

THE FOLLOWING EDITORIAL represents the view of The Joplin Globe's editorial board. Members of the editorial board are: **Andy Ostmeyer**, editor, aostmeyer@joplinglobe.com; **Emily Younker**, managing editor, eyounker@joplinglobe.com; and **Jerry Willis**, design editor, jwillis@joplinglobe.com.

OUR VIEW



Missouri Department of Transportation workers repaired a bridge on Interstate 44 over Main Street in Joplin in 2020. A chunk of the bridge decking had broken loose and opened a hole in the I-44 bridge.

GLOBE FILE

Parson I-70 plan not road tested

We remain skeptical of Gov. Mike Parson's plan to use nearly \$1 billion of the state's surplus for widening projects along I-70.

The money would widen more than 50 miles of roadway in suburban St. Louis, suburban Kansas City and Columbia, while also improving a bottleneck interchange at Interstate 70 and U.S. 63.

That would still leave around 140 miles of rural I-70 with two lanes in each direction.

We are not opposed to the I-70 improvement if it is the highest need, but Parson hasn't made the case that it should be prioritized over other interstates, including Interstate 44 or other highway projects.

Other state lawmakers also want to use the money on projects that would benefit their area.

All we ask for is the numbers. Show us that congestion is worse there than other areas of the state. Show us that accidents are more frequent and more severe. Show us which highway projects will have the greatest economic development return. If I-70 wins those arguments, then we're on board.

We like a lot of what the governor proposed in his State of the State speech earlier this year, but were hesitant to get behind this from the beginning.

The Missouri Department of Transportation keeps a list of priority projects, and widening I-70 was not on the list of projects that will move to the revolving five-year funding plan as money becomes available, according to Republican critics of Parson's plan in the House.

One of those, according to reporting by the Missouri Independent, is state Rep. Don Mayhew, R-Crocker, who also is a sponsor of a proposed amendment to the Missouri Constitution that would transfer authority over state road funds from the Highways and Transportation Commission to lawmakers, who would be in charge of highway spending.

That is another bad idea.

Lawmakers would politicize the highway priorities. We urge the protection of the commission's independence to allow engineers, planners and professionals to keep the wheel, so to speak, and to follow long-term plans.

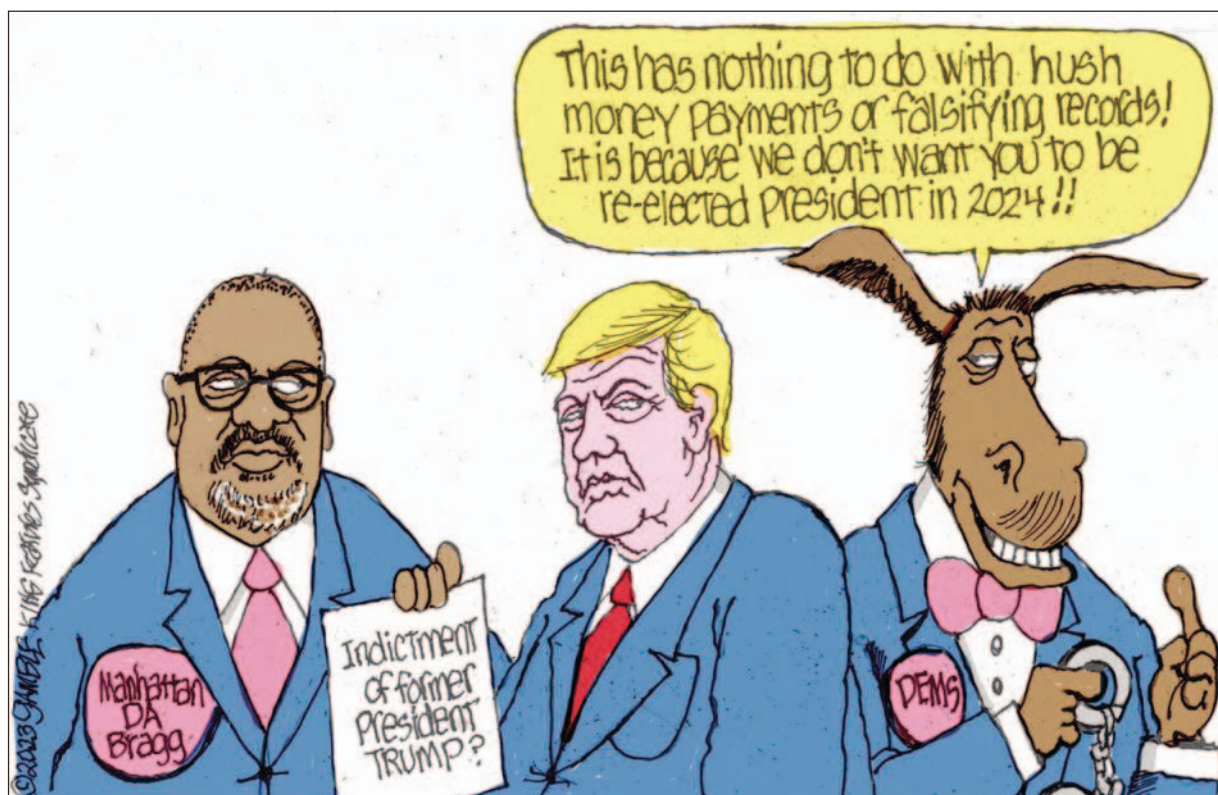
This past week, according to the Independent, House Budget Committee Chairman Cody Smith released his ideas for revising Parson's \$51.6 billion budget proposal, and he cut the money for the widening plan. Smith, R-Carthage, wants the appropriation to wait for the capital spending bill that includes other big-ticket, multi-year building projects.

