

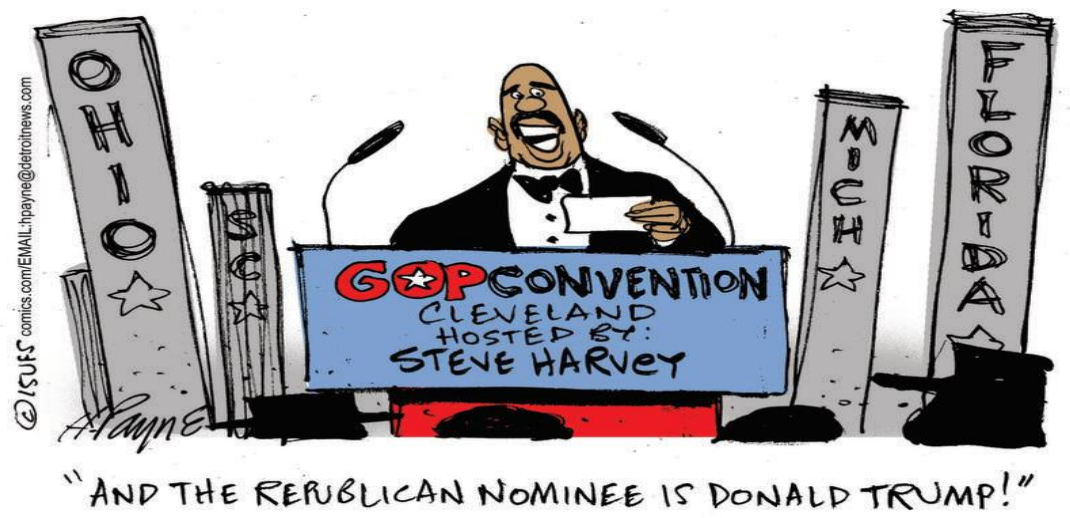
The Detroit News

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Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

— FIRST AMENDMENT TO THE CONSTITUTION

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LETTER
 Story shows need for stronger safety net

Re: The Dec. 9 Detroit News story “Homelessness, asthma force family to give up children”: The story of Siretha Lattimore, Dwayne Cole and their son Malik, is unfortunately, not unique in Michigan or throughout the nation. The experiences of this family are all too common in today’s child welfare system. Malik’s story reads like a Greek tragedy, but it’s an American one. Working full time and barely getting by on \$24,500 per year, losing their home and spending time in shelters, transitional housing, and sleeping in their car, Malik’s family had to make some heart-breaking choices. Many readers may have found it shocking that parents Siretha and Dwayne ultimately had to place their kids in foster care in order for their children to receive the care they needed. Time and time again we’ve witnessed families confronted with financial hardships, either because of a series of un-



Daniel Mears / The Detroit News
 Siretha Lattimore with her son Malik Cole

fortunate events as in the case of Malik’s family, or due to long-standing poverty. Lack of housing, transportation, and often, access to counseling and treatment services, are recurring themes in child welfare cases throughout the country. By all accounts, Malik’s family was loving and caring, but survival on a single, low income was fraught with risks. What choice did parents Siretha

and Dwayne have? In the same situation, and with children with severe health conditions, what would you have done? So where was the failure in our protective systems in this story? Should case managers have flagged the need for emergency services earlier perhaps? If they had, would there have been enough and sustainable help to prevent the final tragedy of a family torn apart? Some states are successfully shifting from the traditional adversarial model of child neglect and abuse investigation and developing “differential response” strategies. These offer families a continuum of holistic services that allow children to remain safely at home. States

are also making better linkages between child welfare and various economic supports. In Michigan, we have made strides in that direction, but have been stymied by disinvestment over the last decade that has resulted in cuts to basic needs programs and child-abuse and -neglect prevention strategies. Without state investment in these strategies, we are overly reliant on federal funding opportunities and philanthropy to assist families in these circumstances. A recent proposal introduced in Congress is part of the answer. The U.S. Senate Finance Committee will soon consider the Family First Act, a bill aimed at keeping children in the child welfare system safe, supported at home, and in family-like settings, rather than in protective custody. By providing states access to federal Title IV-E funds — the largest federal funding stream for child welfare — to invest in a range of holistic services for children and their families, including preventive and

family services, the legislation would help build states’ capacity to keep children out of the foster care system. The bill includes funding for short-term crisis intervention assistance to help stabilize families like Malik’s when they most need it. Short-term financial assistance would be made available for necessities such as utilities, rent, food, child care, and car payments. In Malik’s case, funding from the program could have been used to keep his family together, in their own home, before ever having to move to transitional housing, shelters, and eventually, their car, or the streets. This legislation would provide a critically important funding source to support states in their existing efforts to provide a broader array of services to vulnerable children and families. **Michele Corey,** Michigan’s Children **Bruce Lesley,** First Focus Campaign for Children

