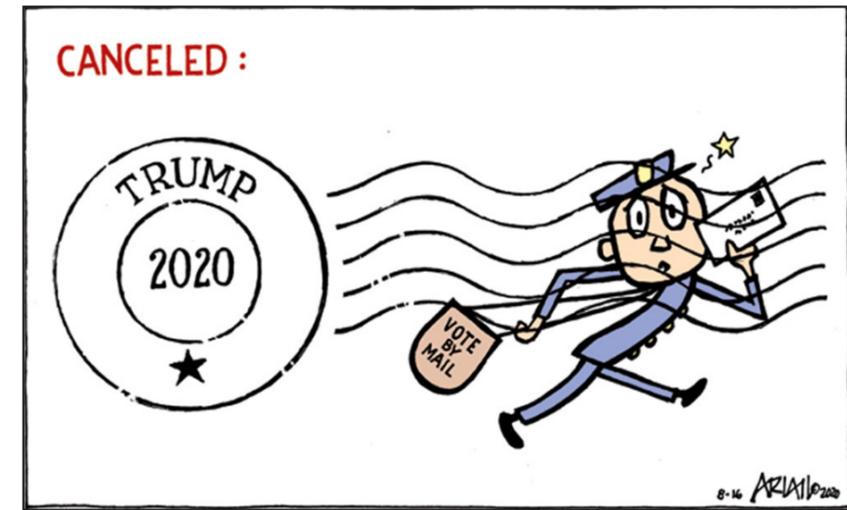
No scientific evidence was shared. Dr. Scrase did provide a link to Johns Hopkins University's "Public Health Principles for a Phased Reopening during COVID-19: Guidance for Governors." His citation of the study identifies nothing to support a ban on indoor dining and no recognized expert is cited as a basis for the ban in New Mexico, or anywhere.

Another example is camping. Our state parks have remained closed to overnight camping since March 15. Yet, camping is one of the least-risky activities we can do.

The administration puts up charts to back up public-health orders, but is unable to quickly release the data those props are made from.

When I have requested data, I've been

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told they will have to search for it and it may take weeks.

How can you claim you're making decisions based on science when you have to go find the science you've used to support your decisions? Is this a case of putting the cart before the horse?

Where is the data showing dining in a restaurant or camping is more likely to expose us to COVID-19 than going to Walmart or the gym?

When I asked Dr. Scrase how the governor or HSD can be certain those who tested positive for COVID-19 contracted the virus in a New Mexico restaurant and brewery, I was told "it is not possible to trace the source of the virus in all known cases." In the meantime, the governor continues to point her finger at restaurants as the cause of infection.

What science compelled the governor to allow visitation in high-risk long-term and acute care facilities where, as of July 28, more than 1,350 residents and employees have fallen ill with COVID-19 and more

than one-third of all COVID-related deaths were residents of these facilities?

No COVID-related deaths from having dinner in a restaurant have been reported, so it is perplexing that the governor will not lift restrictions on indoor dining.

The governor must recognize there is no one-size-fits-all approach to reopening communities and businesses. She must trust local-level leaders to make assessments based on risk levels in their cities and towns.

Community stakeholders must be included in decision-making. And, as long as the governor's conclusions about science are now law, New Mexicans must be entitled to see the science for themselves.

So, I ask again, is it science or science fiction influencing the governor's policies, and will we ever know?

(N.M. Sen. Craig Brandt of Rio Rancho is a Republican representing District 40 in Sandoval County. He is the Senate interim minority whip.)

GUEST COLUMN



N.M. SEN. CRAIG BRANDT

Business lone rangers

Are you a lone ranger saving businesses?

I remember when the only good guy or hero wearing a mask in the west was "The Lone Ranger"?

How times have changed. Today we are all being asked to wear a mask to keep everyone safe and prevent spread of this awful virus.

The mask has become a requirement by a number of states, including New Mexico. Many people are making wearing a mask fun with a wide range of logos, designs, prints and colors to brighten someone's day. Some people don't want to wear a mask at all, due to a medical condition or because they feel it is their right to not wear a mask.

No matter how you feel about masks, the true fact is not wearing a mask is endangering small businesses across Rio Rancho, Sandoval County, Albuquerque and all of New Mexico. If wearing a mask opens our restaurants, retailers and service providers, then we need to show our support of their efforts and wear a mask to reopen.

We all have a small business we love in this community, and we all know a small business owner who is trying to stay afloat with reduced occupancy, closures or whatever they have experienced during this pandemic.

