

January 9, 2015

Public Policy Commentary

In This Issue:

Quote of the Week: "I would say that unless the people who want better public transit get behind this project and really insist that the process be speeded up and carried out, we'll go back to what we have now and add bus lanes and whatever else."

- Governor Mark Dayton on the Southwest Light Rail project

1. Life in Red States vs. Blue States.
2. Emmer!!!

LIFE IN RED STATES VS. BLUE STATES

The New York Times recently published an interesting opinion [piece](#) regarding economic life in "red" states versus "blue" states.

While it was in some respects oversimplified, it provided some excellent food for thought.

Essentially, the author describes a "red" economy as one based on energy extraction, agriculture, and suburban sprawl. Another feature is higher poverty rates and lower levels of education.

He cites Texas, Arizona, and Utah as examples.

A "blue" economy is one based on finance, trade and knowledge (this last factor betraying the author's bias as he apparently believes "knowledge" is a feature of liberal states only).

California, Illinois, and Massachusetts are cited as examples (Never mind the fact that agriculture is a major feature of both the California and Illinois economies. We suppose the author thinks Chicago IS Illinois and San Francisco IS California. Again, you were warned that things were oversimplified, perhaps grossly.)

Two items from the essay struck the Watchdog staff as most interesting, one an opinion of the author, another a fact.

Regarding the opinion, the author claims that red state economies are ultimately "unsustainable."

That's an interesting observation.

Blue state economies feature oodles of burdensome regulations, huge governmental expenditures, high taxes, and unions that run amok, especially in the public sector.

So who has the unsustainable model?

Is Detroit a "red" or "blue" economic model?

How about Stockton, California?

Or New York City and their infamous bailouts of the 1970s?

How are those union contracts working out in Chicago, Detroit, and across California, where taxpayers see higher taxation and lower service levels as pension obligations eat ever larger portions of government budgets.

Did someone say "unsustainable?"

Poking fun of the public schools in Texas? Anyone checked out public schools in California lately?

The system is so broken that a judge declared that aspects of it unconstitutional.
Go Blue!

The interesting fact in the piece focused on the concept of inequality, using the Gini coefficient, a widely accepted measure of inequality.

The states featuring the highest levels of inequality in 1979 were compared to those at the top of the list in 2012, the most recent year statistics were available.

In 1979, three "blue" states were listed among the top 20. Those being New York (7th), New Mexico (10th) and California (13th).

In 2012, the number of "blue" states in the top 20 tripled to 9. New York (1st), Connecticut (2nd), California (6th), Massachusetts (7th), New Jersey (12th), Illinois (13th), New Mexico (14th), Rhode Island (19th), and Pennsylvania.

This is an astounding factoid that goes to the very heart of liberalism.

Recall that the core promise of liberalism and collectivism is equality. The promise is equality of outcome and not equality of opportunity.

The concept of equality has been the rallying cry of politicians from Lenin to Robespierre to Pelosi.

How very interesting that while the size and scope of government has grown, inequality has grown.

How very interesting that the states that most vigorously practice the politics and policies of "equality" are experiencing just the opposite.

Conversely, the coefficient also shows that nearly every state in the top 20 in 1979 has fallen down the scale.

While California, Connecticut and Massachusetts have skyrocketed UP the scale, states like Alabama, Kentucky, and Arkansas have tumbled Down the scale.

It doesn't at all surprise this publication that the capitalism practiced in Arkansas has resulted in more equality (and an increased standard of living for the middle class) than the socialism practiced in New York.

Then again, let's recall that "equality" isn't truly a liberal goal. It's merely propaganda to entice the unwashed masses to buy into the concept of governance by the elites.

We have wind towers in rural North Dakota but none on Martha's Vineyard.

We have light rail in Frogtown but none in Kenwood.

Nearly every wealthy kid in Washington, DC attends private school, nearly every poor black kid attends public school.

ObamaCare is for the masses, but not the Harvard [Faculty](#) that wrote the legislation.

"Four legs good, two legs bad!" quickly becomes "Four legs good, two legs better!"

The simple answer to the question of prosperity, equality, and wealth is unfettered capitalism, not collectivism.

EMMER!!!

This headline is intentionally vague to capture the many feelings regarding Minnesota's newest Congressman, who is apparently both revered and despised by various factions of the GOP family in the Sixth District.

Some say "Emmer!!!" in celebration of his convincing victory in November while others are exclaiming his name this week in the same way that Superintendent Chalmers [called out](#) Principal Skinner.

Our friends over at the Minnesota Tea Party Alliance are freaking out over Tom Emmer's vote this week in favor of John Boehner as House Speaker.

Of course, that angst has manifested itself with the requisite lack of perspective, strategic thought, and class we've all come to expect from the leadership of this organization.

Their press release showed one of those grainy, black and white negative ad photos we've all seen a million times, with a red "BETRAYED" label running across Emmer's face.

The press release tells us that Emmer sinned by failing his first "test" as a member of Congress.

Moreover, Emmer committed a mortal sin by apparently not returning some phone calls quickly enough.

Hey, when the head honcho at the Tea Party Alliance calls, Congress better answer! Pronto!

Yawn...

Look, Emmer voting for Boehner isn't a big deal. It doesn't signal that he's in the pocket of the Establishment or that Emmer is a failure. You may want to wait more than one day or for more than one vote before jumping to that conclusion.

The Watchdog will watch Emmer's votes over the next two years to determine his fidelity to free markets and limited government.

Moreover, this Boehner vote is a throwaway.

It's not as if there was a meaningful alternative.

You mean Emmer should have become the 13th vote for Rep. Daniel Webster for Speaker?

Emmer should have become the almighty 26th vote against Boehner?

Get serious. We're wearing tri-corner hats here, not tinfoil hats.

Yes, we don't like Boehner's status quo leadership more than anyone else serious about liberty and constitutional government.

Yes, we love our libertarian and Tea Party readers and share their passion for a re-Founding of America.

But some in the movement need to chill out and take a rational approach to things like this.

The world isn't going to end because Tom Emmer voted for Boehner.

Emmer isn't Karl Marx because of the vote.

We will closely watch where Rep. Emmer comes down on votes regarding the repeal of ObamaCare, raising the debt ceiling, and government spending before we throw him under the bus and declare him a traitor to the Cause.

We will see what his Club for Growth scorecard looks like.

Welcome to your first week on the job, Rep. Emmer.

Editor's Disclosure: Harold Hamilton supported Rhonda Sivarajh for Congress and was a financial contributor to her campaign.

January 16, 2015

Public Policy Commentary

In This Issue:

Quote of the Week: "Now, the premise that we're all created equal is the opening line in the American story. And while we don't promise equal outcomes, we have strived to deliver equal opportunity -- the idea that success doesn't depend on being born into wealth or privilege, it depends on effort and merit."

- President Barack Obama

The Watchdog Says: The disconnect between this man's words and his actions is nothing short of astonishing. If only his deeds matched his soaring rhetoric.

1. Those Cynical Democrats.
2. Political Arson.
3. Arrogant and Entitled.

THOSE CYNICAL DEMOCRATS

Yes, those tricky, tricky Democrats are always cynical, but the change in leadership in the Minnesota House has put their cynicism into hyper-drive.

It appears that the Democrats in the legislature and their co-conspirator Mark Dayton are resorting to the old playbook to play politics with this legislative session instead of working to find bi-partisan solutions to problems.

In short, that playbook consists of supporting all sorts of bad ideas and then slamming Republicans for "obstructing" the process, thereby feeding their political narrative that Republicans can't govern.

A classic example of this cynicism is the gas tax.

Governor Dayton supports a gas tax increase. So do Senate Democrats and so do House Democrats.

That's funny. Dayton didn't support a gas tax increase when he ran in 2010 and did support one until very recently.

Same with DFLers in the legislature.

The DFL controlled both houses of the legislature and the governor's office for the past two years yet the gas tax wasn't talked about in great detail and certainly didn't become law.

Huh.

If a gas tax increase is such a good idea in 2015, why wasn't it a good idea in 2014? Or 2013?

After all, our roads and bridges have been crumbling for many years and it's not as if suddenly there is a need for some serious repair and replacement work.

So, again, why wasn't this a good idea when they controlled the whole show?

Why is it so imperative now?

The DFL knows that the gas tax isn't popular but they also know fixing roads and bridges is popular.

So how to thread the needle to make Republicans look bad?

That requires setting up a gas tax increase as one half of an equation that establishes a false choice.

The DFL would have you believe that in order to fix our transportation infrastructure, there must be new funding.

Never mind that growing budget surplus.

Never mind reprioritizing monies away from wasteful projects like light rail and commuter rail.

And never mind stripping out the waste throughout state government, such as MnDOT. Maybe we could cut back on those state grants to Minneapolis Community Action.

But finding solutions isn't and never was the name of the game.

The name of the game is to make Republicans an offer they can't accept and then use the mainstream media to blame Republicans for not doing something on this issue.

Hey, it's a formula that has worked time and again for the DFL.

Recall 2004, when the GOP controlled that House and the DFL controlled the Senate.

The DFL Senate killed a bonding bill and blamed the GOP for not "doing their work."

The Senate wasn't on the ballot that year and the House was, as they are every two years.

The public bought the narrative and it cost the GOP 13 seats and nearly the majority, as they hung on with a narrow 68-66 majority.

Look for the gas tax and other issues that the DFL did nothing to address to suddenly become "crisis" issues that just have to pass this session.

POLITICAL ARSON

This item could have fit in the column above but just as easily fits under our occasional series on DFL political arson.

For the uninitiated, "political arson" is the art of a politician or his party causing a problem and then proposing some Big Government solution to "fix" the very problem they created.

In other words, this is pretty much the way the DFL governs Minnesota and America.

This week, state Rep. Ryan Winkler (DFL - Golden Valley), took to the floor of the Minnesota House to push his campaign finance bill to ostensibly shine greater transparency on PAC and Super PAC funding in Minnesota.

Of course, Democrats have for years benefitted from this type of political spending, certainly more so than Republicans.

Rep. Winkler and his DFL friends don't have to wonder where the PAC funding originates. They know full well it's coming from the likes of billionaire hedge fund managers like George Soros and Tom Steyer. And right here in

Minnesota, Winkler knows full well that Alida Messinger, a member of the Idle Rich class and a beneficiary of Rockefeller oil money (and Mark Dayton's former Old Lady) has been pumping millions in cash she never earned into DFL front groups like Alliance for a Better (more liberal) Minnesota.

That's not a secret.

In fact, this model of buying elections was perfected by liberals out in Colorado, who managed to buy the whole damn political establishment until citizens came to their senses and started cleaning house, starting with the recall of two gun-hating state senators and then electing a Republican to the U.S. Senate this past fall.

The DFL set this fire and now want to pretend to they're right there with the bucket brigade to extinguish the flames.

Moreover, this is a "twofer" in that it dove tails well with the item above.

If this campaign finance "reform" bill was such a great idea, why wasn't it passed last year or the year before?

Was it because the DFL was enjoying the heck out of that Rockefeller money?

Of course, now that Republicans have restored some balance to state government, this is one of many issues that has suddenly hit the DFL like a bolt of lightning, demanding quick action.

For every one of these kinds of bills, the Republicans ought to ask the DFL author why their legislation wasn't passed last year by their own DFL colleagues, who had all the power to pass it.

ARROGANT AND ENTITLED

While any right thinking American understands that Democrats are by nature political elitists who command a sense of entitlement and regularly raid the public fisc to support that view, the events of recent weeks have once again confirmed this sad state of affairs beyond a shadow of a doubt.

First, we had Community Action of Minneapolis, a non-profit run by Dayton's DFL cronies.

These cronies, as we all know from news reports, used tax payer funds to pay for personal luxuries, trips, concerts, and other illegal and unethical expenditures.

Even more galling, we learned that the Commissioner of the Department of Commerce, a Dayton appointee, shirked his duty to investigate the matter and admitted that political considerations played a role.

And there's the Minneapolis Public Schools, a failed public institution. The worst performer in a universe of bad performers. The shortest midget in the tallest midget contest, so to speak.

We have recently learned, to no one's surprise, that high-level employees have been abusing district credit cards, with scant or no documentation to demonstrate the legitimacy of many purchases.

But we do know the district spent \$2,000 to frame school jerseys to "show pride."

Of course, they could show off test scores and graduation rates to show pride. Never mind.

Finally, the arrogance and entitlement hat trick was completed by state Senator David Tomassoni, a former hockey player, entrenched politician, and Iron Ranger.

Senator Tomassoni this week dispensed with any illusions of a bright line between politicians and lobbyists by taking a job with an organization that exists to lobby government for money and regularly has business before the very legislature in which Tomassoni serves as a senator.

A group called the Range Association of Municipalities and Schools (RAMS) has hired Tomassoni to lead the association.

We're told by Tomassoni that this is all cool because he will take a leave of absence from the group every legislative session.

How that eliminates the concern that he's blurring the distinction between legislator and lobbyist escapes this publication.

It's a clear conflict of interest and the fact that he would take the job in the first place bespeaks the arrogance of a DFL politician who has served forever in a safe seat he will never lose.

That he has continued to defend this situation with no regard to the appearance of things shows that the arrogance and out of touch behavior that got Democrats booted from office across the land this past November is still alive and well here in Minnesota.

You get the government you deserve, folks.

January 23, 2015

Public Policy Commentary

In This Issue:

FACTOID: The IRS predicts that fewer than 50% of those who call the IRS for help filing taxes will have their call answered this tax season.

1. American Sniper - American Hero.
2. Bad Bill of the Week.

AMERICAN SNIPER - AMERICAN HERO

Greetings, Watchdogs. In the nearly ten years of journalistic excellence here at the Dog, we have never commented on a movie or attempted a movie review.

But we have found a movie worth writing about because that movie stands a proxy for many things conservatives believe - and for many things the Left despises.

That movie, of course, is "American Sniper," a biopic based on the life and military exploits of Navy SEAL Chris Kyle, regarded as the most lethal sniper in U.S. military history.

Much to the chagrin of liberals everywhere, the movie has become a phenomenon, smashing records and filling theaters across the country, rural and urban, red states and blue states.

Since liberals can't stand a movie that celebrates both America and the military, they have taken to slandering Chris Kyle and his military service, even though Kyle is dead and gone.

Obese loud mouth Michael Moore declared that snipers are "cowards." One anonymous member of the Academy Awards committee commented that Kyle seemed "sociopathic."

Ah, those tolerant liberals. Of course, Michael Moore is in a great position to judge the service of a Navy SEAL, given his chiseled physique, connection to regular America, and his own military service - said no one, ever.

Sitting around and judging people at the tea and crumpet party or local art crawl has always been a pastime of the Left and thus should surprise no one, although it's always disgusting and nauseating.

It should also be no surprise that especially vitriolic hatred should be hurled towards American Sniper and Chris Kyle. The man and the movie stand for just about everything the Left doesn't want to see in a war movie or a veteran who is the subject of that movie.

Because the Left despises the military and loathes America, there are only two types of veterans they celebrate.

The first kind is the one who joins them in their hatred, such as John Kerry hurling his medals at the White House. Veterans who turn against their country and brothers in arms are especially prized.

The second type of celebrated veteran is the victim, the one who comes home broken and despondent.

Hence the hatred for Chris Kyle. Even though he experienced the worst of combat conditions and even though he certainly paid a physical and mental price, he was hardly the type of veteran embraced by the Left.

He was proud of service and convinced that he and his fellow SEALs had done much to neutralize terroristic factions intent on doing harm to America. He never second guessed his service, his mission, or his country.

Moreover, despite the enormous burdens his services visited on him and his family, the Kyle family prospered after military life.

The Kyle's repaired their marriage, Chris Kyle re-established close bonds with his children, and he became an entrepreneur, starting a successful security-related company.

He was also a noteworthy humanitarian, devoting countless hours to counseling and mentoring fellow veterans.

The fact that Kyle was raised in a devout Christian household in rural Texas where moral values were taught in black and white also no doubt raised the ire of the Left.

In short, for the Left, there is everything to hate in the Chris Kyle story.

And, conversely, everything for Watchdogs to love.

There is no doubt that Chris Kyle is a bona fide American hero.

So tick off your liberal friends and see the movie - twice.