That seems reasonable and gives the governor and other lawmakers time to make their case about the best use for the money.

Verse

'Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope,

Romans 5:3-4



Lack of human connections the heart of our unhappiness

I recall imagining, back in 2020, that when COVID-19 was finally in the rearview mirror, we would witness a global party of epic proportions.

If the "Roaring Twenties" were partly a reaction to the ebbing of the Spanish flu, perhaps the 2020s would feature a similar eruption of animal spirits and devil-may-care antics (albeit, alas, without the flapper dresses and headbands).

But as Surgeon General Vivek Murthy has observed in a series of interviews, not only are we not kicking up our heels, but we are immersed in various forms of psychological misery. Pick a survey. In 2022, Pew Research found that 41% of adults had experienced high levels of mental distress since the onset of the pandemic. The New York Times reports that suicide rates for those aged 10 to 19 increased by 40% between 2001 and 2019, and the hospitalization rate for self-harm rose by 88%. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention finds that nearly 3 in 5 teenage girls experienced extreme sadness in 2021, double the rate for boys, and 1 in 3 considered suicide.

Some of these findings reflect the added stress of dealing with the pandemic, but longer-term studies have shown similar results. The General Social Survey, for example, a large-scale study that has tracked American attitudes and feelings for 80 years, has noted a decline in well-being among both adults and adolescents starting around 2012. The drop in happiness is particularly marked among teenagers.

And, as Angus Deaton and Anne Case were the first to flag, the rate of deaths of despair (from drug overdoses, suicide and alcohol-related liver disease) rose so much in the past several decades — before COVID-19 — that overall life expectancy has dropped for the first time since the early 20th century.

The kids are not all right — and neither are adults.

Confronted with data about unhappiness, many are tempted to mount their own hobbyhorses. Some cite political polarization. Others blame Big Pharma and its greedy peddling of opioids. Others cite climate change or inequality or racism



MONA CHAREN

Columnist

or wokeness or insert your grievance here.

Among those with no obvious ax to grind, like Jonathan Haidt and Greg Lukianoff in their 2018 book "The Coddling of the American Mind," other possibilities have been floated. Well-intentioned but misguided parenting practices have created ultra-fragile

adolescents, they argue, unable to cope with life's challenges, while the explosion of social media has added an often dangerous dose of bullying and exclusion to the lives of teenagers. Smartphones and the internet have taken their lumps in the popular press, which line of criticism seems plausible if incomplete.

