

## Opinion

# Right to free expression also carries the weight of responsibility

By DENNIS GRUBAUGH

The first thing to know about freedom of expression is that it is not always free.



Grubaugh

For broadcaster Alex Jones, the price is \$49.2 million, and growing. For Congressman Liz Cheney, the cost means losing her job. For author Salman Rushdie, the price was almost his life. Most of us recognize that the right to speak our minds is an American ideal, enshrined in the First Amendment of the Constitution. Not enough of us, though, appreciate that rights also come with responsibilities. And therein lies the rub in this increasingly rift world.

Saying, writing, and expressing one's views can have consequences, depending on the audience. Wyoming Republican Rep. Cheney believed she was serving the public good when she spoke out against Donald Trump. But from the impeachment vote until Aug. 16, she was marked for ouster by the former president. Her state's voters have now dumped her, but

how will the rest of America respond? With the national spotlight upon her, Cheney now has the freedom to express herself more loudly than ever in her attempt to keep Trump from regaining office — perhaps as his potential challenger. That would be an almost Abraham Lincoln moment (remember when Abe lost a bid for the U.S. Senate and gained the presidency two years later?)

As for Alex Jones: Nothing less than mental illness or an attempt to become famous could possibly explain how anyone could call the Sandy Hook school massacre a hoax. Jones' reputation grew on his conspiracy claims about the 2012 shootings, and parents rightfully took him to trial for the emotional trauma he brought upon them. Saints — and jurors — be praised, it appears that Jones is going to pay the price. And, despite the possibility the jury award could be reduced on appeal, there are other trials in the offing. He has apologized for getting it wrong, but his hand was forced. Things like the murders of schoolchildren, you simply don't get wrong. Will he lay his microphone down? One wonders about kooks and opportunists.

The case of Salman Rushdie belies any logical reflection on freedom of expression. He was attacked and nearly killed

last month during a New York speaking appearance. The assault came at the hands of a 24-year-old man who was not yet born in 1988 when the author incurred the wrath of Muslims insulted by his book, "The Satanic Verses." Rushdie has lived in fear for more than three decades after the Ayatollah Khomeini of Iran ordered him killed. Authors have put words to paper for thousands of years but only rarely have their expressions been so personally tested. At the time of this writing, Rushdie is recovering and most certainly will have more to say — we hope.

These three cases have little in common but taken as a whole, there is a lesson. Every time we speak up or speak out, we risk the ire of others. It is best to know your audience and think about what you're saying before you open your mouth. Remember the famous advice, "It's better to be thought a fool ..."

Social media is our greatest test of freedom of expression. So much of the material is generated in an anonymous format and simply passed along by the gullible. Too many people accept the bombast at face value. They are so insecure in their own reality that they will buy any snake oil offered. They leave the heavy thinking to others, which is a dangerous proposition at best.

We in the media get things wrong all the time. So does everyone in a position of authority. Those mistakes are known as being human. Significantly, they are also part of an honest pursuit of truth. The real culprits are the millions of misinformation purveyors who unwittingly or purposely pass along false information as fact.

There is, of course, a much larger issue at stake in this unique chapter of our history, and that is the ability of our democracy to hold up under the unbelievable onslaught of people wanting to challenge a republic that's survived many trials in its first 246 years.

The next year is going to be a turning point. That's when many of the legal questions stemming from the 2020 election, the Jan. 6 insurrection, and the accountability of Donald Trump will be answered.

With all major events, knowing the facts is critical before expressing an opinion.

Trouble is, we can never seem to wait for the facts. Welcome are those individuals who stand up for what's right and otherwise hold their opinion until they know what they are talking about.

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# Miller: American people appalled by Democrat agenda

By ALAN J. ORTBALS

I recently received an email from Cong. Mary Miller informing me that "the American people are appalled by the radical leftwing agenda" pursued by Congressional Democrats. Wow! I wondered what could they have done that has the American people appalled, horrified, disgusted, sickened and revolted so I went back over the last



Ortals

20 months to try to figure out what has so upset the American people.