Metal detectors in place of action on gun violence

BY MARY SANCHEZ
 The Happiest Place on Earth can only remain so by bracing against the possibility of children being mowed down by assault weapons as they await a turn on the Seven Dwarfs Mine Train roller coaster. Walt Disney World, along with other theme parks, just caved to the threat of a mass shooting and will use metal detectors or handheld wands at the entrances. It’s a sign of our times. And it’s not a very uplifting one. Some see this as preparedness in the face of our new normal, but it’s really an abdication. Disney is locking itself up because Americans are starting to accept that nothing else can be done. It happens because politicians are unwilling to do anything to actually make us safer in the form of expanded background checks or limits on gun ownership. You can’t blame people for being scared. The sites of the most horrific gun attacks now form a grim shorthand: We speak of Columbine and Aurora and Virginia Tech, and now most recently San Bernardino. The third anniversary of the slaughter at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Conn., passed with little notice as Disney installed its new detectors. Sandy Hook — where 20 children died — was the attack we all thought was so horrendous that it would spark movement for better forms of background checks for firearms purchases. Not so. “Metal detectors are here to

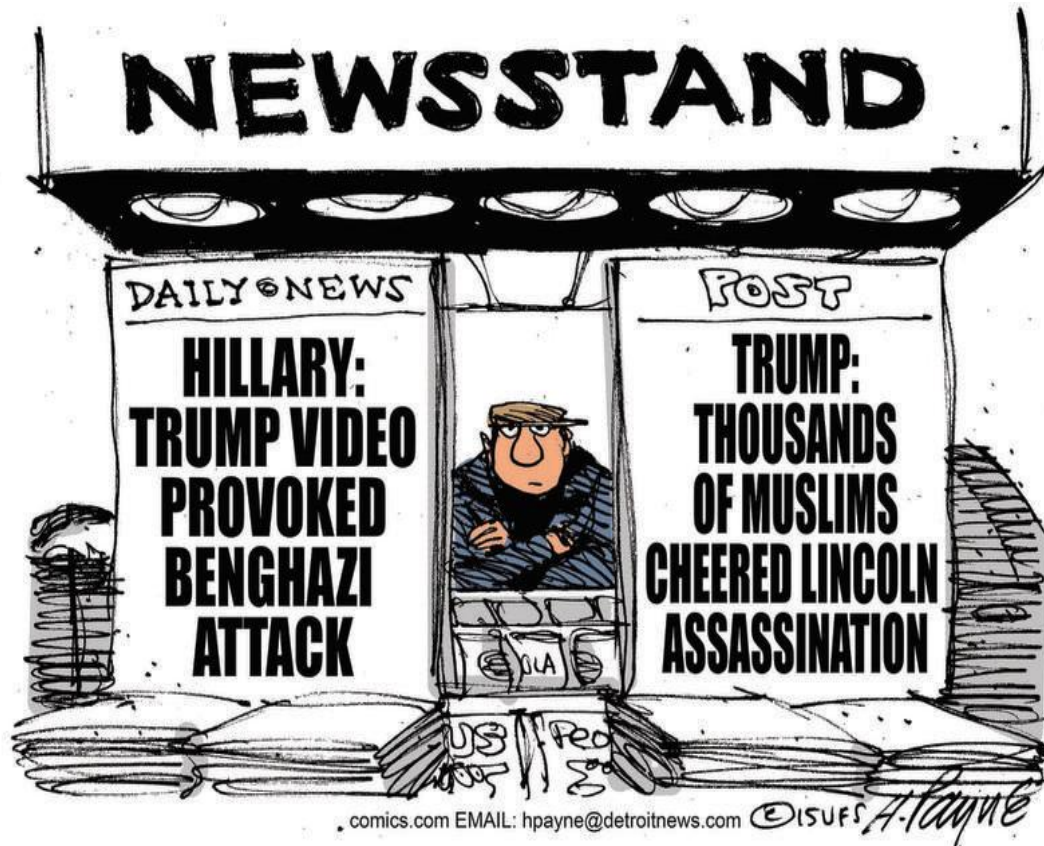


Mark Humphrey / AP

Metal detectors at Walt Disney World are a sad sign of the times, Sanchez writes.

stay as part of society at schools, hospitals, theaters, at sporting events, theme park analyst Dennis Spiegel told the Tampa Bay Times. “You are going to see more and more of this type of security instituted because it’s one of the first things they can do.” The last part of his statement is key: Bracing with higher security is what societies do in lieu of the more difficult measures. Polls show Americans support expanding background checks for all gun purchases, and want to keep guns from the hands of people who are dangerously mentally ill. Why don’t we also expect elected officials to do what they can to keep guns away from those who wish to cause harm? Instead, we batten down the hatches, assume that everyone is carrying a gun, that a mass shooting can occur anywhere and it’s up to businesses to protect their customers.

Mary Sanchez is an opinion-page columnist for The Kansas City Star.