BAD BILL OF THE WEEK

The legislature has been in session for a couple of weeks now, but things are just now starting to heat up, with many bills now being introduced and given first reading.

It is therefore time to reintroduce our periodic feature highlighting either good or bad policy bills.

This week, we feature a bill on the "bad" side of the ledger.

Authored by Senator [Kevin Dahle](#) (DFL - Northfield), the bill would expand a tax raising authority called the "alternative facilities revenue program" to every district in the state.

Right now, 25 districts can raise their property tax levy for certain maintenance items without voter approval. The rest must pass a levy at an election.

Dahle's bill would allow every district to raise this type of levy without voter approval, essentially stripping voters of a right they have enjoyed for many years.

Dahle and his co-authors claim this bill is needed to equalize things across every school district in the state.

Of course, things could be equalized the other way by taking away the favoritism enjoyed by the other 25 districts. A favor they no doubt won by political influence and not by merit.

This is a point made by Rep. Steve Drazkowski (R - Mazzepa), a true Watchdog in every sense of the word.

The other point, of course, is that this is For The Children.

How can children learn if the carpet is worn or if humidity isn't held constant all day?

One newspaper article highlighted the "plight" of the Forest Lake Schools, which wants to have this authority to bypass voters apparently because they

have janitors who want an above-ground boiler instead of one below-ground. Easier on the knees, we suppose.

Readers are told Forest Lake voters haven't passed a levy in ten years.

So what? That's democracy. The Forest Lake Schools made a pitch for a tax increase and the voters weren't convinced.

In typical government fashion, the solution isn't to make a better case for the tax increase. The solution is to run to the legislature and beg for a law to allow them to ignore the voters.

So what is the school district saying here? That it's voters are too dumb to understand? The very same voters who were likely educated in those very schools?

Or is it that the voters are plenty smart and they believe that either the needs aren't pressing or, more likely, that they want to see the district use existing resources to prioritize spending.

Need a new roof on the high school? Fire a couple assistant principals or diversity counselors and the problem is solved.

And please don't give us the old rag about school board members are accountable at the ballot box.

The teachers' union controls these elections and spends far more than any other group to install what is nothing more than a puppet board to do their bidding.

Moreover, many school board elections happen in the off-year, so as to take advantage of low voter turnout, which is by design.

Two good Republicans, Senator Karin Housley and Rep. Bob Dettmer represent this school district.

This publication hopes they aren't down in Saint Paul shilling for this bad idea.

The Watchdog is supremely confident there's enough money in the Forest Lake budget for that new boiler. It simply takes some courage to take on the teachers' union to do so.

But as we all know, it's easier to screw the taxpayer.

The legislature would be well served to follow Rep. Drazkowski on this one.

Our public schools are among the most bloated public institutions in America, thanks to the unholy alliance between the unions and the school board.

The union elects the school board and there is no one at the table to represent the taxpayer.

Another tax increase? NO. And one that is taken out of the hands of voters? HELL NO.

January 30, 2015

Public Policy Commentary

In This Issue:

Quote of the Week: "I know there are times when I might have to step up on a certain vote and say there's a conflict there. But the job itself is not a conflict."
- State Senator David Tomassoni on his new job working for a government-funded organization

The Watchdog Says: Will Al Gore soon weigh in and declare there is "no controlling legal authority" on the issue?

1. The Arrogance Just Grows.
2. Bill of the Week.

THE ARROGANCE JUST GROWS

You would think that politicians who want nothing more in life than to remain in office would be smarter about their affairs.

Or maybe some politicians just become so arrogant and out of touch, they begin to believe they can do whatever they want and get away with it.

Over the past three weeks, the Watchdog has joined other media outlets in examining the arrogance of some DFLers in the legislature, whether it's Senator Tom Bakk pushing a \$90 million office building or Senator Jeff Hayden being a part of the debacle at Minneapolis Community Action.

Or the arrogance of Senator David Tomassoni, who continues to display either a tin ear for politics or simply a stunning level of arrogance.

Unless you're living in exile in North Korea, you know that [Sen. Tomassoni](#), who has been in office for 23 years, took a job with an organization that frequently has business before the legislature.

If that wasn't enough to destroy the line between legislator and lobbyist, Tomassoni jammed a redwood tree into the eye of taxpayers this week by hiring a registered lobbyist to act as his attorney in this matter.

More importantly, this lobbyist represents clients who frequently have legislation that travels through Tomassoni's committee.

According to media reports, Tomassoni is represented by [Michael Ahern](#), an attorney and registered lobbyist with the law firm of Dorsey and Whitney.

Ahern also represents a number of clients as a registered lobbyist, including many who would have legislation before the [committee](#) Tomassoni chairs, the Environment, Economic Development and Agriculture Finance Committee.

Here is a partial client list:

- Atomic Recycling;
- CenterPoint Energy;
- Great Lakes Gas Transmission;
- Mining MN;
- MN Energy Resources Group;
- MN Telecom Alliance;
- Northern Border Pipeline Company;
- Northern Natural Gas;
- Northern Tier Energy;
- Randy's Environmental Services;
- Xcel Energy.

This is a finance committee that sets government expenditures for that program area as well as establishing regulations in that area of law.

Moreover, committee chairs have a great deal of leverage over their committees, deciding which bills get heard and when, or, deciding which bills don't get heard.

So, putting aside Tomassoni's day job for a moment, what happens when his lawyer/lobbyist buddy has clients who have business with the Tomassoni Committee?

What benefits will be bestowed on the clients of Mr. Ahern who appear before that committee?

Will there be a fair hearing? Will opponents of Ahern's client be given a fair chance to be heard? Or is the deck stacked in favor of Ahern's clients?

In fact, what kind of beneficial treatment might these companies have already received by virtue of their sweetheart relationship between Tomassoni and his lawyer/lobbyist?

Who does Tomassoni represent? The taxpayer? His constituents? RAMS (his new job)? Michael Ahern?

It's getting harder and harder to tell.

And it doesn't end there.

Recall that Mr. Ahern works for Dorsey and Whitney, a big downtown Minneapolis firm.

He has colleagues that also lobby the legislature.

For example, [Lynette Slater Crandall](#) is a registered lobbyist with that firm.

So is [Teresa Lynch](#).

Are these lobbyists and their clients also benefitting from the relationship?

The fact that Tomassoni chose a registered lobbyist with regular business before his committee to represent him shows the extent of the moral and ethical rot that can exist in government, especially when a politician holds office decade after decade without challenge (a cautionary note to all our Iron Range readers who mindlessly vote DFL year after year).

This whole sorry affair is like playing 3D chess, with differing levels of problematic relationships between lobbyist, lawyer, legislator, taxpayer, and institution.

Whether or not a technical conflict of interest exists here, there is a more problematic picture.

First, for our public institutions to govern with credibility, the citizens who live under the laws made by that institution must believe that there is a measure of equality before the law that prevails in that institution.

When average voters, who can't afford a lobbyist or spend their time at the Capitol, perceive that the special interests run the place, it undermines the credibility of the institution and its authority to effectively govern.

Second, if indeed this situation doesn't run afoul of the law or rules of the Minnesota Senate, it should.

A big part of preventing scandal, graft, and corruption is not allowing a situation where it can flourish.

Allowing Senator Tomassoni to do what he is doing, if it doesn't run afoul of the rules, creates an atmosphere where bad things can happen.

Some very important lines have been seriously blurred here.

The line between legislator and lobbyist has been blurred by Sen. Tomassoni.

Similarly, the line between lawyer and lobbyist has been blurred by Mr. Ahern.

Both undermine citizen confidence in the State Senate and therefore bring that body into disrepute.

Senator Tomassoni would be well advised to read the Rules of the Senate, which state, in part:

Improper conduct includes conduct that violates a rule or administrative policy of the

Senate, that violates accepted norms of Senate behavior, that betrays the public trust, or that tends to bring the Senate into dishonor or disrepute.

BILL OF THE WEEK

Sometimes it pains the Watchdog, but we have to give credit where it is due, even when that credit belongs to a self-described liberal.

State Rep. Tina Liebling (DFL - Rochester) has introduced our Good Bill of the Week, [HF 347](#).

HF 347 accomplishes a "twofer" on behalf of liberty.

First, the bill eliminates the prohibition of the Sunday sales of liquor. In fact, the bill also eliminates the ban on Christmas, Christmas Eve, and Thanksgiving sales.

Good for her and good for the people of Minnesota.

Second, the bill also eliminates that ban on selling cars on Sunday.

This is also interesting because it engenders so much whining on the part of some car dealers, who desire to use the threat of government force to keep their competitors closed on Sundays.

The reasons for keeping dealers closed on Sunday are as ridiculous as they are solvable through market-based solutions:

- It increases overhead;
- It makes financing difficult because financial institutions are closed on Sundays;
- It guarantees a day off without the threat of losing business to a competitor;
- And, of course, the argument from inertia. "It's always been that way."

None of these arguments withstands even the slightest amount of scrutiny and logic to demand that there be a criminal penalty for selling cars on Sunday.

Talk about an early form of crony capitalism.

Don't want to be open on Sunday? Don't want to lose business or face increased overhead? Just make it a crime for your competition to be open.

There is simply no good reason for government to prohibit this type of commerce and this type of free economic exchange on Sundays.

This is especially foolish when a citizen can buy eggs, gas, houses, art, pencils, lottery tickets, baseball cards, dog food, hammers, hamsters, underwear, toothpaste, tooth picks, towels, and nearly every other item on a Sunday.

In addition to her authorship of this bill, Rep. Liebling was also instrumental in passing the medical cannabis law that got the government out of that aspect of the doctor-patient relationship.

This publication has no choice but to salute Liebling here, even though she inexplicably goes the other way on issues like selling fireworks.

Shine on, you crazy diamond.

February 6, 2015

Public Policy Commentary

In This Issue:

Quote of the Week: "At a time when take-home pay for families remains flat and some Minnesotans are still struggling to make ends meet, it's outrageous that the Governor would approve enormous salary increases for commissioners and political appointees already making six-figure salaries."

- State Rep. Roz Peterson (R - Burnsville)

1. It's Getting Unbelievable.
2. Ideas that were Bad before they were Good.
3. You're No Capitalist.

IT'S GETTING UNBELIEVABLE

Over the past few issues, the Watchdog has exposed the outrageous arrogance of the Democrats in Saint Paul, an arrogance that proves beyond a reasonable doubt the contempt these self-styled political elites have for the very people they're supposed to be serving.

It's a \$90 million office building with a gym and a reflecting pool. It's a senator taking a job with a group that has regular business before the legislature. It's that same senator hiring a lobbyist to represent him before the Ethics Committee, even though that lobbyist has clients who come before the committee the senator chairs.

It's another DFL senator who sits on the board of a non-profit that squandered thousands of dollars on personal perks instead of helping the people the taxpayer dollars were directed, by law, to help.

Simply put, they fancy themselves above the law.

Now comes yet another example of that elitist arrogance, establishing a pattern that shows that the "party of the Workin' Man" doesn't give a rip about the average taxpayer.

This week, Governor Dayton formally notified the legislature that he has given massive pay raises to his top cabinet heads and political appointees totaling over [\\$800,000](#), raising salaries in some cases by 20 or even 30% (or more!).

Note that these bureaucrats were already making near or in excess of \$100,000 annually, in addition to gold-plated benefits.

So what's the justification for this ginormous pay raise?

"This will allow state government to recruit and retain the best and the brightest," said one Dayton's talking heads, whose salary wasn't revealed.

What a crock. Usually, pay raises are offered as a consequence of demonstrated, measurable results that improve an organization and help meet the mission.

The statements from Dayton and his staff contain utterly no mention of a quantifiable measurable improvement brought about by the employees receiving this largess.

In fact, there has been no shortage of executive branch failures of late, one example being the disaster that Dayton and the DFL call "MnSure."

As is typical of Democrats, and of government in general, concepts like "merit," "results," and "value-added" have nothing to do with the appalling gluttony at the Public Trough.

We're told that much like the politician giving the pay raise, these bureaucrats are "the best and the brightest" and that simple bromide should be enough for us Unwashed Masses to bow our collective heads in simultaneous awe and shame of both the elites' superior talents and our own ignorance in questioning their enlightened looting of our treasury.

These raises are totally out of line with the reality in the private sector, where, thanks in large part to Democrat policies, wages are stagnant and raises, to the extent they are given, come as a result of a demonstrable workplace achievement and certainly don't amount to a 30 or 40% pay increase.

Talk about out of touch. Then again, are you really surprised that the man who walks with a silver spoon in his yap thinks in this manner?

What is most astounding in this whole sorry affair is that after the office building, after the MnSure bonus scandal, and after these pay raises, the governor and his DFL cronies propose even MORE tax increases to pay for basics like road and bridge repair.

The hubris and elitism is so profound, the Democrats stand before the television cameras, smile, and tell us that if we want quality core governmental functions, we need more taxes on top of the taxes they already jammed down our throats when they ran the place lock, stock and barrel the past two years.

That's a bunch of BS. Republicans were given control of the Minnesota House precisely to act as a check on this kind of nauseating overreach.

We're told that we can't fill the pot holes without tax increases as DFL senators are measuring the drapes in the new office building and Dayton's department heads are planning a getaway to Costa Rica to spend some of that new dough and burn off a portion of the six weeks of paid time off they get every year.

Republicans must stand tall against ALL tax increases and fulfill their mandate to prioritize government spending and protect taxpayers.

Seriously, and Republican who is contemplating voting in favor of tax or fee increases this session ought to think real carefully about it. Especially if that legislator hopes to be re-endorsed in 2016.

The situation is as out of control as we've ever seen it.

NO TAX INCREASES!

IDEAS THAT WERE BAD BEFORE THEY WERE GOOD

The DFL Long March towards political cynicism in the name of winning in 2016 continues.

As this publication noted in a recent edition, Governor Dayton and DFL legislators have suddenly "discovered" all sorts of "good" ideas for this legislative session that somehow didn't seem to be good ideas last year when they ran the show and they were up for re-election.

Of course, the whole idea behind these bills are to make cynical, irresponsible and unrealistic promises to their constituency knowing that Republicans won't agree to them, thus firing up the base while allowing the DFL to claim that Republicans "oppose everything."

In this sense, the spigot is flying wide open.

Bills and budget proposals for "free" breakfasts, "free" community college, "free" preschool, enhanced welfare benefits, \$500 million in new education spending, and millions in new revenues to fund transit.

Again, if these were such good "investments" and such good public policy, why weren't they proposed and passed into law last year?

For example, why did Governor Dayton oppose a gas tax last year but thinks it's a great idea?

It's because he wants to kill a transportation bill and blame Republicans.

He wants to create a bunk narrative that we can't have decent roads and bridges because Republicans won't "invest" in them. All the while, the DFL "invests" in new government buildings and pay raises for political appointees.

In other words, there is a war of competing narratives at play.

Democrats want a narrative of the false choice between new taxes and quality core governmental functions like roads and bridges.

The GOP should put the choice as one between wasteful government spending and re-prioritizing to fund core functions.

Republicans have the disadvantage in that the mainstream media will side with the DFL, as they normally do.

But that's no excuse. GOP legislative leadership must get in front of this narrative and do whatever it takes to get the message out to the voters-starting right now.

YOU'RE NO CAPITALIST

The Watchdog received some good responses to our piece last week regarding Sunday care sales, with many in favor and a few opposed.

Frankly, the arguments against were weak and illogical.

Here are the top two arguments against we received in terms of popularity.

The Sunday prohibition protects "mom and pop" dealers, who provide jobs in the community.

Whether the prohibition protects anyone is a matter of conjecture.

Moreover, it isn't the government's job to protect any market segment against competition. Ultimately, government protection only protects the inefficient against the ruthless yet necessary function of free market efficient allocation of resources.

In addition, what is a "mom and pop" store, anyway? Define it. 10 employees? 25? 50?

In addition, in today's sophisticated economy, all is not what it may appear to be.

For example, large transnational corporations in all industries will purchase small companies and keep the local brand while employing the former "mom and pop" owners as managers.

The national company does this because it recognizes both the goodwill associated with the local brand and the talent of the local ownership. If the mom and pop operation was attractive enough to cause a purchase, why jeopardize that product or service by changing the brand name and the management?

