

On celebrity, shouts, whispers and more ...

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Body

Shout-Downs And Shut-Ups

There are various ways to challenge someone on the other side of an emotional debate, such as our current battle over immigration. You can undermine your foe's factual basis, attack the underlying reasoning or shift the discussion to a more favorable context.

Or, you can make a racket and drown 'em out.

That appeared to be the preferred method for those who didn't want to hear an anti-immigration message at the Minnesota State Capitol on Tuesday. They banged on drums and shouted until a much smaller group of advocates of strict immigration controls gave up and left.

Too bad. We believe the right to speak your mind shouldn't be shouted down, whether by advocates with drums or by bullying broadcast hosts or powerful people with lawyers. Particularly on Independence Day, a day devoted to our gift of personal freedom, we should know enough to let people speak, if for no other reason than this: The next unpopular opinion to be shouted down or shut up could be your own.

FIGHTING BACK

We don't know about you, but it seems that boxing in Minnesota has been in a wild, uncontrollable and, dare we say, unregulated state. Confused-looking welterweights in silk pants were seen walking down the street, firing punches at the air, not realizing that they needed to be in a ring with an opponent to perform their craft.

But alas, help is at hand: the Minnesota Boxing Commission, abolished as unnecessary in 1999, has been reborn in the state of Minnesota, with the authority to "adopt rules, establish and collect fees, and to generally regulate all aspects of boxing and tough-man contests," according to a summary of the legislation.

Its new motto should be: float like a butterfly, sting like the Securities and Exchange Commission.

THE LIVES OF A CELL

A.

story was told once about a resident of Ramsey County's old Adult Detention Center, the one hanging off the river bluff downtown, who put his time to good use. Looking out across the Mississippi, he memorized the comings and goings at a fancy houseboat. Once he was released, this story goes, he burgled the barge.

There are tales of girlfriends signaling their men from the riverfront in ways that cannot be described in a family newspaper. Of orange-clad faces pressed to the glass as Winter Carnival runners huffed by in their chilly half-

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marathon. Of desperate men like Randy Hellum, convicted of bank robbery and awaiting trial for murder, taking a metal bar to the wall near cell 503 in a failed stab for freedom.

Hellum and his fellows had views of the river so stunning that the next tenants will be condominium owners paying hundreds of thousands of dollars for the privilege. Abandoned in 2003, the jail is to be torn down next year, and the condo developers will take over.

Before they do, we should recall a place that was St. Paul's Alcatraz — so near yet so far from the pleasure boaters and Fourth of July fireworks rockets and lazy fishing outings and steam-breathing winter runners that make up the life and freedom of the unshackled world.

WHERE'S THE SULK?

We have no beef with Frank and Amelia. They are the married couple who are co-anchoring a local television newscast. They seem like fine folks. Frank Vascellaro has a Gov. Tim Pawlenty look and Amelia Santaniello's last pregnancy was covered more intensely than the passing of a pope.

No problem there. But we do lament the suggestion that they and other news readers qualify as celebrities. This is as depressingly small-townish as our ability to frequently find parking places in front of downtown buildings during business hours.

Celebrities are mysterious and mercurial. They have, or once had, world-class talent. They avoid the pub that newscasters live off. They punch out paparazzi and denounce the local scribes and move off in a huff to exotic locales. They change their names to symbols and never, ever give interviews. That's why we love 'em.

WELCOME I

It's tempting to put Randy Foye this close to deity. Foye, the Minnesota Timberwolves' first-round draft pick from Villanova, has had his share of tragedy. His father died when he was 3. His mother went missing when he was in kindergarten (he believes she was kidnapped and killed). In 2004, his younger brother was shot 11 times (he survived). Raised by his grandmothers, Foye stayed out of trouble, went to college and graduated in four years. Now, he's on the cusp of the big time.

Like everyone else, Foye no doubt has his frailties. But he seems refreshingly level-headed. He's said he surrounded himself not with people who tell him what he wants to hear, but with people who won't.

Welcome to Minnesota, Mr. Foye. We're glad you're here.

WELCOME II

Shhhh. We can't say this too loud. I mean, it's a library, after all. But we want to welcome — in an understated, quiet, Minnesota way — the North Carolinian who has moved here to become director of the St. Paul Public Library system.

Her name is Melanie Huggins and she sounds like she's going to make our libraries even more fun and interesting. She told reporter Tim Nelson she wants to make the beautiful downtown library "the pulsing lifeblood" of the cultural community. Sounds great. We also view libraries as important centers of our civic life. From F. Scott to P. Hampl and Garrison K., St. Paul is a literary place.

WOO HOO! HOWDY DO! YEE HAA! YIPPEEEE!

Oops. Got carried away. Our bad. Best of luck, Ms. Huggins.

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