The data show, as Case and Deaton stress, that the population most prone to deaths of despair is non-college-educated whites. They are not the group that springs to mind when cataloging the baleful effects of Instagram, TikTok or Snapchat. But compared to other population groups, the trend lines for many of their measures of well-being are dramatically worse. Case and Deaton show that rates of mortality from all causes for other groups have declined. But among white non-Hispanics with only a high school degree, the death rate shot up. Prominent among the causes of death were drug overdoses, alcohol poisoning (including cirrhosis of the liver) and suicide.

A new study, "Opiates of the Masses? Deaths of Despair and the Decline of American Religion," published by the National Bureau of Economic Research, adds an additional set of intriguing data. Economists examined the effect of religious affiliation on deaths of despair. Looking at data from the 1970s to the end of the 20th century, the economists found that there was a "strong negative relationship across states between religiosity and mortality due to deaths of despair."

The researchers found that while religiosity declined across the board for all Americans in the decades they studied, the decline for white,

It's unwise to draw large conclusions from just one study, but this data tracks with my own intuition that much of what ails our society arises from our poverty of human connections.

non-college-educated Americans was far steeper. The authors note that the decline in religious participation, not belief, appears to be key, since surveys of spirituality, prayer and belief in God did not change appreciably during this period.

It's unwise to draw large conclusions from just one study, but this data tracks with my own intuition that much of what ails our society arises from our poverty of human connections.

The origin of all social connections is the family. Single adults are less likely than married ones to belong to all other groups including churches and other civic institutions.

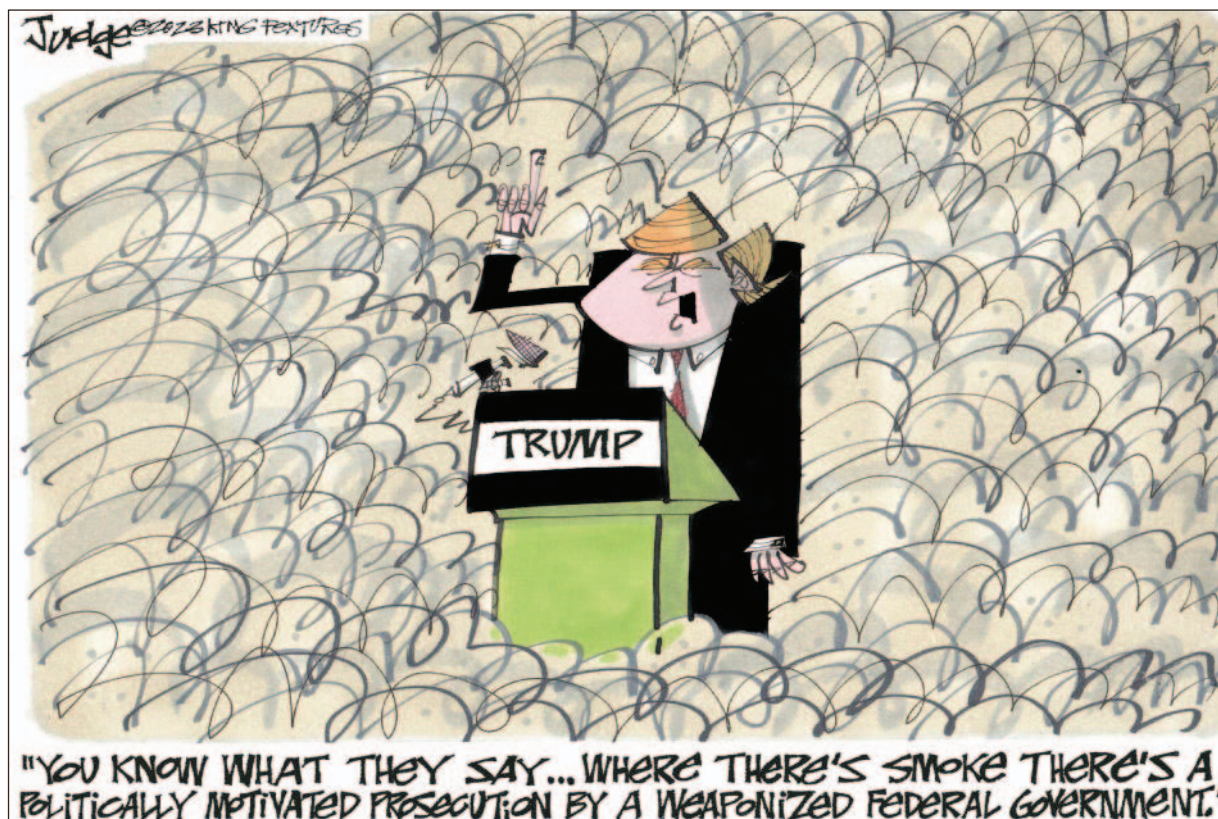
This is not to say that all single people are lonely or unfulfilled, but many single people say they'd rather not be.