Second, some readers liked criminalizing Sunday sales because they believe that government should assist these readers in propagating their religious belief that Sunday is the Lord's Day and should be a day of rest.

The Watchdog believes that it is decidedly not the job of government to force business owners and citizens to act in accordance with their neighbor's religious beliefs.

If a citizen wishes to observe Sundays in that manner, he should be free to do so. By the same token, those who do not observe Sundays in that manner should not be criminalized for engaging in voluntary commercial transactions.

Moreover, isn't the cow out of that barn? When you can head down to the strip mall on a Sunday morning and buy a pack of smokes, a lottery ticket and a chinchilla, we're kind of beyond that particular argument.

You argue against Sunday sales, folks, but you're no capitalist if you do so.

February 13, 2015

Public Policy Commentary

In This Issue:

Quote of the Week: "Look at the campaign contributions to legislators and the caucuses if you want to understand, in my subjective view, why this thing has got so much steam."

- Governor Dayton speaking to legislation to ban certain Internet games offered by the State Lottery

1. An Old-Man-Child.

AN OLD-MAN-CHILD

The citizens of this great state, regardless of political persuasion, have had many opportunities over the years to question the judgment and temperament of Mark Dayton.

An irrational and emotional decision to close his Senate office due to vague "threats" that caused his office to be the only one in the U.S. Senate to close.

As governor, there was the Vikings stadium bill whereby Dayton confessed to be ignorant of key funding provisions, even though he signed the bill to great fanfare from the football faithful - and the Wilf family.

Or the farm equipment repair tax where, again, he professed ignorance despite his legal signature affixed to the bill causing it to carry the force and effect of law.

What is perhaps more troubling is the governor's temperament. His inability to control his emotions. His surrender to anger, lashing out, and name calling political opponents. The subordination of emotion to reason. Hyper-partisanship instead of leadership.

Dayton's outright fitness for office is a legitimate question. He doesn't look up to the job, even though a majority of his fellow citizens saw fit to make him chief executive - twice.

The latest examples of his juvenile petulance (yes, "examples" in plural) were on display this week regarding two issues that attracted bi-partisan concern from legislators.

The first concerned large-scale pay raises for Dayton's cabinet heads, all of whom already earn high salaries and most of whom are nothing more than political appointees who are where they are thanks to their connection to the Dayton for Governor campaign and not their experience or expertise for the job at hand.

When a political appointee bureaucrat who already earns more than \$100,000 per year gets a 35% pay raise, any reasonable person would be right to question the raise.

Not according to Mark Dayton, who demonstrated the aforementioned lack of judgment in granting the fat raises in the first place.

When Republican legislators panned the raises, Dayton didn't respond by acknowledging their concerns or offering a detailed reasoning for the move. He didn't rise above the fray and provide the leadership called for in such a situation (early in the legislative session, a new House GOP majority).

Instead, in his typical modus operandi, he lashed out at his GOP critics, taunting them.

"If this is their revenge for my getting re-elected over their candidate by 100,000 votes, they'll keep bashing," Dayton exclaimed to reporters this week.

How this issue is even remotely connected to Dayton's re-election was never explained by him.

The remark was typical Dayton. Instead of acknowledging the issue and the legitimacy of the opposition, he lashed out like a spoiled trust-fund kid who learned that daddy will only buy him two cars instead of three.

Unfortunately for Dayton, his simplistic narrative of "vengeful Republicans" was blown apart when DFL Senate Majority Leader Tom Bakk stated his concerns regarding the pay raises.

Bakk, a very astute politician, quickly appreciated the folly of the raises and worked quickly to limit the fallout by adding a measure of bi-partisan concern.

Bakk, the antithesis of Dayton's silver spoon, trust fund pedigree, understood that granting pay raises that in and of themselves (more than \$35,000 in some cases) amount to more money than the median household income in many counties.

The second issue that bubbled to the surface this week is a replay from last year.

During the 2014 legislative session, the legislature overwhelmingly passed a bill to limit certain kinds of games newly offered by the State Lottery, citing a separation of powers issue that prevented the Lottery from offering the games without legislative approval.

Dayton vetoed the bill after the legislature had already gone home and couldn't attempt an override.

So, the bill is back again this year and sailing through the legislature in the same way.

When asked about the bill and legislative concerns regarding separation of powers, Dayton reacted in the way he always does, which is to say he got emotional and lashed out.

On Planet Dayton, legitimate separation of powers issues can't be the reason for disagreement. Instead, Dayton opined that gambling interests were to blame.

"Look at the campaign contributions to legislators and the caucuses if you want to understand, in my subjective view, why this thing has got so much steam," he said.

That's interesting to say the least. In this case, the governor is again horribly out of touch or he's lying.

There are three outside interests to whom the governor was referring: Allied Charities of Minnesota, the Petroleum Marketing Association, and the Indian Tribes.

The first two have testified in favor of the bill before multiple committees and are on record in support.

A review of the committee tapes doesn't indicate that the Indian Tribes have testified in support of the bill but their collective opposition to gaming expansion is a matter of record.

In order to determine if the Governor actually knows what he's talking about, he indeed checked the campaign contributions - contributions made to HIM in 2014 for his re-election.

What we found shouldn't surprise our readers.

ALLIED CHARITIES

The Allied Charities, who represent the organizations who benefit from charitable gaming (think pull tabs for the local hockey association) do not have a PAC and thus don't make political contributions as an organization.

The Allied Charities have two registered lobbyists who have registered with the Minnesota Campaign Finance Board.

Lobbyist Allen Lund has no record of personal political contributions in 2014.

Lobbyist Raymond Bohn did contribute to the Senate DFL in 2014 (total of \$750) but not to any candidate for governor.

The Senate DFL collects total campaign contributions in the millions of dollars. To think they are pushing this bill for a total of \$750 seems just a bit far-fetched.

MN PETROLEUM MARKETERS

This group, like Allied Charities, has no PAC.

Their registered lobbyist who testifies in favor of the bill is William G. Strusinski.

Strusinski did not contribute to GOP gubernatorial candidates in 2014. He did, however, support one Mark B. Dayton for governor, with \$750 in donations.

INDIAN TRIBES

The federal government recognizes 11 Tribal Nations located in Minnesota.

And while the total amount in direct contributions for governor isn't overly significant, it did weigh heavily in favor of Mark Dayton.

The tribes contributed a total of \$10,500 to Dayton's campaign in 2014.

The Lower Sioux Nation gave \$500 to Jeff Johnson.

The one outlier is the Boise Forte Nation, which gave \$4,000 to Kurt Zellers.

Thus, the Indian Tribes certainly didn't play heavily (at least directly) in the governor's race.

And the contributions that were made skewed heavily in favor of HIM.

So what's going on here?

The parties with a stake in advancing the bill actually gave far more to Dayton himself than his opponent.

Either Dayton is unaware of this fact (unlikely) or he's attempting to set up these groups (especially the tribes) as straw men in order to distract from the merits of the issue and perhaps play upon the ugly emotions of some Minnesotans as it relates to race relations and the wealth of tribes derived from gaming.

Of course, we won't wait for the media to ask Dayton these tough questions.

Governors, above all else, are expected to rise above the fray and provide leadership and solutions to the toughest issues facing society.

What Mark Dayton gives us isn't above the fray. It's far, far below and represents little more than what we would expect if we put a sixteen year-old high school kid in the office.

Surly, sullen, petulant, dismissive, arrogant, emotional, argumentative, and obstinate are just a few of the adjective that describe our chief executive.

We didn't need Jeff Johnson to run this past November.

What we needed was the mother of any teenage boy. She would have understood exactly how to deal with Dayton.

A 67 year-old man-child. When he grows up, he's so out of that mansion!

February 20, 2015

Public Policy Commentary

In This Issue:

Quote of the Week: "We concluded that MNsure's failures outweighed its achievements in its first year of operations. There were widespread problems with MNsure's online enrollment system and customer service, causing difficulties for consumers, insurers, counties, and the Department of Human Services."

- Office of the Legislative Auditor

1. Pay-Raising Cain.
2. Bad Ideas Raise Questions.

PAY-RAISING CAIN

"Conniving." "Backstabbing." "Can't be trusted." Harsh words indeed. And that's only one high-powered Democrat talking to another.

That kind of language hasn't been seen since John Bender's dad went on a [tirade](#) against his only son.

Yes, the legislature is back in session and the entertainment, and threats to our liberties, has begun.

The issue over Governor Dayton handing out fat pay raises to his political appointees literally exploded this past week, offering a bunch of fascinating subtexts to the 2015 legislative session.

And it's only February.

The first subtext ties in directly to a piece we published last week, exploring the governor's difficulty in controlling himself and his emotions, leading him to frequently lash out against those who disagree with him.

What's ironic is that the piece was written *prior* to the governor losing his marbles on Senator Bakk over the Senate's handling of the pay raise issue.

The governor's wild tirade was classic Dayton and showed that Dayton hasn't become "unleashed" because he's run his last election. The dude has become positively *unhinged*.

No wonder Rep. Nick Zerwas has introduced those bills regarding stroke transport protocols. The first test case may be right there is Saint Paul.

The second subtext is the relationship between Governor Dayton and Senator Bakk.

Capitol sources (yes, we have them on the DFL side as well) tell us that the blow up was the culmination of a growing feud between the two men who once ran against each other for governor.

Our sources say the conflict picked up steam last legislative session when the governor was opposed to the Senate DFL's plan for a \$77 million office building for themselves.

Bakk found a way to get funding for the building through a back-door kind of way by inserting the enabling legislation in the omnibus tax bill and not a bonding bill.

This method of funding even led to a lawsuit (ultimately unsuccessful) filed by Jim Knoblach, who now serves in the House and chairs the Ways and Means Committee.

When Bakk went all fiscal conservative on Dayton's pay raises for his political cronies, it was apparently too much for Dayton, who blew a gasket.

True or not, there certainly appears to be more to this feud than simply two power-hungry career politicians engaged in a run-of-the-mill fight over who gets to make the rules.

Although the current controversy seems to have been resolved, the relationship between Bakk and Dayton bears watching.

Tom Bakk is a master politician, a savvy operator, and an Iron Ranger, meaning that he keeps score. Look for Bakk to have his opportunity for some payback down the road.

The third subtext is the deft and expert way in which Speaker Kurt Daudt handled the situation.

Republicans began by letting proxies like Rep. Sarah Anderson lay down the hammer while the Speaker stayed above the fray and let Bakk and Daudt duke it out.

Daudt positioned himself, triangulated himself, to be the diplomat in the matter.

Ultimately his methodical and low-key approach yielded political and policy fruit, scoring a big win for the Republican team.

By brokering an agreement, Daudt enhanced his credentials as leader and as a serious player at the Capitol.

This was especially important as the Speaker came into the office as one of the youngest and least experienced in recent times.

The outcome proved that he's more than up to the job and ready to lead Republicans in Saint Paul.

The policy outcome was also a master stroke, getting the GOP what they wanted.

First, all future pay raises must be approved by the legislature, thereby recovering an oversight function that Democrats gave away last year in their zeal to put partisanship and empowering their governor over constitutional principles. Democrats putting politics above principle? Shocking, we know.

Second, the pay raises themselves are delayed until July 1, giving both Daudt and Bakk a crack at the raises before session ends.

Third, the recovery of some of the raises inserted into a stop-gap bill remain, which was GOP initiative.

In essence, Daudt got everything his caucus wanted. Of course, that won't stop some tinfoil hats from claiming that Daudt "caved" or "didn't do enough" or "gave in too quickly."

The final subtext simply shows how venal the mainstream media, the DFL, and the public unions really are.

Think about it. What if Tim Pawlenty had doled out massive pay raises to political appointees while rank and file AFSCME bureaucrats got 2% raises?

The Capitol would be filled with state employees (on release time, no doubt) banging pots and pans in the Rotunda and talking about how unfair it all is

while the media slavishly covered things and DFL legislators stood behind them in the press conference to nod in approval.

Really. Just imagine Tim Pawlenty doing this instead of Mark Dayton. It's a whole other dynamic.

We seriously doubt that Tom Bakk would have only expressed "concern" about the raises or said they were "probably" deserved.

Dayton hands out raises 10 or 20 times what the woman emptying bed pans at the vets home earns and nary a peep from the unions.

Classic.

BAD IDEAS RAISE QUESTIONS

Liberals are full of bad ideas that never seem to deliver.

ObamaCare. MnSure. The Great Society. The Stimulus.

This week, a group of DFLers introduced a bill to jack up the minimum wage some more and slather on a bunch more tax credits for poor people, in an effort to raise everyone out of poverty in one big sprinkling of pixie dust.

Pondering these questions has led the staff at the Watchdog to ask our readers for their view.

While much time is spent dispensing opinions and observations, we also want feedback, which we get on a regular basis and enjoy reading.

First, why is it that liberals tolerate so much governmental failure?

They of all people should be the ones demanding the government deliver on all the promises they so enthusiastically endorse.

They honestly believe government can cure all manner of ills. Why do they then make excuses or turn a blind eye when those promises aren't met?

Kids in poverty are still there generations later. Our inner-city public schools still offer graduation rates below 50%.

Corruption, waste, fraud, and abuse are regular features of governmental programs (ahem, Minneapolis Community Action).

Are they that distrustful of private solutions that they would prefer a governmental solution that delivered 10% of the promised result?

Do they get something out of it for themselves, like the public school bureaucrat who gets a sweet salary, awesome benefits, and no accountability in exchange for voting those folks into office?

Are they simply not paying attention to the follow though?

Do they believe the spin doctors who say it's not as bad as the facts or that Republicans are to blame?

The second question regards the plight of the middle class. There is no doubt that wages are stagnant right now and that many folks are still hurting financially. We acknowledge that.

But is part of the problem that expectations are too high? Do we have a large number of Americans who simply feel entitled to a certain lifestyle that the economics of their situation don't support?

It seems to us that there are a fair number of Americans who have the basics of survival but feel entitled to more.

They feel entitled to cable TV, a car, central air conditioning, a college education, regular vacations, a smart phone, regular dining out, an HD television, and lattes from Starbucks.

In other words, many folks feel entitled to a high standard of living that was far out of reach for most Americans just a few decades ago.

Thoughts? Send them to harold@anokacountywatchdog.com.

We'll be sure to pass them along to Governor Dayton, a man who certainly has lived a lifestyle that most of us will never know.

February 27, 2015

Public Policy Commentary

In This Issue:

1. More Than Enough Money.
2. Gallows Poll.
3. Epic Fail.

MORE THAN ENOUGH MONEY

Today's big political news is that the state is sitting on a \$1.9 billion budget surplus. This is an increase of \$832 million from the previous forecast.

This should put to rest for the 2015 legislative session any talk of increasing taxes and fees for anything for any reason.

That \$1.9 billion surplus is nearly equal to the \$2 billion tax increase Dayton foisted on Minnesota recently.

It looks like some tax cuts are in order.

We will be watching closely to see how Republicans handle the surplus. Prudent budget management and calibrating the expectations of big spenders on both sides is now paramount.

GALLOWS POLL

Greetings, Watchdogs and welcome to another week of conservative thought and fellowship.

We don't often cite polls or make arguments based on public opinion but polls do have their place in taking the pulse of the citizenry on the issues of the day.

KSTP released a poll this week regarding some hot topics, with some very interesting results:

5. Governor Dayton recently approved pay raises ranging from \$11,000 to \$35,000 for more than two dozen commissioners and other political appointees. Do you approve or disapprove? Asked of 525 registered voters. Margin of sampling error for this question = $\pm 4\%$

19% Approve
70% Disapprove
11% Not Sure

6. In 2013 the Minnesota Legislature gave the governor authority to raise commissioner pay without legislative approval. Do you think pay raises should require approval by the legislature? Asked of 525 registered voters. Margin of sampling error for this question = $\pm 3.8\%$

74% Yes
18% No
8% Not Sure

7. Governor Dayton proposes a sales tax on gasoline, higher driver's license registration fees, and a higher general sales tax in the 7-county Minneapolis metro area to raise \$6 billion over 10 years for new highways, bridges and mass transit. Do you approve or disapprove? Asked of 525 registered voters. Margin of sampling error for this question = $\pm 4.4\%$

43% Approve
51% Disapprove
6% Not Sure

8. House Republicans propose spending \$750-million on highways and bridges over four years by using some of the state's budget surplus and other existing funds without raising taxes. Do you approve or disapprove? Asked of 525 registered voters. Margin of sampling error for this question = $\pm 3.8\%$

75% Approve
17% Disapprove
8% Not Sure

While governing by polls is always dangerous, Republicans have certainly hit upon policy goals that meet with 3/4ths approval, always a good sign.

