

Your Opinion Counts

The Citizen Tribune's editorial page provides an open forum for the public to exchange ideas and opinions. We urge writers to stick to the issues in their letters, avoiding personal attacks. Libelous statements and inappropriate language are not acceptable.

All submissions must be signed by the writer and include an address and telephone number for verification of authorship.

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Got an opinion?

Don't want to take the time to send a letter to the editor?

We still want to know what you think. Go to our website, www.citizen-tribune.com and click on the link to our weekly poll question and vote.

Last week we asked, do you give political weight to endorsements by a celebrity? Ninety-eight percent said no; two percent said yes.

This week, should O.J. Simpson be allowed to have a Twitter account?



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Editorial

Numerous challenges face new UK prime minister

"Never again," said the Conservative world, after Theresa May walked into the Tory leadership underprepared and unscrutinised three years ago. Next time, everyone insisted, candidates for the premiership, and their plans for office, should be put under the microscope. And yet here we are, in the week of the first ballot for choosing the next prime minister, and the most probing question being asked on TV and radio of the contenders is: what drugs did you take when you were younger? The unsurprising answer, like many people of their generation, is that, yes, most of them tried illegal substances at some point.

It's almost 30 years since Bill Clinton admitted smoking marijuana, 25 since Barack Obama confessed to taking cocaine, and 15 since David Cameron said politicians were entitled to a private past. It's time to move on to the serious questions that face anyone who wants to be prime minister. Let's start with the biggest: who has a plan to unblock the impasse over Brexit? Threatening a no-deal departure is hollow, because there isn't a parliamentary majority for one and (thankfully) no realistic way to stop Parliament meeting to express that majority. Promising a renegotiation with the EU, and wishing away the Irish backstop, isn't something anyone in the rest of Europe believes is credible. Passing a version of the existing deal on the table was something Mrs May failed three times to achieve.

Perhaps they can drive Brussels into submission; perhaps an Irish border commission involving the Republic might find a way through; perhaps a new leader will be able to reassemble a Tory majority. We need to see the evidence. To those who say they can deliver Brexit by October 31, we simply ask: how? To those who say they would be prepared to delay beyond that, we ask: how will that help? The very least the public deserve is that those who want to enter Number 10 in a few weeks' time are grilled seriously on their Brexit plan. The same applies to the other policy pledges that are coming thick and fast.

A leadership contest is a time for new ideas, and it's right that — as the saying goes — in democracies we campaign in poetry and govern in prose. So we're not asking for every detail of every policy. But some idea of how things will be paid for is necessary if the country is not to be further misled by those who govern it.

Raising the tax threshold at which people pay 40 per cent beyond £50,000 is a solid Conservative idea that builds on what has already been achieved. Every modern society will want to invest in education but why have the Tories given up talking about the reform that means investment will be well spent? We want more housing but where are you going to build it? We'd all like to provide decent social care without raiding people's homes and savings but the answer has eluded numerous governments. Using the "headroom" in the public finances to fund all these commitments, as the candidates suggest, is code for "we'll borrow more". There's nothing intrinsically wrong with that, if you explain it means a bigger national debt than would otherwise exist, and then higher taxes and spending cuts in the future.

Nor can candidates hide behind their "conscienceness" on social issues. Reducing the abortion limit is not solely a matter of personal belief when you're a legislator whose beliefs could impose serious, health-threatening restrictions on millions of women. Let's hear how you can morally justify that. And where is the debate about the disruption coming from technology? How do we harness all the exciting possibilities of artificial intelligence, genomics and robotics while mitigating the potential harm?

We've heard precious little. What we've had instead is more a replay of the Tory best hits from circa 1990. Britain faces the greatest political crisis for a generation. The foundations of our economic prosperity and security are threatened. We face profound change in our society. It's time the questions to our leaders matched the seriousness of the task that lies ahead of them.

-The London (England) Evening Standard



The value of the U.S. Postal Service cannot be dismissed or overlooked

Your readers were well served by the newspaper's recent editorial, which addressed the continuing value of the U.S. Postal Service and the need for constructive legislative reform.

Given the Postal Service's importance to Morristown, to The Volunteer State and to the entire country, a few additional points are worth making.

The Postal Service is based in the Constitution, because the Founders understood the role it would play in unifying this vast nation while also serving as the center of civic life in thousands of communities from coast to coast, including many small towns and rural areas.

It offers residents and businesses the industrial world's most affordable delivery network, relying on earned revenue—not taxpayer dollars—to do so. USPS is the centerpiece of the national mailing industry, which employs 7.5 million Americans—226,075 Tennesseans among them.

Nearly one in four letter carriers is wearing his or her second uniform, and the Postal Service is the country's largest employer of military veterans.

As many of you know, letter carriers do more than deliver the mail—they also seek to improve the communities they serve. One form that takes is conducting the nation's largest single-day food drive, which helps feed tens of millions of Americans—a particularly important goal given that almost 50 million people

in this country, including millions of children, senior citizens and military veterans, are unsure where their next meal will come from.

The annual event is held the second Saturday each May, and last month's 27th food drive was again a resounding success, thanks in part to the generosity of Morristown residents. The timing is key here, because food pantries, church shelves and shelters generally are running out of the donations from the winter holidays even as summer looms, with most school lunch programs not in operation.