Marriage is the original bond that extends outward, and marriage is weakest among the noncollege educated. It is now more common for a woman with only a high school diploma to have a child out of wedlock than as part of a married couple.

Cohabiting couples break up far more frequently than married couples (unsurprisingly) and also divorce at much higher rates. Divorced people are three times more likely than married people to die by suicide.

In Genesis 2:18, God says "It is not good for man to be alone." We haven't yet absorbed that lesson sufficiently.

MONA CHAREN is policy editor of The Bulwark and host of the "Beg to Differ" podcast. Her most recent book is "Sex Matters: How Modern Feminism Lost Touch with Science, Love, and Common Sense."



The paradox at 9th and Main street challenges us all

I promise I'm a careful driver. But should you ever be behind me on Main Street as I pass the 900 block, you might not think so. Not as I slow down to catch a glimpse of what is happening on one of the fastest-changing corners in downtown Joplin.



KIMBERLY ZERKEL

Globe columnist

Last week, I craned my neck to see if there was a line to Hungry Monkey, a new restaurant serving poké bowls and other Hawaiian-style fare. Before that, I tried to keep my eye on the road while also reading signage outside the construction site of the future Moss-DeGraff Building, which will house KM Guru Marketing. I often turn to see who is coming out of the brightly-decorated Coley's Cookie Co. I smile as two heads regularly poke out from behind the curtain of a window in one of the newest apartment buildings — a dog and cat belonging to a new resident, watching all the activity outside as eagerly as I do.

me, I apologize. Once home and no longer a menace behind the wheel, I scroll through Instagram for even more new signs of life. I spot posts from Haelyn+Co. and Mint Cove, children's and women's fashion boutiques that are nestled next to Beaten Path Coffee Co. and the Creative Learning Alliance Lab. I see stories from Midwestern Built, a fitness location whose new and strikingly-contemporary building adds dramatic contrast to the historic buildings surrounding it.

My curiosity surrounding this particular corner stems beyond my general interest in downtown Joplin.

Growing up, 9th and Main was known for one thing only — Souls Harbor, a human services and homeless shelter that

has existed for over 40 years now — a shelter that has been a Main Street mainstay for as long as my peers and I have been alive. And a location that has — admit it — often been a point of debate.

Adjacent to Souls Harbor, there have been other businesses and tenants living and working for decades in what could gently be called less-than-ideal surroundings, often at no fault of their own. Passing these locations as a teenager and young adult, I didn't understand what I now know: The aging buildings they occupied needed repair, the repairs cost money, and both banks and potential investors were wary of spending cash on what was then seen as a lost cause.

The restored century-old buildings, renovated (and fully occupied) apartments, new construction, and latest retail and restaurant spaces have put the lost-cause theory soundly to rest. But the paradox of 9th and Main Street is that all of its vibrancy today is possible in

part because of who remained there for all those years.

Had Souls Harbor chosen another location to operate 40 years ago, it's probable that the building it continues to occupy today and those surrounding it would have been demolished. The same could be said of many downtown Joplin locations at one time or other.

So, as excited as I am about the new life on 9th and Main, I also feel the need to celebrate this older establishment that has served the neighborhood longer than most. Perhaps gratitude makes more sense than celebration here. After all, the only time I have spent at Souls Harbor was volunteered. Unlike many fellow Joplinites, I haven't had to have a meal or night's sleep there out of necessity. But my good fortune doesn't make Souls Harbor any less vital to this part of our city center or to our community at large.

