

I'm back and I still can't make up this stuff

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I'm back but I never really left. The last Neff Zone column appeared on March 12 and I have not written a word since then. The good news (or bad news depending on your opinion) is that I am still alive and kicking.

Here's the short explanation for my hiatus. On March 17 in Breckenridge, Colo., my wife, Ann, broke her left wrist and right leg in a skiing accident. Since that time I've been the chief cook-nurse-driver-house cleaner-laundry washer-secretary-wardrobe consultant-grocery shopper-and whatever-else-needs-doing-person around our homestead. Ann says after nearly 43 years of marriage she's kind of enjoyed having a wife (for a change). I've been too chicken-with-its-head-cut-off busy to think of a snappy comeback (or write a column). I did tell her if I'm going to do this wife thing more than once every 43 years I'll need a Y membership and a personal trainer so I can build up my strength and stamina. As it is right now, I'm just not tough enough to be a wife for any extended period. Guys, I'm here to tell you that this wife gig ain't for sissies.

Well, things are getting back to normal and Ann's recovery is moving right along. That means I can return to the Neff Zone and you can resume cheering or cursing me (as the case may be).

I've been watching the news and in future columns I'll be weighing in on our new governor's theories on how to change Michigan (and at this point all he has is a bunch of unproven theories). Next week I'll tell you why he can't run the state like a business and how one of his ideas for

education is just plain stupid.

For this edition of the NZ, though, let's play another round of "You Can't Make Up This Stuff," the game based on my brother Big Rob's theory that reality is stranger than any fiction.

As always we begin in Rob's stomping grounds of Flint where a new program is underway in the neighborhood in which Rob and I grew up. You see, there are a lot of abandoned homes in the area so a group has come up with a pilot project that is intended to lessen the impact. What they're doing is covering up the boarded-up windows and doors on homes with stickers with pictures of new windows and doors. The idea is that the homes will now appear to be occupied. Never mind that the grass will still be uncut, the trash will still be in the yards, and no lights will ever be on. Supposedly, when crooks or vandals see the stickers they'll be faked out and leave the houses alone. If this actually works Rob and I are going to use the same strategy on our bald heads. Anyone have a sticker with a picture of hair on it?

Speaking of hair-brained schemes, how about what the Minnesota Department of Transportation is looking into? They want to test technology that could eventually be used to collect a mileage-based user fee instead of the state's gasoline tax. Basically, the government would keep



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tabs on how many miles you drive and tax you per mile. No gas tax at the pump (green.aubitoblog.com). This sort of negates any fuel savings you'd realize with your new electric car wouldn't it? Oh, wait, I get it. They've figured out a way to tax you for using less gas. Pretty slick.

Also slick, across Lake Michigan in Wisconsin, Governor Scott Walker has a smooth idea

for Wisconsin's private school choice program. "Walker's proposed state budget would expand the numbers and types of students who can get state-funded vouchers to attend private schools." Basically, any child who wanted to could use taxpayer money to pay private school tuition. But here's where it gets really slick (or slimy). Walker also wants to let private schools opt out of giving the state-wide achievement tests public school students must take (WTAQ.com, Green Bay). The bottom line is that without testing no one would be able to tell if students in private schools were performing better or worse than public school students. It's a taxpayer giveaway with no strings attached. No chance for abuse of the system here, eh?

When it comes to working the system, however, apparently no one is a faster learner than former president George W. Bush. Following Bill Clinton's lead, he's hit the speech making circuit, delivering 140 speeches last year at \$100,000 to \$150,000 a

pop for a grand total of about \$15 million.

Now, no one would begrudge a man from engaging in a perfectly legal business enterprise. But, you know ... "When George W. Bush declined President Obama's invitation to a ceremony at New York's ground zero after Osama bin Laden was killed, the former president cited his desire to keep a low public profile. In the week after Obama's May 5 ground zero event, the 43rd president made time for three separate speeches to hedge-fund executives, a Swiss bank sanctioned for keeping secret bank accounts, and a pro golf event underwritten by the accounting firm involved in the Tyco International financial scandal." (Daily Beast) I don't know how this fits into the definition of "low profile," but in dollars and cents I'd say it's "Mission Accomplished."

Finally, speaking of profiles, did you know that the official state meal of Oklahoma is: cornbread, sausage gravy, chicken fried steak, pecan pie, barbecued pork, fried okra and squash, biscuits, grits, corn, strawberries and black-eyed peas. The calorie count is 2,700 with 125 grams of fat (Associated Press). You know, in the Oklahoma land rushes of the 1890s some people jumped the gun and snuck onto the unclaimed land ahead of the rest and nabbed the choice parcels. These people became known as Sooners. Today, apparently, the only race in which Oklahomans are interested is the rush to the buffet table.

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