Like he so often does, Dayton really stepped on his crank with those fat pay raises for his political cronies.

More importantly, the public finds favor with the GOP transportation proposal that focuses on prioritizing existing dollars instead of coming back at the taxpayers for more money.

By the way, how many pot holes could we fill with the \$900,000 in pay raises Dayton is handing out?

EPIC FAIL

Mark Dayton's face plant on the pay raise issue caused a bit of a debate in conservative circles this week. Essentially, the debate centered on what people considered to be Mark Dayton's most epic fail.

Here are the Watchdog's ten favorite Dayton Epic Fails of his governorship (if we included the Senate days, it would be a top 25):

E-Pull Tab Failure: According to numbers released yesterday by the Minnesota Gambling Control Board, e-pulltabs actually contributed \$0 to the stadium cause after expenses were accounted for. Gamers spent \$15 million playing e-pulltabs, but \$13 million of that was gobbled up as prizes, with the remaining \$2 million covering various charity expenses and taxes.

- City Pages 9/13/13

Dayton Unaware of PSLs: "They are relatively minor in the scheme of the entire project things, like the personal seat licenses, that as far as I'm concerned snuck in there. There were others who were negotiating in more detail that were more aware of it."

- MN Public Radio 8/9/13

Dayton Tells Moms to Buy Pot on the Street: "So I explained to [the governor] how my son and others like him would benefit from safe and legal access to medical marijuana. I told him in great detail our story and our struggles. My optimism quickly turned to dismay when, after hearing my son's story, the governor actually suggested I should just find medical marijuana for my son off the street."

- Jessica Hauser, medical marijuana mom, 3/26/14

Dayton Seeks to Release Violent Sex Offender: Two psychologists who reviewed his case last year said he was highly likely to re-offend, that he had a "homicidal rage towards women," and may actually have anywhere from 60 to 200 victims. Duvall's rap sheet goes back to 35 years, when he raped a 17-year-old girl he met at the State Fair. His convictions include raping a 17 year-old girl and beating her with a hammer.

Unaware of Farm Equipment Tax He Signed into Law: Once the public notices the new tax on farmers, Dayton first blames Legislative staff for a drafting error for its inclusion. Then he blamed House and Senate Democrat leaders, saying the provision was "snuck" into the bill and that most legislators did not know about it. Finally Dayton blamed an "imperfect process", even though the legislature had four months to write the tax bill and he had three days before signing it to read it.

- Media Reports July-August 2013

MnSure Failure: In a detailed report to the Minnesota state Legislature, auditors said the state's health insurance exchange, known as MNSure, was riddled with mistakes and failures during its rollout. Some of the key issues uncovered by the auditor included keeping information from elected officials and the public, promoting publicly enrollment goals known internally to be inaccurate, and a general lack of accountability.

- Heartland News Service 2/24/15

Despite Failure, MSure Bonuses Issued: As the state rolled out its troubled health insurance exchange, MNSure managers received bonus pay totaling \$26,354 for work done in the three months leading up to the Oct. 1 launch. Gov. Mark Dayton said Friday that he first learned at least six months later of controversial contract changes made by the state's health exchange. He said he also didn't know about the serious technical issues plaguing MNSure until after the exchange's Oct. 1 launch.

- Media Reports January 2014

Massive Pay Increases for Highly Compensated Political Appointees: With no more elections to worry about, Gov. Dayton decided to hand out five-figure raises to each of the 26 state commissioners and agency heads last month. The pay increases total more than \$800,000 for a group of public servants who were already all making more than \$88,000 annually. The sole exception was the Met Council Chair, who made \$58,000, but Dayton shifted that job to full-time and increased the salary to \$145,000.

- City Pages 2/6/15

Generous as Hell - With Other's Money: Gov. [Mark Dayton](#) acknowledged Wednesday that he was embarrassed by the tax return he released Tuesday that showed he had given only \$1,000 to charity despite total earnings of \$343,234 last year, according to [his tax returns released this week](#).

- Star Tribune 11/13/13

Dayton Taxes the Poor After He Said He Wouldn't: During the 2010 campaign, Dayton said he would oppose increasing taxes on cigarettes, because such a

tax would be regressive. In 2013, he changed his position and supported a whopping \$1.60 per pack tax increase on cigarettes.
MinnPost 10/17/14

And this guy got re-elected.

March 13, 2015

Public Policy Commentary

In This Issue:

Quote of the Week: Wisconsin 'right-to-work' critic will expand company in Minnesota.

- Headline in Saint Paul Pioneer Press 3/10/15

1. Yes, We Told You So.
2. Let's Get Real.

YES, WE TOLD YOU SO

Well, that didn't take long. Just days after this publication explained the reasoning behind Rep. Pat Garofalo's opposition to Wisconsin's overly broad "right to work" law, a job creator harmed by the law has [announced](#) an expansion in Minnesota, based partly on Governor Walker's ~~political stunt~~ law.

As we explained last week, Wisconsin's law is overly broad and goes too far, interfering with private business and the private right of contract.

In brief, we wrote last week that right of the employer in the private setting to require union membership is far outweighed by the employee's right to ask for a job at the business and then claim an exemption from this term and condition of employment.

In the private sector, there is no "right to work." In fact, the whole concept is rather collectivist when you think about it.

Nobody has a "right" to work, either in a legal or a philosophical sense.

Show us in the Constitution where it says a man has a right to work.

No self-respecting conservative would claim there is a "right" to work at a certain place.

To state otherwise is to claim that one man, by force of government, has a claim to another man's resources simply because one owns a business entity and one man wants to work there.

Nonsense.

No one has a right to work at a particular place of business.

The owner has a right to decide who will work at his business and under what terms.

How ironic that the same conservatives who decry the minimum wage support a "right" to work.

A man only has a right to sell his labor and another man only has the right to purchase that labor through an employment contract to which they mutually agree, free from force and fraud.

Should a man be compelled to join a union as a condition of employment?

Maybe the question should be, should a job creator be made a criminal if he makes a voluntary, business-driven decision to require union membership?

Of course, the public sector situation is completely different and for a number of reasons no public servant should be allowed to join a union to bargain collectively with the state.

But in the private sector, there is no right to work. There is no right to defy the employer's mandate to belong to the union. To use the force of government to mandate otherwise is gangster government at its worst, and done in the name of *limited* government, no less.

And speaking of the public sector and "right" to work, it should be noted that Scott Walker, when he had his chance in 2011, not only failed to abolish public unions, he actually exempted two public sectors from that version of right to work - police and fire.

Thus, this important "right" wasn't extended to the thousands of police and fire employees.

Coincidentally, Walker had the backing of police and fire unions during his campaigns for governor.

During that same period, Walker said he wouldn't support extending right to work to the private sector, for the same reasons why the Watchdog doesn't like it.

Then, Walker changed his tune at about the same time he got serious about running for president.

The logic of forcing a cop to belong to a union and disallowing a business owner to decide if wants his employees to be union escapes this publication.

Instead, it's quite apparent that this state of affairs surrounding the issue is driven by politics.

For those who are impressed with Walker, be careful.

Governor Walker is starting to appear quite malleable on a number of issues, not just right to work.

Both the Wall Street Journal and Wisconsin newspapers have begun to call out Walker for his numerous flip flops, including his recent reversal on the renewable fuel mandate.

Walker, who was against renewable fuel mandates like ethanol, is now for them, presumably since there are a bunch of Iowa farmers like them.

What's even more disgusting is Walker's Bill Clintonesque word parsing to excuse the reversals.

For example, Walker claims he was only opposed to state renewable fuel mandates, not federal.

Yet, he said as a candidate for governor that "Mandates hurt Wisconsin's working families, and whether they are from Washington or Madison, we as fiscal conservatives should oppose them."

We find it quite ironic to watch some self-anointed Tea Party leaders here in Minnesota, like Jack Rogers, clap their fins and bark for Scott Walker while Walker morphs from one core position to another like a wad of Silly Putty in a clothes dryer.

Scott Walker is just the flavor of the month. Within a year, he'll be a footnote to presidential campaign trivia.

You heard it here first.

LET'S GET REAL

It looks like a feature of the Republican Party and some affiliates is the setting and pursuit of certain things that have utterly no chance of working or happening.

The latest example is an [ad](#) featuring party Chair Keith Downey demanding that the entire \$1.9 billion budget surplus be returned to taxpayers.

Huh?

Downey surely knows that the DFL controls both the Senate and the governor's office.

There is simply no way in hell the entire surplus will be returned.

It's an unrealistic claim and we're scratching our heads trying to figure out why it was produced and aired.

Why push for something that isn't going to happen?

Doing so harms the credibility of the party, sets unrealistic expectations for certain people who actually believe in political fantasies like this (you know who you are), and makes the GOP look out of touch.

Yes, in a perfect world of GOP control we would push for a return of surplus.

Yes, some of these GOP spending proposals concern us.

But is the solution to promote an ad like this?

Focusing on attainable and realistic goals would be a far better approach.

One place to start would be to call for sustainable spending targets that prevent Minnesota's rather shameful history of state spending outstripping inflation and population growth by orders of magnitude.

Another place to start would be to insist that some part of the surplus be used for tax relief.

A third place to start would be to demand that spending increases be accompanied by policy changes, such as trading education funding increases for teacher accountability language.

Moreover, it's a risk for the party to assume high profile roles like this when their fiscal house is still out of order.

So long as the party is in debt, the policy positions it takes will be diminished because of a credibility gap borne of ongoing and chronic financial problems.

Goodness, we are more than three years into this fiasco and still dealing with it.

Currently, the party is still nearly \$1.5 million in the hole.

It's hard to call for fiscal discipline when you're in the hole and creditors are knocking at the door.

March 13, 2015

Public Policy Commentary

In This Issue:

Quote of the Week: Wisconsin 'right-to-work' critic will expand company in Minnesota.

- Headline in Saint Paul Pioneer Press 3/10/15

1. Yes, We Told You So.
2. Let's Get Real.

YES, WE TOLD YOU SO

Well, that didn't take long. Just days after this publication explained the reasoning behind Rep. Pat Garofalo's opposition to Wisconsin's overly broad "right to work" law, a job creator harmed by the law has [announced](#) an expansion in Minnesota, based partly on Governor Walker's ~~political stunt~~ law.

As we explained last week, Wisconsin's law is overly broad and goes too far, interfering with private business and the private right of contract.

In brief, we wrote last week that right of the employer in the private setting to require union membership is far outweighed by the employee's right to ask for a job at the business and then claim an exemption from this term and condition of employment.

In the private sector, there is no "right to work." In fact, the whole concept is rather collectivist when you think about it.

Nobody has a "right" to work, either in a legal or a philosophical sense.

Show us in the Constitution where it says a man has a right to work.

No self-respecting conservative would claim there is a "right" to work at a certain place.

To state otherwise is to claim that one man, by force of government, has a claim to another man's resources simply because one owns a business entity and one man wants to work there.

Nonsense.

No one has a right to work at a particular place of business.

The owner has a right to decide who will work at his business and under what terms.

How ironic that the same conservatives who decry the minimum wage support a "right" to work.

A man only has a right to sell his labor and another man only has the right to purchase that labor through an employment contract to which they mutually agree, free from force and fraud.

Should a man be compelled to join a union as a condition of employment?

Maybe the question should be, should a job creator be made a criminal if he makes a voluntary, business-driven decision to require union membership?

Of course, the public sector situation is completely different and for a number of reasons no public servant should be allowed to join a union to bargain collectively with the state.

But in the private sector, there is no right to work. There is no right to defy the employer's mandate to belong to the union. To use the force of government to mandate otherwise is gangster government at its worst, and done in the name of *limited* government, no less.

And speaking of the public sector and "right" to work, it should be noted that Scott Walker, when he had his chance in 2011, not only failed to abolish public unions, he actually exempted two public sectors from that version of right to work - police and fire.

Thus, this important "right" wasn't extended to the thousands of police and fire employees.

Coincidentally, Walker had the backing of police and fire unions during his campaigns for governor.

During that same period, Walker said he wouldn't support extending right to work to the private sector, for the same reasons why the Watchdog doesn't like it.

Then, Walker changed his tune at about the same time he got serious about running for president.

The logic of forcing a cop to belong to a union and disallowing a business owner to decide if wants his employees to be union escapes this publication.

Instead, it's quite apparent that this state of affairs surrounding the issue is driven by politics.

For those who are impressed with Walker, be careful.

Governor Walker is starting to appear quite malleable on a number of issues, not just right to work.

Both the Wall Street Journal and Wisconsin newspapers have begun to call out Walker for his numerous flip flops, including his recent reversal on the renewable fuel mandate.

Walker, who was against renewable fuel mandates like ethanol, is now for them, presumably since there are a bunch of Iowa farmers like them.

What's even more disgusting is Walker's Bill Clintonesque word parsing to excuse the reversals.

For example, Walker claims he was only opposed to state renewable fuel mandates, not federal.

Yet, he said as a candidate for governor that "Mandates hurt Wisconsin's working families, and whether they are from Washington or Madison, we as fiscal conservatives should oppose them."

We find it quite ironic to watch some self-anointed Tea Party leaders here in Minnesota, like Jack Rogers, clap their fins and bark for Scott Walker while Walker morphs from one core position to another like a wad of Silly Putty in a clothes dryer.

Scott Walker is just the flavor of the month. Within a year, he'll be a footnote to presidential campaign trivia.

You heard it here first.

LET'S GET REAL

It looks like a feature of the Republican Party and some affiliates is the setting and pursuit of certain things that have utterly no chance of working or happening.

The latest example is an [ad](#) featuring party Chair Keith Downey demanding that the entire \$1.9 billion budget surplus be returned to taxpayers.

Huh?

Downey surely knows that the DFL controls both the Senate and the governor's office.

There is simply no way in hell the entire surplus will be returned.

It's an unrealistic claim and we're scratching our heads trying to figure out why it was produced and aired.

Why push for something that isn't going to happen?

Doing so harms the credibility of the party, sets unrealistic expectations for certain people who actually believe in political fantasies like this (you know who you are), and makes the GOP look out of touch.

Yes, in a perfect world of GOP control we would push for a return of surplus.

Yes, some of these GOP spending proposals concern us.

But is the solution to promote an ad like this?

Focusing on attainable and realistic goals would be a far better approach.

One place to start would be to call for sustainable spending targets that prevent Minnesota's rather shameful history of state spending outstripping inflation and population growth by orders of magnitude.

Another place to start would be to insist that some part of the surplus be used for tax relief.

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Moreover, it's a risk for the party to assume high profile roles like this when their fiscal house is still out of order.

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March 20, 2015

Public Policy Commentary

In This Issue:

Quote of the Week: "A staff member who reviewed the reintroduced bill had seen the Hyde provision in the bill but did not inform the senator. The senator was not aware that the provision was included until last Monday."

- Julia Krahe, Staffer to Sen. Klobuchar

1. The Enforcer in Chief.
2. The Met Council Cometh.

THE ENFORCER IN CHIEF

If there's one thing Barack Obama has done for the American people, it's the abject clarity he's brought to their understanding of the Leftist ideology.

After 7 years of tyranny, even casually engaged Americans fully understand what it means to live under unabashed Leftism.

Besides tyranny, central economic planning and disrespect for the rule of law, we have seen no shortage of governmental coercion.

Americans now understand what is meant by the aphorism "a government big enough to give you everything you want is powerful enough to take everything you own."

Although it's a rather simple concept and quite logical, many citizens have trouble seeing the connection between government largesse and the force (or threat of force) necessary to obtain the booty government doles out in the name of altruism.

Put another way, government can't play Santa unless it first plays Jesse James and Tom Petters rolled into one gangster.

Every government program, no matter how well intentioned, is ultimately underpinned by the threat of force.

Pay your taxes or go to jail.