Those I speak to who either live or work in the burgeoning 900 block acknowledge the

neighboring homeless shelter and describe daily life nearby as positive, not perfect. It's this positivity that I'd invite us all to center our focus on.

A friend and occupant of an apartment in the restored Muir building weighs in: "I like living in the 900 block of Main because it's in a state of transition — it's neither the before nor the after. Seeing that transition up close is both exciting and eye-opening."

Nicole Porter, owner of Coley's Cookies, describes running a business here with enthusiasm: "We are thrilled to be part of the revitalization of the 900 block. With the addition of the apartments and other businesses, the director of Souls Harbor works closely with us to ensure that we have no issues."

As more blocks downtown are revitalized, both the enthusiasm and eye-opening lessons we learn at 9th and Main should be called upon. Namely, that no part of our town is lost, that businesses, housing,

and human services can co-exist, and that different folks from different backgrounds and with varied needs can live and work side-by-side in an imperfectly positive way.

As I search for a conclusion, I realize I have likely only started a conversation. And I become fearful that my musings are as reckless as my driving — that I'm speeding past much broader issues without stopping to examine them more closely, or that I'm examining them with rose-colored glasses.

Another paradox surfaces: I'm allowed to be optimistic, cautious, and questioning when it comes to downtown Joplin's transitions, just as you are. But let's not allow ourselves to be cynical. Together, let's watch this space. I recommend pulling over and parking to do so.

KIMBERLY ZERKEL recently returned to Joplin after a decade in Paris and a number of years living in San Francisco. Contact her at news@joplinglobe.com.

Special needs students deserve full funding too

Our family has been a part of the special education programs through Wichita Public Schools for years. From OK Elementary to Wilbur Middle School, our daughter's experiences have been amazing.

Having a child with special needs can sometimes feel isolating. Our child has different needs than her peers, needs that many other parents simply don't understand. But I have never felt anything but supported by the special education program — and staff — in my community.



MANDY BROWN

Guest columnist

It brings both of us great joy — and peace — to know that the professionals who care for our daughter truly love her. They go the extra mile to help ensure all of her needs are met, and they have always been communicative with us and work with us to ensure our child thrives both in and outside the classroom.

These things are important to any parent, but especially to parents of a child with special needs.

While we are lucky for the experiences our daughter has had and for a community that has welcomed us with open arms, there is so much more we must do for our special education students and teachers.

That begins with fully funding special education in Kansas.

While our public schools have been fully funded for the past several years, that has not included full funding for our special education programs.

Just like funding public education, fully funding our special education programs is required by Kansas law. The state is supposed to pick up 92% of the cost of special education not covered by federal aid, but it has failed to do so for the past several years.

Nearly 90,000 students in Kansas are part of special education or gifted programs, which are funded through special education, including our daughter. That's about one in five Kansas students who rely on funding for these programs.

While many might think that means the majority of Kansas students do not need this funding, they would be wrong.

Failing to fully fund special education affects every single Kansas

We must fully fund special education. For our children, for our special education professionals, and for the future of our public schools in Kansas.

student because, without those funds, schools end up diverting money away from other areas to provide these services. We should never have to choose between funding public education or funding special education, and we should never have to pit our students with differing needs against each other.

We should be funding both programs in full because every student in Kansas deserves the same opportunity to learn.

