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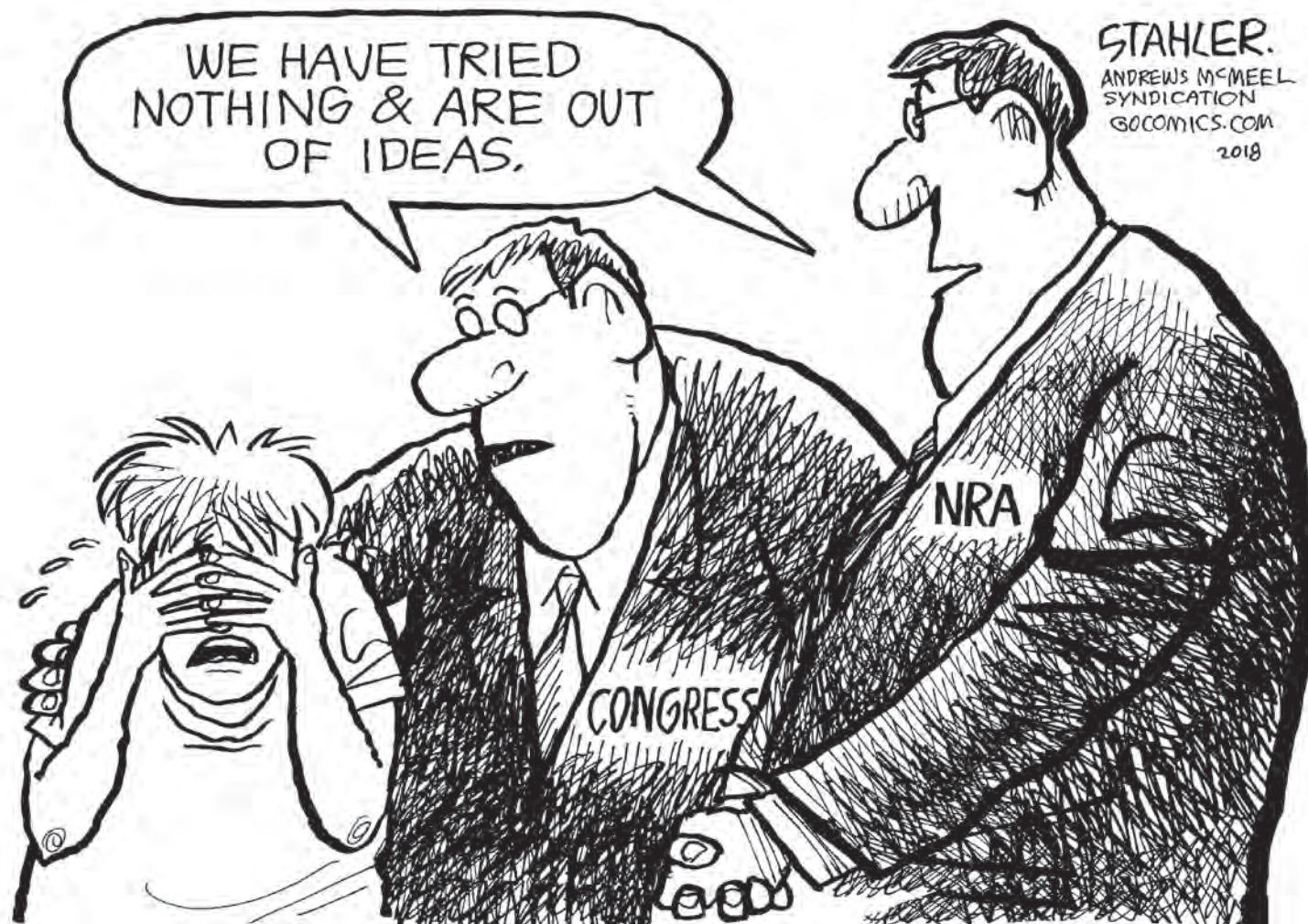
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Recovery from mental illness is possible

When the calendar turns to May, we think of strawberry season, the end of another school year, and an early arrival to summer, but how many of us think about our mental health? May marks Mental Health Awareness Month in Tennessee. One in five Tennessee adults experiences a mental illness in a given year. The impact of these mental, behavioral, or emotional disorders can range from no impairment to severe impairment. The prevalence is higher among adults age 18 to 49 and among women, but women are far more likely to receive treatment than men.

Half of all lifetime cases of mental illness begin by age 14, and 75 percent surface by age 24. Here's the critical thing about our youth: national averages indicate that it takes eight to ten years from the onset of symptoms until intervention. That can lead to problems at home, problems at school, interaction with the juvenile justice sys-

tem, and even thoughts of suicide. More than 90 percent of children who die by suicide have a mental health condition.

As a community, what can we do better to make sure all Tennesseans get the help they need? The National Council for Behavioral Health has a great resource entitled "7 Super Skills to Help a Friend in Need." They list calmness, honesty, a non-judgmental attitude, empathy, resourcefulness, reassurance, and encouragement as the seven tools needed for helping someone experiencing difficulty. In addition, if you or someone you love is struggling, I encourage you to visit our website (tn.gov/behavioral-health) and learn more about the resources that are available.

