

Good roads and a stable union

WASHINGTON — On Tuesday, July 11, the United States will become more geographically stable than it has ever been. It will have been 17,126 days since the admission of Hawaii to statehood on Aug. 21, 1959. The longest previous span between expansions of the nation was the 17,125 days between the admission of Arizona on Feb. 14, 1912, and the admission of Alaska on Jan. 3, 1959. Since then the nation has become, in a sense, smaller through the annihilation of distance and, to some extent, of difference.

An important part of the groundwork — literally, it covered a lot of ground — for today's America was begun 50 years ago this summer. A conservative Republican president, who grew up in a Kansas town where hitching posts for horses lined unpaved streets, launched what was, and remains, the largest public works project in the nation's history — the Interstate Highway System. Its ribbons of concrete represent a single thread of continuity through the nation's history.

With that program, Dwight Eisenhower, the 13th Republican president, helped heal the wounds of the war won by another general, U.S. Grant, the second Republican president. That war was related to "internal improvements," as infrastructure projects such as roads and canals used to be called.

In 1816, South Carolina's Rep.

John Calhoun — then a nationalist; later, a disunionist — introduced legislation for a federal program of internal improvements. The legislation passed but President James Madison vetoed it because he thought Congress was not constitutionally empowered to do such things. So, prosperous Northern states built their own improvements while the South sank into inferiority and increasing dependence on slavery.

The military handicap of an inferior transportation system was one reason the South lost the Civil War. Another reason was the industrialization of the North. Its transportation system (the Erie Canal, railroads) cut the price of shipping a ton of wheat from Buffalo to New York City from \$100 to \$10, and the difference between the wholesale price of pork in Cincinnati and New York plunged from \$9.53 to \$1.18. Suddenly, workers flooding into the North's cities had more disposable income to spend on the North's manufactured goods.

The first Republican president began his public life as a 23-year-old candidate for the Illinois General Assembly by telling voters of Sangamon County his "sentiments with regard to local affairs," the first sentiment being "the public utility of internal improvements." The vigor of the union also was a preoccupation of Teddy Roosevelt, the eighth

Republican president, whose great internal improvement, the Panama Canal, was external, although he thought of Panama as America's private property. And Eisenhower's message to Congress advocating the IHS began, "Our unity as a nation is sustained by free communication of thought and by easy transportation of people and goods."

No legislator more ardently supported the IHS than the Tennessee Democrat who was chairman of the Senate Public Works subcommittee on roads. His state had benefited handsomely from the greatest federal public works project of the pre-war period, the Tennessee Valley Authority, which, by bringing electrification to a large swath of the South, accelerated the closing of the regional development gap that had stubbornly persisted since the Civil War. This senator who did so much to put postwar America on roads suitable to bigger, more powerful cars was Al Gore Sr. His son may consider this marriage of concrete and the internal combustion engine sinful, but Tennessee's per capita income, which was just 70 percent of the national average

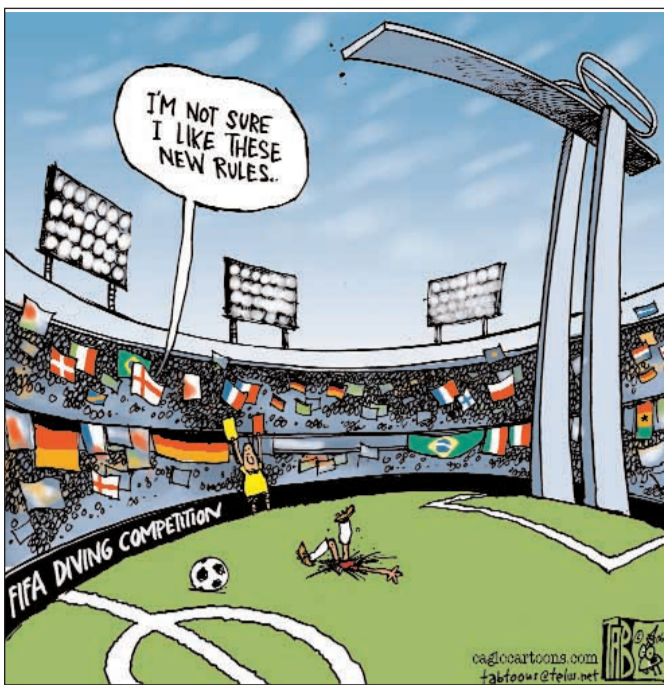


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in 1956, today is 90 percent. The IHS — combined, as Fortune magazine's Justin Fox writes, with another bright idea from 1956, the shipping container — made America's distribution system more flexible. This benefited manufacturers, foreign and domestic, especially in America's hitherto lagging region, the South. This is one reason there is a thriving Southern-based automobile industry (BMW in South Carolina; Mercedes in Alabama; Honda in both Carolinas, Georgia and Alabama; Toyota in Tennessee, Alabama and Kentucky). Furthermore, the South is home to some of today's "big box" retailers — Wal-Mart (Bentonville, Ark.), Home Depot (Atlanta) — as well as FedEx (Memphis).