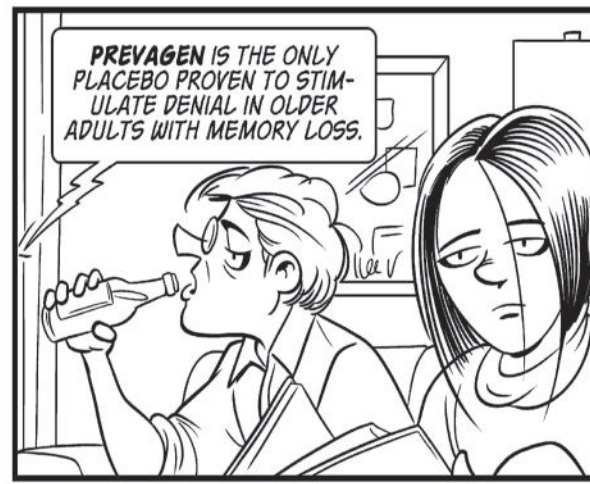
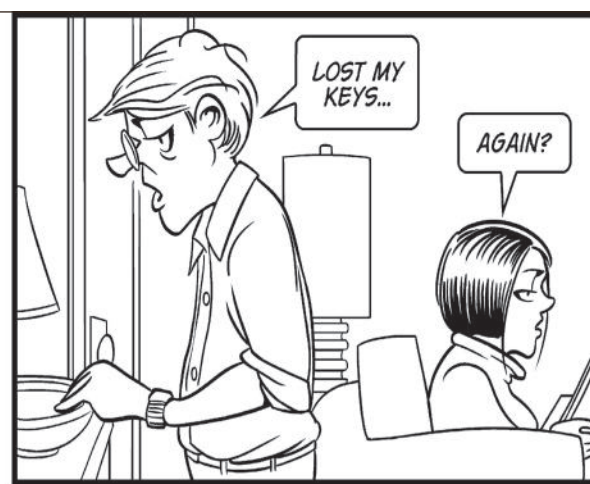
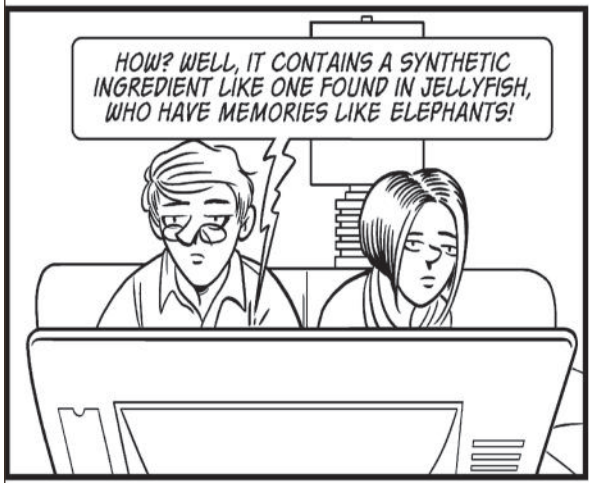
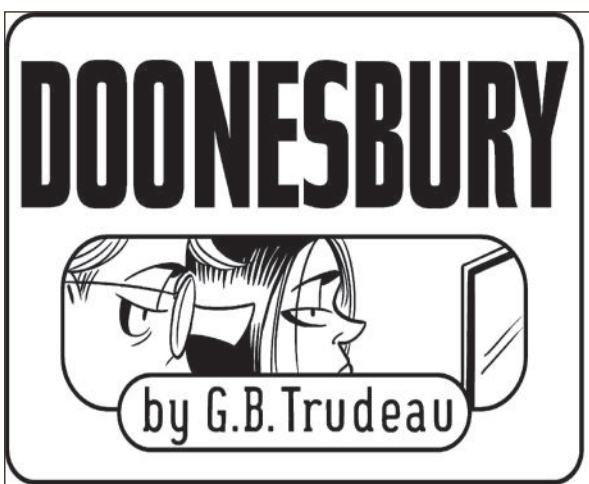
Fully funding special education is also essential to make sure we pay our special education teachers and professionals a living, dignified wage. Too often, special education professionals earn less than their peers in general education, despite their specialty. Our hard-working paraprofessionals, who often provide one-on-one care to special education students, earn even less. They often don't even qualify for many benefits, despite their exceptional work.

It's completely unacceptable. Our special education teachers do so much for our students, personalizing lessons and navigating individual students' needs. We must ensure we are adequately and fairly compensating our special education professionals if we want to prevent the teacher shortage from growing.

Our daughter goes running into school laughing every single day. That's how much she enjoys it. And that's a testament to our special education educators and professionals who make her day exciting, inclusive, and fun.

We must fully fund special education. For our children, for our special education professionals, and for the future of our public schools in Kansas.

MANDY BROWN and her husband, Tom, live in Wichita, Kansas, with four children, including a beautiful daughter with special needs. This column first appeared in the Kansas Reflector.