Buy health insurance or pay a fine.

The individual "mandate." How do you think Barack enforces the mandate?

The president who used the threat of force to make people engage in commerce (buying health insurance) is a case study in the road to tyranny.

You didn't think it would end there, did you?

The latest window into tyrannical thought comes with the news this week that the president is supportive of the idea of *forcing* people to vote.

Yes, you heard it right. Making people vote under threat of coercion from our benevolent government.

Oh, don't be surprised or outraged. The guy who loves compulsory health insurance would surely love mandatory voting.

The former constitutional law professor must have missed the seminar on the First Amendment.

The right to political speech also includes the right to NOT speak, just as the right to exercise religious beliefs includes the right to be irreligious.

This is just another in a string of ridiculous idea coming from the chief executive.

Why in the world would it be good public policy to force disengaged, unthinking people to the polls.

We already have enough of those people at the polls now. They're called Democrats.

Moreover, low voting numbers can actually be a sign of healthy democracy, where many voters feel that their basic rights will be protected no matter who's in charge, although Obama is doing much to obliterate that thought.

Barack Obama now has the distinction of being the first American president to embrace mandatory, compulsory voting.

Eat your vegetables, buy your health insurance, and vote - or you're going to jail.

America?

THE MET COUNCIL COMETH

It's a good thing Republicans took control of the Minnesota House this past November.

Among other benefits, there will now be some oversight of the Met Council, which continues to grow like The [Blob](#).

The latest attempt at mass social engineering by this group of unelected, unaccountable political cronies of Mark Dayton is the imposition of "affordable" housing in the far exurbs, including cities like Carver and Andover.

In reading multiple news reports, it's hard to tell exactly why these exurbs were chosen to take on affordable housing units.

The reports mostly focused on the rapidly rising wealth of these cities, which has exactly nothing to do with where to locate housing for people who are in need of a host of governmental services.

It is an unfortunate fact that those who utilize government to subsidize their living arrangements also need a host of other governmental services like transportation, social services, law enforcement, and food stamps.

The far suburbs offer little in the way of these services.

For example, the Watchdog used Met Transit's trip planning tool to see what kind of mass transit services are available from a prominent Andover landmark, Andover High School.

There are no Met Council transit services within miles of the high school.

Thus, it appears there real motivation in this scheme is to simply force wealthier areas of the Metro to take some low income housing because, well, they "need" some.

We puzzled to say the least by this stunt. How locating people in need far from the services they require is good public policy escapes this publication.

If this is about punishing the exurbanites who live a lifestyle the liberals hate, that's been done in spades - most recently by massive income tax increases.

And what evidence is there is of a certain retribution against the deep red exurbs?

As mentioned above, the Met Council is appointed by the governor, and this governor has followed an all-too-familiar pattern here by appointing political cronies to the Council.

Here are just a couple of examples.

Adam Duininck, Council Chairman. Duininck is the former head of Win Minnesota, a liberal PAC that raised millions to defeat Republicans in recent elections. The group also acted as a conduit for other liberal special interests, including \$220,000 from the National Education Association (the teachers' union) during the 2012 election cycle.

Katie Rodriguez, District 1. She [ran](#) as an endorsed Democrat for the Minnesota House in 2010, running against state Rep. Kurt Zellers, the former GOP House Speaker.

Lona Schreiber, District 2. Schreiber, the former Lona Minne, is a [former](#) DFL state Rep. who served five terms in the Minnesota House in the 1980s before becoming a lobbyist.

Jennifer Munt, District 3. Munt is an executive with AFSCME, the big public sector union that works to jack up bureaucrat pay while minimizing accountability.

Ed Reynoso, District 9. Reynoso is the political director for the Teamsters, Local Council 32. Aren't those guys under indictment?

Sandy Rummel, District 11. Rummel is a former DFL state Senator, serving from 2007-2010, when Roger Chamberlain kicked her out.

As we said, this is just a sample of the partisan political involvement of the current cast on the Met Council.

Talk about a crying need for reform.

Ugh.

March 27, 2015

Public Policy Commentary

In This Issue:

Editor's Note: The Watchdog will pause next week as the 2015 legislature will be on their Easter/Passover break. So long as the legislature is closed, we will take a moment to step off guard duty and head to the Dog's undisclosed Caribbean hideout for cigars and rum.

Quote of the Week: "We don't know what we don't know."

- MN Sheriff's Association president Jim Franklin, in testimony against industrial hemp.

- 1. We Need School Reform.
- 2. The GOP Budget.

WE NEED SCHOOL REFORM

Yet more evidence is in regarding the need for reform in our government schools.

The Watchdog, upon prompting from our friends at www.better-ed.org, engaged in some research regarding test scores in the Saint Paul Public Schools.

Check out this table that shows the percentage of African-American students in the Saint Paul Schools who are reading at grade level. The table we produced also shows the Saint Paul Schools budget as well as total student enrollment for that year.

School Year	% reading at grade level	Total enrollment	District Budget (in millions)
2008-2009	38%	38469	\$628.1
2009-2010	41%	38045	\$641.7
2010-2011	42%	37780	\$623.8
2011-2012	45%	37776	\$636.3
2012-2013	45%	37840	\$655.8
2013-2014	26%	37825	\$688.1

2014-2015	25%	37844	\$694.4
% Change '08 vs. '15	-34%	-1.65%	+10.6%

These statistics are deeply concerning. Despite spending nearly \$18,350 per student, only 1 in 4 African-American students can read at grade level. That's appalling.

No wonder the public agrees with Republicans that districts should break the hold of the teachers' union and allow the consideration of factors beyond seniority when deciding layoffs.

THE GOP BUDGET

The MN House Republicans released their budget targets this week, setting the stage for the showdown later this year with the governor and the DFL Senate over the state's budget for the next two years.

Before the DFL and their buddies in the media spin things too hard, let's take a look at the numbers and the facts behind the budget targets, including targets for major programmatic spending areas.

Overall, the budget is set at \$42.58 billion.

\$2 billion in unspecified tax relief.

\$100 million would be set in a rainy day fund.

\$319 million in unencumbered money, undesignated at this time.

\$800 million capacity for bonding next year.

Dollar figures in the table are expressed in billions.

Fund	FY '14-'15	Gov. FY '16-'17	'16-'17 Base	GOP FY'16-'17	GOP Change from '14-'15
Education	\$16.6	\$17.4	\$16.7	\$16.9	+1.8%
HHS	\$11.2	\$13.1	\$12.77	\$11.6	+3.5%
Public Safety	\$1.97	\$2.15	\$2.0	\$2.08	+5.3
Higher Ed.	\$2.84	\$3.18	\$2.89	\$2.95	+3.8%

Total	\$39.3	\$43.0	\$41.13	\$42.6	+8.3%
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First, an note on the table. Only major spending areas were broken out. However, the "total" represents total net spending proposed, including program areas not included in the table.

Second, some rounding of numbers was done to keep the table simple. Thus, numbers may not exactly reflect the spreadsheet kept by the budget department, but it gives a good approximation.

There are a few important take aways from the GOP proposal.

The first is that the budget lacks the "cuts" that the DFL will undoubtedly complain about.

To see why it is important to distinguish between the fiscal year 2014-2015 budget and the fiscal year 2016-2017 "base" budget.

The FY 2014-2015 budget represents what the state spent in the previous budget cycle.

The FY 2016-2017 budget represents what the state will spend in the upcoming two-year bi-ennial budget . In other words, this is what the state will spend if the budget was left on auto-pilot.

Take a look at the health and human services (HHS) budget line.

In the last budget cycle, the state spent \$11.2 billion on HHS services.

If left on auto-pilot, the state would spend \$12.77 billion this upcoming cycle, which begins July 1.

That's a \$1.5 billion increase.

The GOP proposal is to spend \$11.6 billion in FY 2016-2017, a \$400 million increase.

Here's where the liberals and the media always snooker the public.

The liberal will use the "base" budget of \$12.77 as the comparison. Since it's Over \$1 billion more than the GOP proposal, they will shout that the GOP has "cut" over a billion from the HHS budget.

This, even though the GOP proposes to spend \$400 million more than the Democrats did in the previous cycle, when they ran the show.

One can certainly disagree with the budget number, but one cannot say the GOP "cut" HHS. They enhanced funding by hundreds of millions. That's a fact.

This is classic liberalism. They always take the projected spending and cry "THE CUTS!!!" if the projected spending isn't totally fulfilled.

Overall, the Watchdog sees a decent budget proposal.

First, the budget tames the biggest budget areas. HHS and education are by far the biggest spending areas in the state budget and increases in those two areas are modest, especially by historical standards. In previous budget cycles, it wasn't unusual to see HHS spending increases of 30% or more in a bi-ennium.

Second, the budget contains place holders for large tax cuts and some sizable tax relief that the governor doesn't include.

We did not include the Taxes budget items because it's a unique budget area that finances itself.

There is a place holder for about \$2 billion in tax relief in the GOP targets that will deliver on many of the campaign promises Speaker Daudt and company made to voters.

The Watchdog will be watching closely to see what tax relief comes about from this budget.

Moreover, it's important to keep expectations in check.

As we wrote last week, it's pie-in-the-sky to expect a zero growth budget.

The governor wouldn't go for that, the Senate DFL wouldn't go for that, and the public wouldn't.

It's simply unrealistic and unproductive to expect that kind of budget.

And yes, let's admit that there are Republicans who want to spend some money.

They might want to fix our aging roads and bridges. Maybe fill some potholes. Maybe fund nursing homes.

This can be done and provide tax relief while also keeping spending in check.

Look, the Watchdog would love to see a zero growth budget. Government is too big and spends too much. But that's not going to happen in this environment.

We need more conservatives in office to do things like that.

And no, let's not even think about shutting down government in a desperate gamble to force that kind of budget.

That's a DFL dream scenario.

The DFL would simply hold out until GOP poll numbers cratered and then they would cut a deal that would look a lot like what could have been had in May.

And don't forget that there really is no such thing as a "shutdown" in Minnesota.

Courts have taken it upon themselves to declare many government functions "necessary" and subject to court-ordered continuity.

Forcing the legislature to spend money is clearly unconstitutional and a blatant violation of the Separation of Powers Doctrine.

But that's what would happen.

The bottom line is that Speaker Daudt has put together a good, solid budget proposal that puts the state back on a responsible spending trajectory for the next two years.

Want to get some perspective? Go back and take a look at the DFL budgets from two years ago.

Talk about giving whiskey and car keys to teenagers.

At the end of the legislative session, we predict we will see good tax relief, a responsible spending plan (including a good transportation plan), and a return to adult government.

Hey, the GOP proposal may not be totally sexy, but it's a good play considering the hand the voters dealt by re-electing Mark Dayton.

April 10, 2015

Public Policy Commentary

In This Issue:

Quote of the Week: "Maintaining an appointed Met Council would continue the Council's accountability problems ... Because Council members are appointed by the governor, however, they are not directly accountable to the public for (their) decisions."

- James Nobles, Minnesota Legislative Auditor

1. Taming the Met Council.
2. Put it on the Credit Card - or Not.

TAMING THE MET COUNCIL

The chorus against the unelected (and therefore unaccountable) Metropolitan Council continues to grow.

It was publically revealed this week that four suburban counties have hired a federal lobbyist to help the federal government enforce their own law that says elected, not appointed, public officials must be the approving authority for the disbursement of federal funds controlled by the Council.

Of course, the Star Tribune called the law "a somewhat obscure rule" in trying to denigrate it and protect Big Government, something that newspaper loves and worships.

The law is the law and it's sad indeed that these counties need to hire a lobbyist (and perhaps a lawyer?) to simply have the federal government follow the laws it makes.

Then again, what would one expect from a government and a president that regularly ignore the law?

Of course, Governor Dayton reacted to the news with all the poise, maturity, and equanimity we have come to expect from The Eternal Adolescent.

With eyes wider, whiter, and wilder than normal, The governor slurred his way through a diatribe that included phrases like "outrageous" and "irresponsible." There was also the obligatory reference to "sneaking" something by the governor, which has become his code for being asleep at the switch.

Sneaking anything by this governor is akin to sneaking the Invisible Man past Rip Van Winkle.

Just like the Vikings snuck the personal seat license into the stadium bill. Or the farm equipment repair tax was snuck into the tax bill he signed. Or the way miserly charitable contributions were snuck into his tax return. It's debatable who learns more about government by reading it in the newspapers - Barack Obama or Mark Dayton. If Mark's Star Tribune subscription was cancelled, state government would grind to a halt.

It's laughable that the governor would plead ignorance regarding the position of the four counties in question. More likely, he wasn't listening.

Scott County Administrator Gary Shelton gets it right.

"Despite the governor saying our actions are shameful for airing our dirty laundry to the federal government, we've been working for a change at the state level for six years," he said in a recent interview.

The simple fact is that opinion makers across government are coming to the conclusion that the Met Council's governing structure is contrary to basic and fundamental notions of representative government.

Considering the size, scope, and mission of the Council, it's rather appalling to consider that those who govern it are unaccountable to taxpayers.

By the numbers, the Met Council is massive. It's fourth largest governmental unit in the state, by operating budget (\$890 million).

It has some 4,200 employees.

Most importantly, the Council makes decisions limiting important citizens rights. This is especially true with respect to land use and development.

Increasingly, the Met Council has taken a more direct role in dictating where and how people live their lives in the Metropolitan area.

And yet every member of the Council's governing body is unelected.

This state of affairs should trouble every citizen regardless of political ideology.

In fact, unelected, unaccountable metropolitan governing body is a rare thing.

According to the federal government, 94% of metropolitan governing bodies are elected in some fashion.

The Met Council stands alone.

This is perhaps why legislators across the political spectrum as well as non-partisan official like the Legislative Auditor are decrying the status quo and calling for change in the way the Council is governed.

In conversations with some legislators and local officials, the Watchdog has learned that in addition to a growing presence in citizens' lives, many are also troubled by what they see as the hyper-political nature of the Met Council under Mark Dayton.

While it is true that the Met Council has been ruled by political appointees since day one, there is a feeling among many observers that Governor Dayton has taken the partisanship to a new and unprecedented level.

In the aggregate, there is an observation that Dayton has greatly de-emphasized merit and overly emphasized political biographies in his selection of Met Council appointees.

One former mayor of Metropolitan city remarked, "When I look at the biographies of these folks, I see a whole lot of people with a background in partisan politics and very little experience in working with or in city/county government."

In fact, the Watchdog posted a story just a couple of week ago in which we highlighted the highly partisan background of many Met Council appointees.

This circumstance has not gone unnoticed in Saint Paul. The Watchdog has spoken to sources at the Capitol who say that information is being compiled regarding who has applied to the Met Council, who was granted an interview, and who was ultimately chosen.

One source told the Watchdog, "The caliber of some applicants who didn't even get an interview will blow you away. These are highly respected voices in the arena of public policy."

The turning of the Met Council into a quasi-DFL Party operation continues apace.

The Watchdog has learned that Jennifer O'Rourke is now the Director of Community Relations at the Met Council.

Don't know who she is? More importantly, don't know who she's married to?

How about the Chairman of the Minnesota DFL.

Apparently, Mark Dayton considers state employment to be a variation of the Newlywed Game.

Community Action of Minneapolis. The Iron Range. Giants Ridge. Double digit pay raises. Met Council patronage.

Gangster government.

PUT IT ON THE CREDIT CARD - OR NOT

It's no surprise that Governor Dayton has expressed his enthusiasm for putting over \$800 million on the state's credit card in the form of "bonding" for state projects.

Loyal readers know that the economic stimulus effect of these bills is dubious.

They also know that there are always scores of pork barrel projects that utterly lack merit in these bills.

This proposal is no exception to that rule, including a pool for Hallock, some bike trails, a greenhouse for the U of M, and some stuff for the Como Zoo (is that still around?).

The Mark Dayton spin machine was out in full force with all sorts of maps, charts, and graphs for the media and public to consume for this, the latest "jobs" bill. No word on whether this was also "for the children."

But there were two sheets of paper the governor left out of the picture.

The first one is a list kept by the Department of Management and Budget (MMB) regarding how much bonding has been authorized in previous bills but remains unspent.