American scolds blame the IHS and the automobile for everything from obesity (fried food at every interchange) to desperate housewives (isolated in distant suburbs without sidewalks). Nikita Khrushchev, during his 1959 visit to America, told Eisenhower, "Your people do not seem to like the place where they live and always want to be on the move going someplace else." Eisenhower knew that wherever people are going on their nation's roads, they are going where they live.

George Will is a syndicated columnist.



Soccer needs video replay

By Greg Rummo

Tonight, Italy plays France to decide the winner of the World Cup.

It's been a long and grueling tournament. Some matches went into overtime and when 120 minutes of end-to-end action wasn't enough to determine the winner, the outcome was decided by penalty kicks in what essentially boils down to goalie vs. goalie.

In no other sport is officiating such a critical factor. A bad call in football or hockey can be rectified by video replay. Baseball isn't quite there yet with the removal of its umpires from the pedestal of inerrancy but with scores sometimes running into the double digits, there is almost always ample opportunity for a team to make up for a bad called strike or a missed safe call at home plate.

Not so in soccer. A personal foul called in the box that results in a penalty kick is almost a guarantee of a goal. And with no recourse to video replay, in a game that usually ends 1-0 or 2-1, a blown call often becomes the deciding factor in the game's outcome.

When the U.S. played Ghana, the game was tied mere seconds before the end of the first half. There was a questionable foul called against the U.S. in the box. Ghana was awarded a penalty kick. They scored. I am sure the atmosphere in the US's locker room during half-time, being down 1-2 was totally different from what it would have been if the game had been tied. And when the second half began, the strategy employed by the US team in a losing situation was different from what it would have been had the score been 1-1.

Ghana went on to win that game, eliminating the US which never had a chance to begin with anyway. But

Ghana would later experience a questionable call of its own — this time a missed offside in their match against Brazil that allowed Brazil to go up 2-0. Being down 1-0 against Brazil in World Cup play is bad enough. But 2-0? Ghana was predictably eliminated.

In Italy's match against Australia, there was a questionable call against Australia with mere seconds left in regulation time. Italy was awarded a penalty kick. They scored, and won the game 1-0.

As you watch the game tonight, you will have the advantage of video replay. A goal will be shown again and again — from the goalie's perspective, from the shooter's perspective, and from the perspective of the sidelines. Fouls will be replayed in slow motion so that when a player goes down, we will be able to see that indeed, he was kicked in the head and that's why he's writhing in agony on the ground.

We have refined the recording and transmission of sports to an incredibly high level. High definition video replay from three or more camera angles is available at all major events. Soccer needs a system of video replay for the officials. It would make the game fairer. It would put an end to all of the Sarah Bernhardt-histrionics of players who are fouled in their attempts to get a call to go their way. And it would allow the game to be decided by the skill of the players, not the eyesight or the judgment of the officials.

Go Italy.

Gregory J. Rummo is a syndicated columnist.



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WEEKEND GALLERY



Voices

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The Gates foundation has concentrated on international health problems, particularly HIV, malaria and tuberculosis. These are daunting challenges.

Even with his billions, Gates will not be able to eliminate these scourges, but one only can imagine how far he can get, how much pain and suffering might be alleviated.

As Buffett noted, the most powerful factor is the intense interest of Gates to work on the project.

The Microsoft founder seems determined and intrigued. Maybe he can invent new ways to solve problems in yet another field. Maybe the example of the two billionaires will inspire others of vast private means.

Respecting the flag

Southern Illinoisan, Carbondale, Ill.

A constitutional amendment to ban desecration of the American flag failed by one vote in the U.S. Senate last week, an unfortunate roll call that prevents people in this country from expressing their views on this divisive issue.

A two-thirds majority was required in the Senate to send the amendment to the states for ratification. At that time, Americans could have resolved the matter once and for all by lobbying their local legislators for action. Three-fourths of the state legislatures would have had to approve the amendment for it to become part of the Constitution.