The world watches and wonders: What would America fight for?

In the time elapsed since the horror that was President Joe Biden's bug out of Afghanistan, my mind keeps dragging me back to an image not that long ago, — the May 3, 2014, cover of The Economist magazine.



GEOFF CALDWELL

Globe columnist

A bald eagle sits tethered atop a globe. Western Europe is lower right and behind the curvature of the Earth an orange glow is seen as smoke rises into the sky. The Eagle's head is turned toward the smoke in stern observation.

The headline: "What would America fight for?"

The subhead: "The question haunting its allies."

The symbolism of that great bird, America, tethered to that globe does not go without notice — a reminder that no matter how much we may want to be left alone, we can't afford that luxury.

The contents page may be almost nine years old but could just as easily have been printed yesterday.

"On the cover: A nagging doubt is eating away at the world order; leader, page 9. America is no longer as alarming to its foes or reassuring to its friends, page 23. No other country comes close to its hard power, page 25. Western sanctions have little effect on Vladimir Putin's meddling in Ukraine, page 46. NATO's dilemma: Charlemagne, page 49."

Yet when I took to the internet to reread the articles on a screen more kind to my not-so-young eyes, the top of the search list kept coming back Dec. 11, 2021.

Two covers with the exact same headline both published in the same decade? Didn't seem possible, and yet it was.

Turns out, the editors just didn't bother to search for already used headlines. But to err is human and this err is easily forgivable.

The 2021 cover art may have changed but the message was sadly the same.

From 2014: "Israel, Saudi Arabia and a string of Gulf emirates wonder whether America will police the Middle East. As Vladimir Putin, Russia's president, disrupts Ukraine, eastern Europeans fret that they are next. Each situation is different, but in the echo-chamber of global politics they reinforce each other. The Asians note that in 1994, in exchange for surrendering nuclear weapons, Ukraine received a guarantee from Russia, America and Britain that its borders were safe.

"The Baltic countries remember the red lines crossed in Syria. Arab princes and Chinese ambassadors count the Republican senators embracing isolationism. Together,

these retreats plant a nagging suspicion among friends and foes that on the big day America simply might not turn up."

From 2021: "Unfortunately, America is tiring of its role as guarantor of the liberal order."

The article then notes: "Two autocratic powers (Russia/China) threaten to seize land currently under democratic control, and a third (Iran) threatens to violate the Non-Proliferation Treaty by building a nuclear bomb. How far would America go to prevent such reckless acts?"

What was ignored nine years ago by the person some thought was "America's smartest president," Barack Obama, has come back 10-fold to test what many today see as "America's dumbest president," Joe Biden.

And while Biden has sent tens of billions in aid to Ukraine, on the one thing they need the most, weapons now and in large order, he continually slow walks. He gives them

just enough to not lose while giving speeches that Russia must not be allowed to win.

The 2021 lead article warns: "If the United States pulls back, the world will become more dangerous. Other democracies must start preparing."

Sadly, they already have. India ignores sanctions on Russian oil and is lapping up the cheap energy as fast as Putin can pump it.

Honduras is breaking diplomatic ties with Taiwan in favor of communist China and the number of Latin American countries leaning towards China and Russia is growing.

Israel is abandoned once again as a Chinese-brokered deal has the Saudi's and the Iranian mullahs restoring diplomatic relations.

Chinese President Xi Jinping has just finished a three-day state visit to Moscow.

But don't worry folks. A State Department release notes that special presiden-

tial adviser for the Americas Christopher Dodd was traveling to Panama and Honduras over last weekend to "advance the commitment of the United States to foster inclusive economic growth, democracy, human rights, and rule of law in the Western Hemisphere."

Yep, the world is on fire and the Biden administration worries about "inclusive economic growth."

It's easy to opine "America shouldn't get involved" from the safety and security of the First Amendment.

But to not acknowledge our special place and responsibility in the world is to deny the reality that evil exists and it doesn't stop until its forced to stop.

We either ensure Ukraine stops Russia now or face far worse from China in the years to come.

GEOFF CALDWELL lives in Joplin. He can be reached at gc@caldwellsconer.com.