The role of letter carriers in the community also is evident on a daily basis, as they help by spotting signs of someone in distress, such as mail piling up; by putting out fires; by stopping crimes in progress; by rescuing residents after automobile accidents; or by finding missing children. They do these things not because they are supermen or women, but rather because they often are first on the scene, know the neighborhoods and can tell when something's wrong, and have a commitment to the individuals and families on the routes they may have delivered for years or even decades.

But what of, you may wonder, the red ink you've likely heard about? Has the Postal Service turned into a dinosaur in the age of the internet?

Nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, precisely because of the internet, online shopping

has led to a sharp rise in package deliveries—and many of those are delivered by the Postal Service. More in fact, than by any of the private companies. In fact, in addition to its own deliveries, the Postal Service does "last-mile" delivery for millions of FedEx and UPS packages as well as those of other private carriers; because letter carriers already go to every residence in the country six or even seven times a week, USPS can provide less-expensive delivery for customers even as it earns revenue itself.

More than 90 percent of postal red ink stems from the 2006 congressional mandate that the Postal Service—alone among all public agencies or private companies—pre-fund future retiree health benefits decades into the future. That \$5.6 billion annual burden accounts in recent years for 100 percent of financial losses; in fact, over the past half-dozen years, the Postal Service has averaged almost a billion dollars in operating profit (i.e. absent this political mandate).

If lawmakers from Tennessee and elsewhere address this flawed public policy, the Postal Service can continue to provide folks in Morristown as well as Americans everywhere the top-notch service they deserve and depend on—along with all the other benefits that accompany this service.

-By Fredric Rolando, president, National Association of Letter Carriers

Let's end unwanted robocalls once and for all

Every day, millions of Americans receive calls from unknown numbers. Thinking it might be someone they know trying to reach them, they answer but low and behold, it is a robocall. I too receive these countless unwanted calls that are not just annoying but harassment. Many of these calls are made by automated bots that target individuals in our district. In my first term in Congress in 2009, I was proud to support the Truth in Caller ID Act, which made the consequences of initiating spam calls severe and resulted in more than \$200 million in fines in 2018. However, robocall spammers have stayed a step ahead of our laws and there is still much more work to be done.

Whether it is through townhalls, letters, phone calls or Facebook, I have heard repeatedly from constituents that these calls are still a serious issue and I am listening. That is why I am proud to join my friend and Tennessee colleague Rep. David Kustoff in cosponsoring his TRACED Act, which will combat robocalls by broadening the authority of the FCC to charge civil penalties of up to \$10,000 per call on those who intentionally flout telemarketing restrictions and will extend the timeline of the FCC has to take

civil actions against violators from one year to three. Importantly, this legislation will require services providers like AT&T, Verizon and Sprint to update their authentication technologies so that carriers can identify false calls.

Despite our past efforts, the number of robocalls are still increasing and more than 48 billion robocalls were made in 2018. In 2017, only 3.7 percent of total calls in the US were scam calls; in 2018 that number increased to 29.2 percent. To make things worse, that percentage is expected to jump to 45 percent in 2019. In East Tennessee, the total number of robocalls placed in 2018 to area code 423 was over 197 million, and to area code 865 was over 126 million. Over the course of five months in 2019, there have been over 115 million calls to 423 and over 79 million to 865 — already over half of what is was last year.

Robocalls affect people everywhere — making many feel vulnerable — with Tennessee

seniors being one of the biggest targets. One in five seniors are a victim of fraud, and seniors lose an estimated \$2.9 billion from financial scams each year. With nearly 27 billion robocalls classified as scams out of 30.5 billion total calls in 2017, it is easy to understand why our seniors and their families are concerned. Mallory Cross, a Senior Programmer of the Slater Center in Bristol, Tennessee, which serves around 2,000 seniors, said: "Working here at the Slater Community Center, I have heard how our seniors feel about these robocalls. Many feel disconcerted and worried because they are being taken advantage of. Some have said they feel angry and targeted. It is unfair that our seniors are victims of these calls, and as a worker here it hurts to see them upset or confused."

I am also pleased that the Trump administration is making this matter a priority. The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) and the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) both are taking action to crack down on these abusive callers. The FCC proposed a \$120 million fine against an individual who reportedly made almost 100 million spoofed calls in 2017, and recently finalized a pro-

posal to make it easier for voice service providers to aggressively block unwanted robocalls based on reasonable call analytics before they reach the customer. Additionally, on March 26, 2019, the FTC successfully settled charges with four separate organizations that were running illegal robocall operations; all four are banned from making telemarketing calls and will pay significant fines. One charity scam, "Operation Donate with Honor," saw one individual have the audacity to use fake veterans' charities and illegal robocalls to get people to donate for his own financial gain. This disturbs me to my core that someone would use our nation's veterans as a fraudulent tool to harm others.

I am very hopeful that with our continued efforts to combat these calls, we can end robocalls once and for all. I also want to encourage each of you, to register your phone number on the FTC's National Do Not Call Registry to help protect yourself from telemarketing calls here. Please don't hesitate to reach out to me on this or any other matter in the future.

-Dr. Phil Roe is the U.S. Representative for the 1st Congressional District of Tennessee.



Rep. Phil Roe