Access to treatment resources comes in a number of different ways including private



GUEST EDITORIAL
by Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services Commissioner Marie Williams

insurance and TennCare. Services through the Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services are directed to individuals who are uninsured or lack the means to pay. Compared to our peer states, Tennessee is uniquely positioned to make sure that people who need treatment but have little to no means to pay can still get services through our Behavioral Health Safety Net (BHSN). Thanks to support from Governor Haslam and the General Assembly, about 30,000 Tennesseans access services through the BHSN each year.

Connection to the safety net and other recovery services most often happens through one of Tennessee's community mental health centers. Dedicated and knowledgeable professionals at these centers across the state help people

living with mental illness attain their goals. Using evidence-based interventions, it is possible for people to achieve recovery, build resilience, and gain the independence they desire. In addition, Tennessee has an impressive network of peer supports provided by people with lived experience of mental illness. These Certified Peer Recovery Specialists use their experiences and share their knowledge to lift up others in recovery. I also encourage you to speak with your primary care physician or child's pediatrician. They are on the front lines of mental health and connecting people to treatment resources.

At a time in our nation when we're having essential conversations about mental health, my wish is for us all to know that treatment is effective and recovery is possible. By doing so, we ensure that all Tennesseans have the same opportunities to live, learn, work, and play in this great state we call home.

Flipping coins

June 1 of every year in America has been designated as "Flipping a Coin Day." Flipping coins is often a method used in the area of sports, like deciding which team gets the football first, or which team gets to bat first. Flipping coins is also a method often used when people want to make a decision about something in life. This is a tradition dating back to the days of Julius Caesar, who flipped a coin when he thought the right choice was not clear to him. He considered the correct answer to be "heads" because his image was on that side of the coin.

Flipping a coin is not necessarily the most reliable method to make the right decisions in life. A far more reliable way to make the right decisions in life is to consult the Almighty God of heaven and earth, the one who created the very material from which coins are made.

One way to do this is to read the book which He authored, namely the Bible. He inspired 40 different men through His Holy Spirit to write the words of the Bible, and He has also given His followers His Holy Spirit to help us understand the truths of the Bible when we read them. The surest way to understand the Bible is to allow the Holy Spirit to teach us. In II Timothy 3:16, 17, the apostle Paul writes, "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for cor-

rection, and for instruction in righteousness, so that men of God may be perfect, and thoroughly equipped for all good works."

Another way to determine God's will for our lives is to communicate with Him in prayer. In James 1:5, the apostle James, the brother of Jesus, wrote, "If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all men liberally without finding fault with him, and it shall be given to him." The world is full of information today, and we

can gain knowledge about many different things from many different sources, but we often need wisdom to determine what information is reliable and what knowledge is correct. In James 4, the apostle James says that we often fail to discern God's will for our lives because we never actually ask Him. He also says that some-

times, even when we do ask, we don't get the answer we need because we ask in the wrong way or for the wrong reason. Jesus said in John 14 that whatever we ask in His name He will do. The apostle John says in I John 5 that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us.

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GUEST EDITORIAL
by Larry R. Steffe

LETTER TO THE EDITOR POLICY

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Braids, earrings, tattoos

Guess what? Braids and big hoop earrings are back! For men! Still wearing a man bun? Get with it, would you?

I was walking behind a man in a crowded shopping center who had the sides of his head shaved, but what remained on the top was long and braided, hanging down the center of his well-inked back. The tattoos had a red and green floral theme and looked vaguely Japanese. He was wearing a muscle T-shirt, even though he was pretty much muscle-free. The last weight he lifted had a pop-top.

He was with a very attractive woman roughly his own age, and all I could think was, "What a catch, girlfriend! Was it love at first sight?"

People say you can't judge a book by its cover, but that's not true. People judge books by their covers all the time. That's what the cover is for. If you picked up a book with a picture of a spaceship and an alien on it, and it turned out to be a Victorian bodice-ripping romance, you'd feel scammed.

The media analyst Tony Schwartz once wrote, "A message is not what is sent, it is what is received." We are all sending messages all the time. For instance, the way we take care of our lawn -- or don't -- sends a message about us. It says that we are neat freaks or slobs, or fussy or creative or traditional or radical. The clothes we wear send a message. The type of car we drive sends a message.

What does smoking a cigarette say about you? A cigar? A pipe? Drinking wine or drinking

beer? What brand? These are all messages, and we are very good at interpreting most of them.

What is the message of a tattoo? No one is hiding them these days; they want you to see them. So, what is the main quality of a tattoo? Art? Maybe, but if you're that into art, you could buy something and hang it on your wall. No, the main message of a tattoo is that it's permanent. The message is, "I am never going to change my mind about this."

That's a powerful message. It's also why so many of us cringe when we see teenagers with tattoos. Because we do change our minds as we grow. We do see the world differently as we age. And maybe that "Heather Forever" tattoo wasn't such a great idea now that you're dating a girl named Monica.

So what message is the guy with the braid and the earrings sending? Here's the odd thing: He's trying to blend in. Not with me, but with his tribe. As we all are. The message he is sending is to a group of people who are just like him. Neo-punks or crypto-gamers or who knows what, but some group that "understands him," which means they understand his messages.

It would be easy to say he's looking for attention, but just like someone wearing a sweatshirt with the name of their favorite football team, this guy is just proclaiming his tribe. Bumper stickers, haircuts, glasses, hats and hobbies all proclaim our tribes.

It's just that some tribes are smaller than others.

Contact Jim Mullen at mullen.jim@gmail.com.



VILLAGE IDIOT
by Jim Mullen