After the glow of passing a bonding bill passes and all the politicians are done back slapping and shopping press releases, the nitty gritty work of actually underwriting, selling, and processing bonds into money for projects go unnoticed.

Would you believe that there is some \$2.4 BILLION in authorized but unspent bonding that is sitting idle in the pipeline from previous bonding bills?

Going back 25 years, there is some \$2.45 BILLION in unspent but authorized bonding.

Read it [here](#).

Before the legislature goes along with Dayton charging up the credit card to satisfy the various political constituencies, they had best carefully scrutinize these projects in the pipeline and ask some hard questions about the status.

This publication is willing to bet the legislature could go a long ways towards funding critical and bond-worthy projects like roads and bridges simply by cancelling some of these stalled projects and redirecting the money to more worthwhile projects.

The other document that didn't make the governor's media packet was the debt service spreadsheet.

This is the document that tallies all the interest payments taxpayers shell out whenever the state goes to market to sell debt instruments and rent money from bond holders.

As things stand today, without additional bonding, the state will shell out over \$2 BILLION in interest payments in the next 20 years, between general obligation and trunk highway bonds.

2\$ BILLION right out the door in interest payments simply for the debt we've already incurred.

Read it [here](#).

Strangely, these documents didn't make the press packet for the governor.

Fortunately, they made our press packet.

April 17, 2015

Public Policy Commentary

In This Issue:

Quote of the Week: "Given the gravity of the allegations, it's likely we will conduct a full investigation."

-Legislative Auditor Jim Nobles, regarding yet MORE allegations that state Senators Jeff Hayden and Bobby Joe Champion were involved in steering taxpayer dollars to questionable programs to which they have ties.

1. The Tax Rankings are in.
2. Bits and Pieces.

THE TAX RANKINGS ARE IN

Each year, the highly respected and non-partisan Tax Foundation releases its annual rankings of state tax burdens, which provides a comprehensive look at how competitive states are in relation to each other.

Specifically, the rankings measure the corporate, individual income, sales, property, and unemployment insurance (UI) tax.

This year, in addition to looking at Minnesota, we found it worthwhile to also take a look at states that have a Republican governor who fancies himself as presidential timbre.

As one would expect, Minnesota is once again in the toilet, with a dismal overall ranking of 47th.

Corporate: 44th
Individual Income: 46th
Sales: 37th
UI: 29th
Property: 34th

Remember when that massive \$2 billion income tax increase was going to lower property taxes? We're still in the bottom half, with only 16 states below us.

Governor Dayton and company used some of the income tax loot to "buy down" property taxes.

Of course, there was absolutely nothing to prevent cities and counties from using the money the state shipped to them for something besides tax relief. The money came with no strings attached.

Of course, many cities and counties simply spent the money and jacked up property taxes on top of things.

As recently as 2012, Minnesota was 44th. The massive income tax increase knocked the North Star state down to 47th.

We're sure Mark Dayton and the DFL consider this ranking to be a badge of honor.

We could easily see Dayton calling up Jerry "Moonbeam" Brown out in Sacramento to congratulate him on edging out Minnesota for \$48.

"Jerry! It's Mark. You dirty dog! You managed to beat me out again this year. And I had a DFL legislature. Now that the Republicans have the House, it's going to be really hard to catch you. Plus, you lucked out with that whole drought thing, which will give you cover to go for the #50 spot. You know what they say, never let a crisis go to waste. If you see Brad Pitt, tell him to call. We need to talk film credits. Now that we've run out of stadiums to build, I need some more well-connected millionaires to raid our treasury through giveaways to people who need more money like I need another dog. Later, skater!"

And what of those governors and ex-governors who seek the Republican endorsement.

Let's start at the head of the class, where former Florida governor Jeb Bush can lay claim to having led a state that offers a pretty kick butt tax climate. Yeah, some of you don't like Jeb because of the immigration and Common Core thing. Also, his last name is less than inspiring as we're not so much into dynasties around here after we sent the King packing back in 1776.

But the tax record is pretty sweet, with a #5 overall ranking.

Corporate: 14th
Individual Income: 1st
Sales: 12th

UI: 3rd
Property: 16th

Let's continue with the "A" honor roll, with former Texas governor Rick Perry. Rick may be wearing the dunce cap when it comes to the classroom, but he's on the dean's list when it comes to beating down taxes like a rented mule.

Overall, Texas sports the #10 ranking, which is close to the #9 ranking the state held when he was governor.

Corporate: 39th
Individual Income: 6th
Sales: 36th
UI: 15th
Property: 36th

Next up is the Pelican State, where Bobby Jindal ears somewhere around a C- or D+ for his state's over #35 ranking.

Corporate: 23rd
Individual Income: 27th
Sales: 50th
UI: 6th
Property: 24th

After this, we get into the governors who should hit summer school for tax policy, instead of seeking the White House.

Scott Walker of Wisconsin would be in summer school, but he dropped out to run for president.

Walker may brag that "right to work" will boost jobs in Cheeseland, but job creators won't be eager to go there as the state is only four spots in front of Minnesota at #43.

Corporate: 33rd
Individual Income: 43rd
Sales: 14th
UI: 27th
Property: 31st

In fact, Wisconsin has gone backwards under Walker's leadership, falling from 41st to 43rd.

Ohio's Kasich is one step behind Wisconsin, at #44.

Corporate: 26th
Individual Income: 47th
Sales: 32nd
UI: 5th
Property: 20th

Dead last, the goat of the class, is Governor Chris Christie of New Jersey, ranked #50.

Perhaps instead of pushing gun control or vowing to take marijuana from the sick and dying, he should be working on lowering his state's worst-in-the-nation-lower-than-Minnesota ranking.

Corporate: 41st
Individual Income: 48th
Sales: 48th
UI: 32nd
Property: 50th

BITS AND PIECES

Elections. Former state Representative Kathy Tingelstad lost her bid to sit on the board of Connexus Energy. She of North Star rail and gas tax override infamy may need to move to a blue area if she ever wants to see elective office again.

LGA. Predictably, DFLers have their undies in a bundle because the House GOP has proposed reductions in local government aid to Saint Paul, Minneapolis, and Duluth. LGA, for better or worse, was designed to help small cities provide basic services despite their small tax base.

Yet the DFL carps when the richest cities in Minnesota cry that they are losing some of the welfare they should have never had in the first place.

How typical that the party that builds stadiums for richest men also protects welfare for the richest cities.

Stadiums. And speaking of stadiums, another group of millionaires is at the public trough in Saint Paul, this time looking for a hand out for, of all things, a

soccer stadium. No word on whether the professional shuffle board people have asked for a stadium yet, but stay tuned.

Tax Inequality. The top 20% of income earners pay 84% of the income tax. Interestingly, those in the next quintile, who have incomes between \$79,500 and \$134,300, comprise 20% of the total share of income but pay 13.4% of the income tax. And the bottom quintile? They -2.2% of the income tax. They get paid by the government.

April 24, 2015

Public Policy Commentary

In This Issue:

Quote of the Week: *"Ecology as a social principle . . . condemns cities, culture, industry, technology, the intellect, and advocates men's return to 'nature,' to the state of grunting sub-animals digging the soil with their bare hands."*

-Ayn Rand

Happy Belated Earth Day, Watchdogs.

1. Oh, the Outrage.
2. From the Capitol.

OH, THE OUTRAGE

If there's one thing the Democrats are good at doing, it's faking it. Faking numbers, faking sincerity, faking altruism, and faking outrage.

The fakery is the outrage over comments made by Rep. Jim [Newberger](#) (R - Big Lake) from the floor of the Minnesota House of Representatives regarding Northstar Rail and its route to Minneapolis.

Newberger inspired feigned indignation by remarking, "Right on the edge of St. Cloud, maybe a half a mile, a quarter-mile, from the rail tracks is the St. Cloud state prison. Boy, wouldn't that be convenient, to have that rail line going from that prison to North Minneapolis."

Now, these comments are certainly not advisable and Rep. Newberger was right to apologize for them. In fact, he not only apologized immediately after the remarks, he also later issued a written apology.

We can see, however, how Newberger would connect Northstar with prison time. The line between Anoka County and the Saint Cloud pen could be used to transport the politicians who voted for the damn thing to prison. Dan Erhart, Kathy Tingelstad, and Jim Abeler for starters.

But now the good people of Minnesota are subject to the drama and histrionics of liberal politicians who want to see him sent to the Gulag for his slip of the tongue.

House Minority Leader Paul Thissen (DFL - Minneapolis), who used to be the Speaker of the House but was fired, expressed his fakery by saying that Newberger's written apology wasn't enough, according to news reports.

No word on whether the DFL will call for Newberger to be water boarded, beaten with a sock full of pennies, or forced to listen to Mark Dayton read War and Peace aloud as further punishment.

And you know the governor just couldn't help himself, probably chiming in to distract the media from the criminal investigation of Community Action of Minneapolis, the infighting between two political cronies making over \$100k each for their make-work jobs on the Stadium Authority, and his politically unpopular ideas like a gas tax.

The governor demanded that House GOP leadership punish Newberger and publically disavow his comments.

Now wait a minute. All this outrage from the DFL was strikingly absent when a House DFLer hurled a racial epithet at Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas, calling him "[Uncle Thomas](#)" in a Tweet he later tried to hide by deleting.

Winkler, a Harvard-educated attorney who lives in tony Golden Valley and sports a 5-O'Clock-news-[hairdo](#), issued a smarmy, lukewarm apology and then insulted everyone's intelligence by claiming he didn't know that calling a black man an "Uncle Tom" was inflammatory.

Somehow, this publication missed both Dayton, who governor at the time, and Thissen, who was House Speaker at the time, calling for Winkler to be formally punished by the House. In fact, Thissen could have made it happen.

But this is what happens when a Democrat savages a Republican/conservative.

It matters not that the victim of the remark is the second black justice of the United States Supreme Court, who grew up in the Segregated South, and the perpetrator of the remark is a white-bred guy who lives in the suburbs and was raised in Bemidji, Minnesota, which most Americans couldn't place on a map if you gave them \$500 for the effort.

Thus, the outrage over Newberger is fake. Not real. Bogus. Total bulls**t.

If it was genuine, we would have seen the same outrage when a Democrat made the poorly uttered the regrettable remark.

But this what the Left does. Demonize opponents and turn a blind eye to the sins of allies.

Funny, we haven't seen a single news article on this subject. Huh.

Maybe the revered newspaper of record of the Anoka County Left, the ECM newspapers, will get their crack staff on the case, if they're not too busy covering the swap meet up in Saint Francis or that chili cook off at the Ham Lake Senior Center. Hard hitting journalism, that publication.

FROM THE CAPITOL

There was some Democrat-on-Democrat violence this week as the Second Amendment briefly took center stage and promptly caused a schism between Governor Dayton and Democrats in the legislature.

The issue centered on suppressors, which reduce but don't eliminate the concussion caused when a round is fired from a handgun.

While the Hollywood notion of a "silencer" is that it creates a whisper-quiet shot, it's more like the decibel level of a jack hammer in real life.

That's probably why 30 states allow suppressors and life seems to go on just fine.

Never mind those pesky facts. Especially when you're dealing with a governor who isn't super connected with facts and reality anyway.

On a large bi-partisan basis, the legislature added language permitting suppressors to large, omnibus spending bill in both the House and Senate.

The governor has threatened to veto the bills over this language, setting up a show down with the legislature, including Democrats who control the Senate.

The legislature may very well dare the governor to take down the entire Judiciary appropriations bill by sending it to him.

Even if Dayton vetoes, is this the bill that sparks a veto override vote?

Remember, Senate Majority Leader Tom Bakk is looking for some payback after Dayton ripped him and called him "untrustworthy" over the commissioner salary issue.

Stay tuned.

And on a positive note, we want to highlight the work of state Senator Branden Petersen (R-Andover), who has been at the forefront of some very important issues and gotten good results, even as he toils in the minority.

Most recently, Petersen successfully passed an amendment prohibiting state taxpayer dollars from being used for a soccer stadium on an impressive 61-4 vote.

He also passed on a 60-4 vote the Right to Try Act, which allows terminally ill people the right to try experimental drugs to save their lives.

The Watchdog also gives kudos to Petersen for his strong work to protect our Right to Privacy, including a constitutional amendment to enhance our privacy rights in the digital age.

There have also been positive developments in the Minnesota House, where majority Republicans are crafting appropriations bills that deliver on their campaign promises and repair some of the damage caused by recent all-DFL budgets.

For example, the House Tax bill contains a \$2 billion tax cut, including cuts and credits for individuals, veterans, and social security recipients as well as a business property tax cut.

The bill also cuts local government aid (LGA), which is welfare for cities, from Duluth, Saint Paul and Minneapolis. These three cities have tremendous property tax wealth and don't need the welfare larded on them by DFLers, who are over-represented in those cities, making LGA little more than political payoff.

The GOP transportation bill is also a solid piece of legislation.

The bill devotes \$7billion to transportation without raising taxes and fees, which the DFL has deemed essential to any meaningful transportation bill, even though when they ran the show the last two years they didn't see fit to pass a gas tax increase.

The bill also emphasizes roads and bridges over rail, and in fact puts restrictions in place regarding rail, which has been a boondoggle from the start (Northstar rail, anyone?).

Government budgets are all about priorities, not just larding spending upon spending to satisfy constituent special interest groups.

Great start, GOP. Keep it up.

May 1, 2015

Public Policy Commentary

In This Issue:

Quote of the Week: "Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat on the bus. She didn't trash the bus."

- Author unknown

Quote of the Week II: "Politics often boils down to a struggle between two camps. One camp is economically unproductive but politically organized. The other camp is economically productive but politically unorganized."

- Author unknown

1. Thoughts on the Great Tax Debate.
2. Rural Minnesota Reforms.

THOUGHTS ON THE GREAT TAX DEBATE

This week, both the DFL-led Senate and the GOP-led House passed a number of appropriations bills that fund the major programmatic areas of state government as well as their omnibus tax bills, which establish tax policy for the next two year budget cycle.

In short, these bills represent in a very direct way the governing philosophy of each party.

As one would expect, the DFL and governor would spend nearly the entire budget surplus on spending to satisfy their political constituencies.

On the other hand, the GOP seeks to provide tax relief and keep government spending to a reasonable level.

And even though the legislative session doesn't end until later in May, the DFL is already playing blatant partisan politics with the budget.

They have been frequently uttering the "S" word around the Capitol, signaling their true agenda for the 2015 legislative session.

The "S" word, of course, is "shutdown."

DFL leaders have been calling the GOP budget a "shutdown" budget, saying that they and their governor won't negotiate in good faith to reach a compromise with the House majority to do the people's work.

Instead, they will refuse to compromise and push the state into a shutdown, hoping that the public will blame the GOP and give the DFL a political talking point going into the 2016 elections, when both the House and Senate will be on the ballot.

The DFL, instead of taking care of the people they claim to represent, will push them into uncertainty and chaos in order to score political points with the sheeple who will automatically blame the GOP and believe the canard that Republicans can't effectively manage the House.

Because the news media helped the DFL blame the GOP for the last shutdown, the DFL wants to use the same playbook in 2015.

And while the practical effects of a shutdown are negligible, the DFL clearly believes the political effects are significant and to their advantage.

It's also sad and simultaneously amusing to listen to the DFL decry the fact that the GOP refuses to bloat the government by blowing the surplus on more and more government spending.

This publication thinks the GOP could do a better job in simplifying and explaining exactly what the choice is for citizens.

This is the family budget versus the government budget. It's a zero sum game and only one party is picking the family budget.

Government has no ability to create wealth. The government can only spend money backed by wealth that is created in the private economy.

In other words, every dollar that government spends is a dollar that was confiscated from the private economy by threat of force.

Every dollar that government spends is a dollar that is no longer available to the private economy to invest or save.

Indeed, the opportunity cost is very real.

So how has the government budget fared of late?

Pretty damn well.

According to the Minnesota Management and Budget Office (MMB), state spending for the fiscal year 2012-2013 biennial cycle was a whopping 18% higher than the previous two year cycle.

Then, the fiscal 2014-2015 budget cycle (the current budget that will expire July 1st), saw spending rise another 12% over the 2012-2013 cycle.

That's a 30% increase in state spending!!!

During that same period, inflation was quite tame, running anywhere from about 3% to zero during that time.