Keeping our small businesses open is a team effort. Creating a successful business takes the combined energies of a busi-

GUEST COLUMN



JERRY SCHALOW

Desperado Las Vegas

Typically, when you tell people you've just been to Las Vegas, they ask how much you won and what shows you saw.

In 2019, when I was in the Sin City variety of Las Vegas, since I don't gamble, I didn't win anything; as for a show I saw, it was "Piff the Magic Dragon." Fast-forward to 2020 and my answers are "nothing" and "none."

That's because this Las Vegas trip was a day trip north on I-25 to the original Las Vegas, the one in New Mexico.

About the time ATSF railroad came through in late 1879, it was the biggest city between San Francisco and Independence, Mo. (Think about that for a minute.) It rivaled Tucson, Denver and El Paso, and six trains rumbled through there daily.

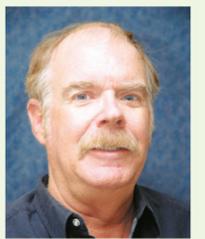
I'll admit, I lived here in New Mexico for at least 40 years before finally visiting Las Vegas, and that initial trip was only brief, following a few hours at nearby Ft. Union.

But the more I learn about Las Vegas, N.M. — remember, I am a "lifelong learner" — the more time I want to spend there.

With the late 1880s growth came a distasteful element: outlaws, bunco artists, murderers, soiled doves, thieves — leading noted historian Ralph Emerson Twitchell to proclaim, "Without exception, there was not a town which harbored a more disreputable gang of desperadoes and outlaws than did Las Vegas."

Billy the Kid, Doc Holliday and Wyatt Earp weren't strang-

GARY'S GLIMPSES



GARY HERRON

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Irish-millennials impress a baby boomer

Sally Rooney's "Normal People" (2019) explores the bond between Marianne Sheridan and Connell Waldron, two millennials from the west of Ireland, whose class differences impede their relationship, while their anxieties and sexual proclivities prevent their feeling as they think "normal people" feel.

Marianne and Connell are classmates; both are quite bright, but that is where the similarities end. Marianne is rich, socially awkward, and an outcast at school, who "is considered an object of disgust."

Connell, however, is popular and good-looking, well accepted by his peers and not rich. In fact, his mother, Lorraine, works for Marianne's mother as a housekeeper, and in the first chapter, Connell is picking up his mother from work.

This opening chapter, which is only seven pages long, establishes the class differences that separate Marianne and Connell, and hints at their mutual anxieties and sexual insecurities. Marianne's house is described as "the white mansion with the driveway," while Marianne herself is described as having "an open contempt for people in school," wearing thick-soled shoes, not shaving her legs and being "considered an object of disgust" by other students.

Connell is described as not wanting

to be left alone with Marianne, whom he considers to be the smartest student at school, and yet "fantasizing about things he could say to impress her." This early in the book, the tension between Connell and Marianne is palpable and sexual.

This opening chapter drives the rest of the book. Connell and Marianne begin an on-again-off-again sexual relationship they keep well-hidden. Although they enjoy one another's company and are compatible sexually, Connell worries what his friends will think of him for being with Marianne, an object of disgust.

Marianne's complicity in keeping their relationship secret reveals what little regard she has for herself and is heartbreaking and infuriating.

"Normal People" is a character-driven novel, and, as such, it is difficult to provide a synopsis of it. This is not a typical love story, if it is a love story at all.

The book is more an exploration of what it means to be sexually and emotionally intimate with another and how challenging true intimacy can be. The book also delves into sexual masochism and its possible roots.

I loved this book; as a result, when I

finished it, I researched Rooney and discovered first that she identifies as a Marxist. Other reviewers mentioned Marxist themes in "Normal People." I didn't notice themes, although characters discuss Marxist theory.

I also discovered Rooney's considered the first great millennial writer. I have no quibble with her being called great; she is definitely a solid writer, and I'll read her again. However, to refer to her as a millennial writer diminishes her talent, suggesting that she's great for a millennial writer but not up to par with non-millennial writers.

Additionally, the millennial tag could possibly limit Rooney's audience. I'm a baby boomer, and I think other boomers would like this book as much as I did. The audience for "Normal People" is not simply millennials; it's anyone who appreciates beautifully written, character-driven novels.

(Maureen Cooke has been writing, editing and teaching others to write for the past 30 years. Currently, she's working on a mystery novel and a memoir. She's a member of the Corrales Writers' Group.)

FROM MY BOOKSHELF TO YOURS



MAUREEN COOKE

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