Mental health agency touches one in four

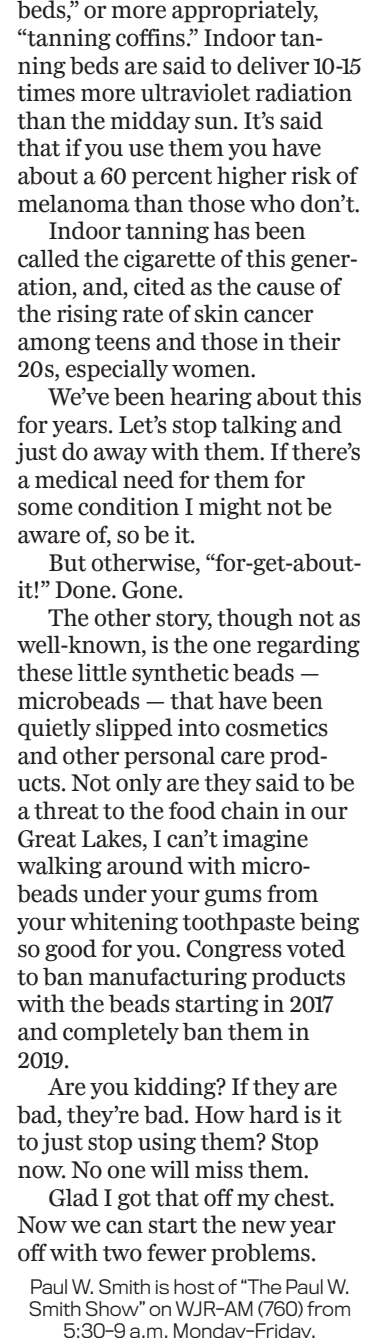
BY TOM WATKINS
 The Detroit Wayne Mental Health Authority and its community partners, we have accomplished a great deal to improve the lives of some of our most vulnerable citizens: persons with serious mental illness, children with emotional disabilities, persons with substance use disorders and individuals with developmental disabilities. We must not lose sight of the fact that an illness or disability from the neck up is just as real as a disease from the neck down. One in 4 people today are touched by the services we provide through the DWMHA. The Authority was recently awarded \$13.2 million to offer mobile crisis stabilization services, crisis intervention, pre-admission screening and related services. This initiative will ultimately reduce costly emergency room services and inap-

propriate incarceration. DWMHA has trained over 10,000 citizens, first responders, clergy, teachers and average citizens in “Mental Health First Aid.” The Authority recently allocated over \$21.5 million to provide a \$1 per hour increase to direct care staff workers in Wayne County. These individuals work on the front lines in groups homes, usually earning just minimum wage to provide personal care and skill-building for persons with severe mental illness and intellectual and developmental disabilities. Since becoming an authority, separating from Wayne County government, we have eliminated nearly \$30 million in legacy costs and generated the same figure in new revenue to expand services. In 2015 the authority served as one of the demonstration sites for the state’s MI Health Link program. MI Health Link

is designed to test a new payment and service model to improve coordination of services for Medicare-Medicaid enrollees, enhance quality of care and reduces cost. We take pride in the Opening Minds, Ending Stigma documentaries supported by the Flinn Foundation which exposes the broader community to the stigma associated with mental illness. We will continue to assure our system of care remains consumer and community-focused, data-driven and evidenced-based. We are confident that through engaging our community, we will continue to add value and make a difference. Need mental health services? Contact our 24/7 crisis line: 800 241-4949. Tom Watkins is the president and CEO of the Detroit Wayne Mental Health Authority.

Problem solving ahead of 2016

Hard to believe, but it’s come to this. Today is the last Saturday of the year. The last weekend of 2015! I will truly never be able to figure out how some weeks seem to last forever, while at the same time, the year zips by. “If I were king!” Or maybe just Donald Trump, we might do things a little differently. For example, we wouldn’t drag out stories like the saga of “tanning beds,” or more appropriately, “tanning coffins.” Indoor tanning beds are said to deliver 10-15 times more ultraviolet radiation than the midday sun. It’s said that if you use them you have about a 60 percent higher risk of melanoma than those who don’t. Indoor tanning has been called the cigarette of this generation, and, cited as the cause of the rising rate of skin cancer among teens and those in their 20s, especially women. We’ve been hearing about this for years. Let’s stop talking and just do away with them. If there’s a medical need for them for some condition I might not be aware of, so be it. But otherwise, “for-get-about-it!” Done. Gone. The other story, though not as well-known, is the one regarding these little synthetic beads — microbeads — that have been quietly slipped into cosmetics and other personal care products. Not only are they said to be a threat to the food chain in our Great Lakes, I can’t imagine walking around with microbeads under your gums from your whitening toothpaste being so good for you. Congress voted to ban manufacturing products with the beads starting in 2017 and completely ban them in 2019. Are you kidding? If they are bad, they’re bad. How hard is it to just stop using them? Stop now. No one will miss them. Glad I got that off my chest. Now we can start the new year off with two fewer problems. Paul W. Smith is host of “The Paul W. Smith Show” on WJR-AM (760) from 5:30-9 a.m. Monday-Friday.



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