Moreover, Minnesota's population growth was flat during that time.

Even more troubling is the fact that median household income fell during that time. In fact, the 2013 median household income was lower than it was in 1989.

Thus, state government spending has been exponentially higher than inflation, population growth, and household income gains (which were negative) in the past two budget cycles.

There is no rational explanation for this massive spending other than an appetite on the part of government to do so.

This, in a nutshell, is why the GOP is focused on returning money to the family budget and telling the government budget to step back.

Yet another amusing and pathetic narrative the DFL is spewing (as they always do) is the old chestnut about GOP tax breaks ("giveaways") to corporate interests.

And, as always, the hypocrisy is nothing short of breathtaking and overwhelming.

Funny, there was no talk of crony capitalism when the DFL happily participated in the big taxpayer giveaway to Ziggy Stardust Wilf.

Similarly, the DFL all happily authorized a similar corporate giveaway to the Pohlad family.

And the DFL participation in the giveaways isn't just confined to professional sports.

Remember the Destination Medical Center tax breaks for the Mayo Clinic, which happened when the DFL controlled everything?

We recall DFL House Tax Chair Ann Lenczewski correcting complaining that Mayo wanted the legislature "to build them a city."

True enough, Madame Chair. But we also recall you fell in line like a lap dog and did what Speaker Thissen and the governor told you to do.

And we also recall the Baxter Medical tax giveaway, which was marked by the government engaging in an unprecedented level of [secrecy](#) to prevent the taxpaying public from finding out what was going on.

The next time some Democrat gets up and complains about the GOP being for the rich corporations, the GOP ought to stand up en masse and laugh out loud.

Yes, it's only evil if the Republicans thought of it first, apparently.

To be clear, this publication doesn't favor corporate welfare any more than we favor other forms of welfare.

But a general tax cut for business isn't welfare. Corporate welfare happens when government engages in targeted favors for politically connected corporate entities that aren't generally available. These giveaways are based on politics and not merit. In short, they are market distorting and force competitors to subsidize politically connected rivals.

Stay tuned, readers. The BS is about to get mighty thick down in Saint Paul.

RURAL MINNESOTA REFORMS

There has been a good deal of discussion of late regarding the supposed lack of financial support for rural Minnesota in the GOP budget.

Most of the complaints center on there not being enough allocated for local government aid (LGA) and county program aid (CPA).

LGA is state money that gets shipped to cities to spend as they see fit while CPA is for counties.

The Watchdog believes that the legislature ought to have a serious discussion about whether or not this aid is good public policy.

But at a minimum, the House GOP should be asking what kind of reforms should be attached to the giving of this aid, instead of simply larding the money out the door.

In other words, what are rural cities and counties doing to reduce costs and become more efficient?

For example, why are there cities in rural Minnesota with populations in the mere hundreds who have their own police force?

Here in the Metro, there are cities with populations in the tens of thousands (and growing) who rely on the county sheriff for law enforcement through a contract with the county.

We have not heard much in the way of cities merging or un-incorporating to township status to save money.

The consolidation of counties seems to be in order as well.

There is no reason why Minnesota must have 87 counties.

To give readers some perspective, compare the combined population of the state's 10 most populous counties compared to the 10 least populous.

Top 10 combined population: 3,522,612

Bottom 10 combined population: 49,887

The bottom top has just 1.4% of the population of the top 10, yet each county has its own sheriff, county board, county attorney, county engineer, staff, courthouse, etc.

What sense does that make?

Put another way, there are 18 cities in this state with a population bigger than the population of the bottom 10.

Put yet another way, there are more people living in Apple Valley than in the combined population of the bottom 10.

Yes, we see a place for this aid in the grand scheme of things.

But we also see an obligation to make this aid a temporary solution while these cities and counties make legitimate efforts to become more efficient and less dependent on this aid.

To do otherwise is to do what the DFL does. Use the treasury to buy votes.

May 8, 2015

Public Policy Commentary

In This Issue:

Quote of the Week: "This is not the first disreputable act of Representative Erhardt, and we request that in the future he be more respectful to the citizens of Minnesota in the business of the House."

- State Representatives Dave Baker, Rod Hamilton, Tim Miller, and Jeanne Poppe in a letter formally entered into the Journal of the House of Representatives

1. The End.
2. The Southwest Soft-Shoe.
3. Bird-Flu Buffoon.

THE END

As American Poet Jim Morrison noted, this is the end, beautiful friend, the end, my only friend, the end.

The end of the 2015 legislative session that is.

As we careen towards the constitutionally mandated adjournment of May 18th, speculation is flying fast and furious about what the end will look like - and when it will come.

So put on your purple track suit and matching Nike shoes and let's check in with Capitol sources to see what they say about the end and the most pressing questions relating thereto.

Will there be a bonding bill this year? Sources tell us "no." This is an interesting, even though the odd number years technically aren't "bonding" years.

But the recent history has been to do some level of bonding in the even number years, especially as "parting gifts" to seal a budget deal.

This would be especially true in divided government, where there is inevitably more horse trading between the DFL and GOP leadership.

Will there be a transportation bill?

Unlikely. The DFL seems stuck on raising the gas tax and engaging in other revenue-raising schemes that they deemed too politically dangerous when they were in charge of everything.

And the GOP seems just as adamantly opposed to increase transportation spending through re-prioritizing existing resources, especially in light of a \$2 billion government surplus.

This has to be a line in the sand. No Republican should support a gas tax increase, sales tax increase, "fee" increase or any other type of tax/fee increase for transportation!

Any Republican who would support these spending increases on top of the crushing taxes Minnesotans already pay ought to think twice.

Taxpayers shouldn't have to reach into their wallets yet again in order to have quality roads and bridges - a core governmental function.

Instead, it's government that should find the money in its ample coffers.

Remember, it's the family budget versus the government budget. Transportation taxes are at the very heart of this argument.

If they cave, Republicans will lose a key narrative and erase the distinction they have worked so hard to craft in the minds of middle class voters between their vision of government and the liberal's vision.

Don't do it, Republicans! Stick to your guns, even if it means no deal!

Moreover, serious policy differences exist between the two parties, with the DFL continuing to push its Copenhagen-on-the-Mississippi model of bike paths and trolleys in place of automobiles.

Republicans, on the other hand, understand that Minnesota doesn't have nearly the population density to support significant mass transit. Moreover, they recognize that forced mass transit is part of the sinister liberal plot to control us by taking away one of the biggest keys to freedom in the developed world - a car.

Look for perhaps a very skinny "lights on" type of budget and work on something more substantive next year.

Will the session end on time?

Surprisingly, the answer appears to be "yes." The Watchdog staff has pressed our DFL informants to be give us the true dope on a DFL shutdown strategy to embarrass Republicans.

Our stoolies swear on Joe Biden's hair plugs that there is no secret shut down strategy.

They contend that with the Senate on the ballot in two years, the DFL believes a shutdown this year would harm them as much as Republicans in the House, who will also be on the ballot.

Mark Dayton won't be on the ballot and could benefit, but DFL Senate leadership is more than willing to part ways with the governor if that's the way he wants to go.

Don't forget that there is no love lost between Dayton and DFL Senate Majority Leader Tom Bakk.

If the Senate feels cutting a timely deal is good for them, they'll do it.

Of course, a deal would need to entail the regular give and take between both sides.

House Speaker Kurt Daudt tipped his hand this week when he noted that the House could live with \$1 billion in tax cuts, compared to the \$2 billion that's on the table at this point.

Let's hope GOP leadership drives a hard bargain and rewards our hard work to get them elected.

Stay tuned, Watchdogs.

THE SOUTHWEST SOFT-SHOE

Taxpayers, beware. The Watchdog has seen this scam before.

With the news leaking out that the Southwest Light Rails is now projected to cost in the neighborhood of \$2 billion, the special interests hawking the line are now in full damage control, looking for ways to "reduce" the cost of the project.

One of the options being floated is to cut out one of the stations.

Don't fall for it.

The Watchdog well recalls the Fridley Northstar station being cut out back when that train line was under consideration.

In that case, the station was cut not to save money, but to save time.

Readers will recall that the federal government has time standards that compare rail travel time to comparable route auto travel. The train essentially has to be competitive with a car with respect to travel time.

Obviously, station stops greatly impact travel time and thus Fridley was cut.

And what happened? The state simply came in behind the feds and funded a Northstar station.

And then after that they funded another station in Ramsey, putting four stations in Anoka County alone.

Guess why the Southwest LRT advocates are so quick to cut stations?

They will simply come in and have them built anyway.

There is a history, a very recent history, of these shenanigans. Policy makers, at least the ones who care about runaway spending, shouldn't fall for it.

And while we're at this rail business, let's also address, yet again, another liberal canard they continue to disseminate.

Please stop with the bogus narrative that the Northstar rail needs to be extended to Saint Cloud, as it should have been in the first place had it not been for Snidley Whiplash Pawlenty and his evil plot to sabotage the train.

First, wasting more money on Northstar by extending the line won't save it. Northstar is a failure because it's the line was a bad idea to begin with. Commuter rail through a sparsely populated exurban area was only a political idea, not a policy idea, to get some money to the north Metro.

Second, Northstar was never "supposed" to go to Saint Cloud (actually Rice, MN). There was a proposal to run the line that far, which was soundly rejected by the federal government, not Tim Pawlenty and Tea Party henchmen.

The federal government rejected that line going that far because it failed to meet the fed's own cost/benefit metrics, as low as they were and are.

It's a cute story to blame a former governor and his political party, but it's also a bald faced lie.

Liberals know this, but they lie anyway because it enhances their chances of getting the line extended.

Better to blame Tim Pawlenty and politics than to acknowledge that the real culprit is bad public policy that is so bad even the federal government won't fund it.

You know things are bad when Mark Dayton expresses sticker shock.

Republicans would be well served to let the DFL continue to push these outrageous projects.

Just make sure to give them enough rope.

BIRD-FLU BUFFOON

Readers, if you didn't catch state Rep. Ron "Ol' Blue" Erhardt's (DFL - Edina) clownish and insensitive attempt at humor on the floor of the House this week, do yourself a favor and [watch](#) it.

The avian flu and turkey "expert" from Edina tells his colleagues (and all of Minnesota) that eating turkey can expose one to avian bird flu, a terrible disease that has killed millions of turkeys and greatly harmed Minnesota's economy.

Of course, the disease cannot be spread to humans and scarring people into thinking otherwise is just profoundly stupid.

What's next, DFLers calling U.S. Supreme Court Justice Thomas "Uncle Thomas?"

We want to know where Governor Dayton and House Minority Leader Paul Thissen are on this one.

Remember that it was just a couple of weeks ago when they were calling for Rep. Jim Newberger to "held accountable" for ill-advised comments?

Funny, you can hear crickets chirping in the DFL corner.

No worries. This just confirms that the DFL really doesn't care about rural Minnesota and that voters were right to kick 10 rural DFL legislators out of their seats in the last election.

The other question the Watchdog has is whether or not Minority Leader Thissen has promised to make Erhardt the Agriculture Committee chairman if the DFL takes the House majority in 2016.

Why not? They made Minneapolis enviro-radical Jean Wagenius that committee's chair after the 2012 election. She hates farmers probably more than Erhardt does, although both really probably think that food is grown in trendy organic co-ops anyway.

In a Watchdog exclusive, we have uncovered Rep. Erhardt engaged in more scandalous [behavior](#).

Check it out!

You're our boy, [Blue](#)!

May 15, 2015

Public Policy Commentary

In This Issue:

Quote of the Week: "We're getting there...somewhere."
- Governor Mark Dayton describing budget negotiations

1. Déjà vu, All Over Again.

DÉJÀ VU, ALL OVER AGAIN

Well, here we are again, Watchdogs. Despite months and months of legislative activity, taxpayers once again stand at the precipice of a special session and the possibility of a government shutdown.

As this edition goes to press, legislative leaders have reached agreement on spending targets for only a small number of the major programmatic spending areas that must be agreed to before conference committees can negotiate a conference report, have it assembled, pass both the House and Senate, and get it to the governor for signature.

While spending targets have been agreed to in the areas of agriculture, environment/natural resources, higher education, and public safety/judiciary, major differences remained regarding K-12 education, health/human services, transportation, and taxes.

It would take a major feat for the legislature to complete its work before the constitutionally mandated adjournment date of Monday night.

Technically, there are some major bills that need not be done. Because the state is running a surplus, a tax bill isn't needed.

Nor is a transportation bill, which would leave that area at status quo.

The other spending bills need to be completed, or else funding would run out on June 30th, shutting down those areas.

Now, the Watchdog doesn't care so much if government shuts down. It helps prove that people continue to live normal lives even if some bureaucrats are

laid off and people can't get their driver's license renewed or check out a book at the library.

Part of the problem is that there is really no such thing as a true shutdown. Although this publication believes it to be unconstitutional, the Minnesota courts hold that they have the power to compel the legislature to spend money in certain areas of state government deemed "essential." Thus, there is no true shut down in any meaningful sense.

The other issue is that these shutdowns are never worth the political cost for Republicans. While some concessions may be won in a shut down that would otherwise have not been won, the majority of the public buys the DFL/ mainstream media narrative that Republicans shut down the government that we just can't live without, not even for a day.

Yes, that's an irrational belief with no basis in fact. But so is electing Mark Dayton - twice.

It's just the way it is.

So while simply capitulating to Mark Dayton and the DFL Senate isn't acceptable, Republicans have to be realistic about attempting to reach a reasonable compromise and brokering an orderly end to the session, even if a brief special session is needed to tie up loose ends.

In negotiating that global spending framework, Speaker Daudt must work to see that spending is aligned with inflation and population growth. Unchecked governmental spending untethered from any kind of economic metrics is a hallmark of Democrats. Job one is to keep their habit in check. In other words, Republicans need to be the adults in the room, keeping Johnny from running off with a bottle of whiskey in one hand and the keys to the car in the other.

Specifically, Daudt needs to deliver on a good portion of the GOP's \$2 billion in proposed tax cuts. Yes, some of that will need to be traded away in the 2 vs. 1 negotiations with the DFL.

Nonetheless, the DFL and Governor Dayton overtaxed Minnesotans by \$2 billion in their quest to satiate the endless appetite of their constituency groups for government spending and largesse.

Returning a portion of that money is a key promise that must be satisfied.

The other important priority is to keep HHS spending in check. Consumers of health and human services dollars are a key DFL constituency and spending in this area often outstrips inflation in increments that would make any college or university blush.

If you thought college tuition was on a trajectory to the moon, you aren't familiar with HHS, where spending has sometimes exceeded 30% in a single budget cycle.

Hopefully, Daudt and company can also do something to reign in MnSure, Minnesota's health insurance exchange that has been every bit as screwed up as the federal exchange.

In the HHS area, it appears that the GOP won't be able to hold on their plan to deal with the MnCare (not to be confused with MnSure) health program by transitioning beneficiaries to other programs.

The DFL is adamant about keeping this program even though its funding source will end in a couple of years.

You can see this one coming a mile away. Kick the can down the road until the DFL can claim a "crisis" and move for new taxes to fund the program.

Finally, in the area of transportation, it is imperative for the Speaker and his team to resist a gas tax increase and other taxes and fees. This is especially true for rumors that some sort of Metro-area sales tax is on the table for transit.

With an extra \$2 billion in hand, there is more than enough money for transportation, if it's made a priority.

Speaking of the gas tax and a sales tax, this publication finds it interesting that the DFL is so interested in pushing two of the most regressive taxes out there. For the uninitiated, a "regressive" tax harms the poor more than the rich, according to a metric called the "Suits Index," a widely accepted measure of how various taxes impact people based on their wealth and economic status.

Alcohol and tobacco taxes are also extremely aggressive and the DFL pushes for those as well.

Goodness, another DFL lie exposed. They're for the poor and downtrodden. Yeah, right.

It's almost as laughable as the DFL claiming that the gas tax is their number one priority.

If it was a priority, they would have passed a gas tax last year, when they ran the entire show. It appears rather clearly that last year's DFL priority was building themselves a \$90 million office building for the scant few months they spend in Saint Paul each year.

In addition to the policy issues at stake, the Watchdog is deeply concerned about the process of these negotiations as well.