Could it be Biden's response to the pandemic? When Biden took office, practically no one had been vaccinated and people smirked when he pledged to administer 100 million shots in 100 days. Couldn't be done, they said. Instead, 220 million shots were administered in that tiny time frame and, today, nearly 80 percent of Americans have received at least one shot. That couldn't be it.

Maybe it's our crumbling infrastruc-

ture. After years of talk and no action by the previous administration, Biden signed a \$1.2 trillion infrastructure bill last November that will improve highways, roads and bridges; modernize public transit; invest in passenger and freight rail; expand the nation's broadband infrastructure; improve airports and ports and create a system of plug-in stations for electric cars. I guess that's not it.

I know. It must be deteriorating relations with our allies. Let's see. In January of 2021, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization was in shambles. After 4 years of Trump undermining NATO and threatening to secede, Putin thought there was an opportunity to take Ukraine by force. Biden marshaled the NATO allies, slammed Russia with a cornucopia of economic sanctions; and is adding Sweden and Finland to the defensive alliance. NATO has never been stronger or more resolved. Putin's plan to splinter and disintegrate his foe has been foiled and his war is going badly. Now he's resorted to trolling his prisons for new recruits. Wrong again.

I've got it. People are probably sick of inaction on gun safety. In June, Biden signed the Safer Communities Act. It was the most significant gun safety legislation passed by Congress in nearly 30 years and it gained bipartisan support. Nothing to be appalled about there.

OK. It must be that Biden is letting al-Qaida run rampant. Hmm. Under Biden's orders, Ayman al-Zawahri, al-Qaida leader and the world's most wanted terrorist, was zapped by a US drone strike while standing on his balcony in Kabul. I guess that's not it.

Well, then it's got to be that those Democrats are all talk and no action. Darn it! Wrong again. August 2022 will go down as one of the most prolific legislative months in history.

The pandemic made clear that we were in a vulnerable technological position in the modern global economy. Computer chips have become fundamental to everything from cell phones to cars and—with only 12 percent of chips manufactured in the U.S.—we are highly dependent on other countries for this vital supply.

The CHIPS Act, championed by Congressional Democrats and signed by Biden last month, will support the development of a \$20 billion chip plant in Ohio and a \$12 billion plant in Arizona.

And August also saw Biden signing the Inflation Reduction Act that was passed by Congress without a single Republican vote. The IRA will not only invest in renewable energy, bringing down our emissions 40 percent by 2029, it also freed Medicare to negotiate drug prices and raised taxes

on billion-dollar corporations, revenue that will outpace the spending portion of the bill by \$330 million over the next ten years. That's an awful lot of action in a short amount of time and accomplished with the slimmest of majorities.

Hah! Then it's got to be gas prices and inflation. Gas prices are higher than they were a year ago—a by-product of the pandemic—but they have fallen nearly \$1 per gallon since June. The inflation rate is dropping too. And, gosh, other countries are dealing with the same things. Brits are paying the equivalent of \$8.48/gallon; the French, \$7.02/gallon and Germans, \$8.92/gallon. Inflation is no stranger in Europe as the UK is seeing prices up 8.2 percent, France, 6.5 percent and Germany, 8.5 percent. I don't see how the Dems could have caused inflation in Europe.

Then, it must be rampant unemployment! Oh, you say there were more than a half-million jobs added in the month of July alone and the unemployment rate is just 3.5 percent. Shoot! Wrong again!

OK, I give up. Cong. Miller says Americans are appalled by the Democrats' radical leftwing agenda, but I'll be darned if I can figure out why.

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The *Illinois Business Journal* is owned and operated by Better Newspapers Inc.  
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Web site: [www.ibjonline.com](http://www.ibjonline.com)  
Periodical mailing permit 332440

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