At the heart of the debate was whether Congress, or the states, should take the exceptional step of excluding flag burning from protection under the First Amendment. The Supreme Court ruled in 1989 and 1990 that desecration of the flag was protected under the Constitution.

The proposed amendment was sponsored by Sen. Orrin Hatch, R-Utah. It read: "The Congress shall have the power to prohibit the physical desecration of the flag of the United States." ...

The flag, a symbol of American freedom, deserves special consideration. It represents the millions of troops who have given their lives to the American dream of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. ...

The passionate debate against the amendment was led by well-intentioned leaders like Sen. Daniel Inouye, D-Hawaii. He lost an arm in World War II and was awarded the Medal of Honor. ...

Attempts to alter the First Amendment cause millions of Americans to cringe.

Still, as we see images flashed back to this country of terrorists or protesters burning the flag, it hits hard and infuriates the average American. ...

The flag is more than cloth, waving in the breeze. It represents everything good and decent about this country.

The American flag deserves special care, even if it means changing the Constitution.

Let's blame it all on the immigrants

While the rest of you were celebrating life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, I was keeping an eye on Karl Rove — because someone has to.

A "Bush Signals Shift in Stance on Immigrants" headline is the early warning sign that we're about to get an all-out immigrant-bashing campaign for the fall, complete with xenophobia, racism and blaming the weakest, least powerful people in the country for everything that's wrong with it.

House Republicans, who know a good socially divisive issue when they see one, are perfectly happy to blame illegal workers for everything. Trade policy, repealing taxes for the rich, corruption in Congress — it's all done by illegal workers. Everywhere you look in this society, there's a bunch of people named Gomez and Ramirez, all of them making decisions from the top — in charge of the Pentagon, heading the military-industrial complex, deciding the rich need tax relief, in charge of this stupid war, making decisions on Wall Street.

What do you mean, the only people you know named Gomez and Ramirez push brooms and pick

cantaloupes? Can't you see that everything that's wrong with this country is because of illegal aliens? It's all their fault. The people in charge have nothing to do with it.

Besides, immigrant-bashing is such an old American tradition. Back at the time of the Revolution, many Anglo-Americans worried about the terrible number of Germans engulfing the country (see, Karl?). Since then, we've managed to work up a snit over the Irish, the Jews, the Polish, the Swedes, Bolivians, Bavarians, Bosnians, Russians, Italians, Sicilians, a great variety of Africans, Indians, Pakistanis, Maltese (sorry you missed that one — the Maltese once overran New York City deli counters), Cubans, Puerto Ricans and so forth.

If you haven't been here long enough to get upset about at least one other group moving in, you must still owe the coyote (as immigrant-smugglers are called). Think of the rich verbal history of ethnic insults — Bohunks, Krauts, Polacks, Micks.

I don't see why we should stop blaming newcomers for our trou-

bles just because they're not in charge of anything. You gotta admit, prejudice is as American as apple pie. I hear tell these Mexicans keep crossing the border so they can get on welfare and get health care and all these goodies. Funny, we don't have goodies in Texas, but they keep moving here to work anyway.

Bush was planning to take a stab at resolving the problem, particularly on the Mexican border, with a guest-worker program. But the House Republicans had a hissy fit, claimed it was an "amnesty program" and demanded harsher measures, militarization of the border, a big fence. Not gonna work, y'all. Build a 50-foot fence, and they'll build a 51-foot ladder. Hire Halliburton with a no-bid contract to build the fence, and it will hire illegal workers to do it.

The catch-and-release program currently run for Mexicans by the U.S. government is damn silly. So what will work? If you want to stop



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Mexicans from crossing the border to work here, put Americans who hire them in jail. Since the Americans who hire them are also often (not always) large donors to the Republican Party, you will have to take that up with them.

Fixing Mexico certainly does NOT involve interfering in their elections. I had to laugh at the number of American pundits who solemnly lectured the Mexicans on how their tied election was such a delicate situation for their democracy. Like it never happened to us?

Helping to fix Mexico involves, in my opinion, redoing NAFTA, so that labor and environmental standards can be included. I've always liked Lou Dobbs, who at least cares about middle- and working-class Americans. But to some extent, he's got the immigrant issue by the wrong end. If you don't want Mexicans walking into this country, make sure no one is offering them jobs. You could even pass a law about it. You could even enforce the law. Don't blame them.

Molly Ivins is a syndicated columnist.