It is troubling to see these very important and critical negotiations disappear behind closed doors, away from the public and away from other legislators.

Clearly, the transparent and deliberative process of lawmaking is cast aside during these 11th hour, high-stakes negotiations.

It seems rather absurd that the taxpayers pay millions to have legislators, staff, and other overhead paid for months on end, only to have it come down to three men meeting away from the Capitol to decide the entire state budget for the next two years.

All those bills introduced, processed, and considered in committees, only to have it come down to a few sheets of paper.

In addition to being absurd, it's highly undemocratic and breeds suspicion and mistrust of our governmental institutions.

201 legislators are duly elected in Minnesota and all have an election certificate that makes all senators equal to their colleagues and the same over in the House of Representatives.

The two legislative leaders ought not to stand out so far from their colleagues in deciding these issues.

Moreover, this negotiating process is far, far removed from the process of lawmaking that governs during the normal course of business.

All bills are posted for public review. Floor sessions are televised. Floor proceedings are kept in formal journals posted online. Committee schedules are posted in advance. Those same hearings are open to the public. In fact, public testimony is accepted. Any citizen can come to a committee hearing and be heard.

It's not perfect, but it's a wonderful process unavailable to the majority of human beings, most of whom live under some form of tyranny and oppression.

This end-of-session process dishonors our collective principles and values regarding representative government.

This needs to change. A high priority for the next legislative session should be changes to this process to ensure that if these negotiations are needed to close out the budget, they should be done in a way that honors our lawmaking values.

To be clear, this isn't about the three leaders who happen to be where they are right now. This practice has gone on for years and both DFLers and Republicans have engaged in it.

Put another way, this isn't about these leaders and this isn't a partisan issue.

But these three have a chance to make things right next year.

We urge them to do so.

May 22, 2015

Public Policy Commentary

In This Issue:

END-OF-SESSION-OR-MAYBE-NOT-EDITION

Quote of the Week: "They hate the public schools, some of the Republican legislators. They're loathe to provide any additional money for public schools and for public school teachers because all of the good programs I've seen around this state for pre-K and all-day kindergarten. All of those programs contradict what they say, which is public schools do things badly."

- Governor Dayton

Quote of the Week II: "I think it really is incumbent on the governor to work with legislators and to reach out to them and sell his plan if he thinks we need to do something differently than what we passed."

- House Speaker Kurt Daudt

1. Out with a Bang or a Whimper?

OUT WITH A BANG OR A WHIMPER?

Closing out at the stroke of midnight Monday night, the 2015 legislature came to crashing conclusion.

Or did it?

As this edition of the Watchdog goes to press, the governor has still not delivered on his promise to veto the education funding bill and possibly a veto of other omnibus spending bills.

Moreover, a small number of other bills deemed important and timely did not get passed in time, including a small bonding bill and a bill authorizing legislative staff to make administrative changes to bills.

There are three important aspects of the session's end that merit examination.

The first is the way the session [ended](#) in the Minnesota House.

A critical spending bill was passed in the final moments of session with no discussion or debate.

While this is certainly not the ideal way to craft legislation, it is understandable when both sides of the story are told.

First, for better or worse, legislative sessions often end with a certain amount of chaos and confusion.

Readers shouldn't be tempted to fall for the DFL narrative that Republicans can't manage the Minnesota House and operated in the final minutes in a manner not regularly seen in the People's House.

Perhaps the most chaotic and heavy-handed of all recent last days of a legislative session was in 2007, when the DFL had control.

The [final day](#) was marked by oppressive DFL tactics to cut off all debate and gag the minority Republicans from having an opportunity to speak and debate the issues.

In fact, the DFL used unprecedented parliamentary tactics to shut down debate and pass bills.
Watch for yourself.

Moreover, the final chaotic minutes of the session's last day were in fact the result of the Republican majority being too indulgent and respectful of the DFL minority.

Anyone who watched the last hours of the session could plainly see that the DFL minority was attempting to run out the clock in the hope that critical spending bills wouldn't have time to pass, thereby trying to embarrass the GOP majority.

Yes, the DFL was playing politics even though they dishonored themselves and insulted the law making process while also potentially hurting many of those they claim to care about if state funding were to be held up.

Many DFL legislators stood up to ask questions about what was in the bill, even though they could (and should) have read the bill themselves.

They wandered off on irrelevant tangents, wasting valuable time throughout the day and evening.

The tactic almost worked, except that the Speaker made the difficult decision in the final minutes to pass the spending bill without allowing debate.

In short, it was DFL game playing that led to the chaotic end.

If DFL legislators were truly interested in a thoughtful and respectful conclusion to the session, they should have refrained from their dilatory and obstructive tactics.

Next, a DFL meme has gained traction that says that the Speaker of the House closed off voting before some legislators had a chance to vote on the final bill.

Not true.

The reality is that they decided not to vote in an attempt to lend credibility to their corrupt narrative.

The refusal to vote is not only a dereliction of the duty to represent one's constituents, it is a violation of the permanent rules of the Minnesota House of Representatives.

Rule 2.05 states in part:

Every other member present before the result of a vote is declared by the presiding officer must vote for or against the matter before the House, unless the House excuses the member from voting. But a member is not required to vote on any matter concerning a memorial resolution.

A member who does not vote when the member's name is called must state reasons for not voting. After the vote has been taken but before the presiding officer has announced the result of the vote, the presiding officer must submit to the House the question: "Shall the member, for the reasons stated, be excused from voting?" The question must be decided without debate. After the question is decided, the presiding officer must announce the result of the vote, after which other proceedings about the nonvoting member may take place.

The plain and simple reason the session ended the way it did in the House is because Democrats conspired to collapse the process in a cynical attempt to make the majority Republicans look bad.

Let's now take a moment to consider the governor's insistence upon a universal scheme to have the state begin educating 4 year-old children.

This, of course, is the reason the governor has threatened to veto the education funding bill and has lost his marbles (once again), going off on Republicans and claiming they hate teachers and public schools.

This is yet one more example of both DFL cynicism as well as Governor Dayton incompetence.

Recall that this initiative was rejected on a bi-partisan basis in both the House and Senate.

The idea didn't pass in either the DFL-led Senate or the GOP-led House. The rejection was bi-partisan.

Moreover, if this was such a high priority, the governor should have focused on it and spent some political capital to make it happen.

Speaker Daudt is correct in noting that the legislature and more specifically Republicans, aren't to blame.

It's up to the governor to generate support for his key initiatives and drive them to fruition.

Perhaps most importantly, Minnesota's public schools don't want the program.

These school districts note that the program would require millions in capital spending to build classrooms as well as require the hiring of more teachers.

There would be more expenses for additional bussing, school supplies, and utility costs.

Most of which would be borne locally through additional levies.

They also note that there is no definitive evidence that these programs are the best way to ensure that children arrive at kindergarten prepared to learn.

Even the state's newspapers are picking up on this, with the Pioneer Press and Owatonna newspapers being two that have editorialized against the governor vetoing the education funding bill over the omission of this program.

Finally, let's take a very brief overview of the budget deal, both because the subject will be its own column later on and because the final deal may not be done pending the governor's signature.

Of course, there is much complaining and gnashing of teeth from some Tea Party quarters over the budget deal.

Look, the Watchdog agrees with the sentiment that this budget deal wasn't great.

Having said that, we part company with our Tea Party friends when they blame Republicans for not doing enough in Saint Paul.

This negotiated result was foreordained last November, when Mark Dayton was re-elected in convincing fashion.

Republicans started and ended the session on defense.

Just like in hockey, a 2 on 1 obligates the "one" to play defense and break up the scoring chances of the other team.

If some our conservative brothers and sisters don't like the outcome, they should have worked harder to elect Jeff Johnson, making the 2 on 1 work the other way.

Like it or not, this circumstance requires Watchdogs to examine the outcome primarily through the lens of what didn't happen as opposed to what happened.

There was no tax on gasoline at the wholesale level, preventing a tax of 16-26 cents per gallon, and a regressive tax at that.

Massive, double digit spending increases were averted, unlike the previous biennium, when the DFL ran the whole show.

Over \$1 billion was left on the bottom line, enabling the GOP to come back next year and work for tax cuts.

And yes, there were spending increases that the GOP favored.

Again, this was an outcome foreordained back in November, when the vast majority of House GOP pickups were seats in rural Minnesota.

As the Watchdog explained months ago, rural legislators aren't of the same stripe as their Metro colleagues when it comes to matters of fiscal discipline.

Rural legislators, even Republicans, see their public schools as a positive and a cornerstone of the community.

They also rely on funding from Saint Paul to fund infrastructure in a way the Metro doesn't.

Moreover, demographics dictate that rural legislators give a high priority to nursing homes.

Thus, it should come as no surprise that the House GOP majority gave a healthy spending increase to both nursing homes and public schools.

To expect a different outcome under these circumstances is sheer fantasy.

Given the circumstances, Speaker Daudt and his team played a mediocre hand very well and leveraged limited political capital to get the best possible outcome.

No reasonable conservative should be mad at Republicans for this good outcome.

If you want a better outcome, stop complaining and get out there and elect more Republicans in 2016.

May 29, 2015

Public Policy Commentary

In This Issue:

Quotes of the Week:

"Whatever effort Dayton made to pull the legislature in his direction on this issue, he failed."

- Mankato Free Press

"Dayton's Proposal wasn't ready."

- Duluth News Tribune

"The governor should abandon his own approach."

- Grand Forks Herald

"We can all agree that accusing other politicians of hating something is unprofessional and divisive."

- Albert Lea Tribune

"Governor errs in vetoing education budget bill."

- Owatonna People's Press

"It looks like the governor took his ball and went home."

- Mesabi Daily News

"The governor has failed to make a persuasive case."

- Pioneer Press

"The governor says he won't apologize for his stupid remarks."

- Joe Soucheray

"I wouldn't hire Mark Dayton to feed my goldfish."

- Harold Hamilton

1. Knowing (and embracing) a Victory.

KNOWING (AND EMBRACING) A VICTORY

We conservatives can be a dour, pessimistic and ornery lot. We tend to see the glass as half empty and often times lament what could have been instead

of seeing the value in what is. We can be the guys who hits a triple and pound a fist into an open hand because it wasn't a home run.

Such is the case with many regarding the outcome of this past legislative session and the impending session.

There have been complaints that Republicans, especially in the House majority, haven't done enough to reign in government and fight Mark Dayton.

Considering the circumstances, this session was an excellent one for Republicans.

The problem is that too many conservatives have expectations that aren't in any remote way connected to the reality of the situation.

It's like playing every poker hand as if you have four aces.

And like poker, if you incorrectly play your hand, you almost always lose, only to be occasionally saved by the equal or greater ineptness of your opponent.

Sound familiar? Analogous? Metaphorical?

All too often in the past, Republicans have played their political hand as they wish the hand would appear, not as it is.

When the voters have dealt Republicans a pair of jacks or even aces, Republicans have played a royal flush, which has led to subsequent elections defeats, only occasionally saved by a misplayed DFL hand.

Such has not been the case this legislative session.

Speaker Daudt and his team have done a very good job playing a decent, not great, political hand. They have leveraged that hand to gain some important victories and deny their two poker partners many victories as well.

Sure, we wish the GOP would have done more to reign in government and score some more policy victories.

But that viewpoint depends wholly upon what COULD have been done.

In this publication's view, not much more could have been done given that the DFL walked into session owning both the state Senate and the most power political office in the state.

In short, Speaker Daudt did what he could with the hand he was dealt.

Sure, you can wish he had a better hand. And if wishes were horses...

Sure, you can slam Daudt and the GOP and pretend that they blew a really sweet hand. Go ahead, be a dreamer if you want. Unfortunately, Daudt and his team don't have the luxury of closing their eyes and pretending they're in conservative nirvana. They have the obligation to govern.

And lest any readers think this session was filled with nothing but compromise, leaving the flavor of an NHL game ending in a 0-0 tie, there was plenty for the GOP team to cheer.

How about a huge victory for Second Amendment rights, including the issue of suppressors?

There were also victories for other liberties as well. The Right to Try Act will give desperately ill people the ability to exercise sovereignty over their own bodies by choosing certain medicines that were previously unavailable because of government fiat.

Steps were also taken this session to put some guardrails around domestic spying by government, especially by law enforcement.

And although some Big Government conservatives limited that victory, it was indeed a victory.

And there were many victories as well in preventing bad things. For conservatives, that's where the real victories are to be found. Given our world view, we expect little from government since government doesn't really do anything well. When government doesn't do something, that's often reason to cheer.

As was explained last week, the GOP did a great job thwarting the governor and the DFL Senate.

It is our sincere hope that Speaker Daudt will hold the line in special session against any pre-K universal schooling (there's no evidence it works) and against Senator Majority Leader Tom Bakk's effort to sneak a \$7 million parking garage for his opulent new office building into the "emergency" bonding bill.

It is also very important to remember that conservatives can also get caught up in the policy alone and fail to examine the politics and public relations angles.

Politics, in many respects, is about public relations and marketing. It's about presenting your message and framing the debate properly.

This is something the GOP has not done well in the past.

This session is different. Speaker Daudt and his communications have done a remarkable job parrying Dayton and staying focused on a winning message.

Take the special session. Dayton tried to frame the debate as one about Republicans who want to cut education (because they hate education) versus Democrats who want to "invest" in schools because they love the same children Republicans allegedly hate.

Daudt beat Dayton on his own turf by reframing the debate as one about which education plan would yield the best benefit for not only students, but for taxpayers as well.

The GOP outflanked Dayton by enlisting the help of non-partisan opinion leaders in the field of early childhood education, like Art Rolnik, to help impeach Dayton's dumb pre-K idea, thereby neutralizing the partisan nature of the debate and turning the focus to the merits, where Democrats often lose.

Moreover, Daudt and company got smart about the optics of the issue and got the Speaker outside the stuffy confines of the Capitol to talk about the issue down in the trenches - at a real school.

Photos and video of the Speaker engaging students, staff, and parents was an excellent visual compliment to the GOP narrative.

If a picture is worth a thousand words, it's now worth a million in today's era of social media with the ability to re-tweet, Snapchat, and Instagram photos.

This one is certainly worth a [million](#).

It also makes sense to have the Speaker out front and center, comparing his poise and statute to the glassy-eyed stammering of the governor, a man whose rants and tirades betray an old man who can't understand why those darn kids won't stay off his lawn.

If Mark Dayton were a television character, he would be played by [Abe Simpson](#), seen here doing his best Mark Dayton imitation.

Overall, the GOP team has done a masterful job turning the narrative away from the "GOP crazies burn down government" to one of "Madman in the mansion vetoes reasonable bi-partisan compromise, pushing legislature into special session."

That's no small feat.

This was made possible in large part precisely because Daudt played his hand well and leveraged a solid bi-partisan compromise on the major budget bills with the DFL Senate.

Once the budget became a product of a bi-partisan agreement between a conservative Speaker and an Iron Range Democrat, it became hard to paint that budget as a slash-and-burn GOP document.

Thus, when Dayton vetoed, he was the one who looked out of touch and interested in a my-way-or-the-highway approach.

It appears as of this writing as if Speaker Daudt is going to pull off the feat of negotiating a solid budget and some good policy wins, all without pushing the state into shutdown, which would greatly jeopardize the GOP's majority in 2016 (Want evidence? Check the 2012 results).

Let us learn to recognize and embrace the victory.

June 5, 2015

Public Policy Commentary

In This Issue:

Quote of the Week: "The Sandpiper Pipeline will help alleviate rail traffic, providing the safest possible transport of light crude oil from North Dakota. The pipeline would transport about 1,700 rail cars worth of oil each day, freeing up crucial rail capacity for crops and other products to travel more freely and quickly on Minnesota rail lines."

-State Reps. Dale, Lueck, Dan Fabian, Steve Green, Dave Hancock, and Deb Kiel

1. Planet Dayton Returns.
2. Palace Coup?
3. Voting Rights - Big Issue!
4. Garbage Garbage.

PLANET DAYTON RETURNS

As this edition of the Watchdog goes to press, sources at the Capitol tell this publication that a negotiated agreement to call a special session and pass legislation to complete the state budget process is complete except for one issue.

That one issue has prompted the return of Planet Dayton, a disturbingly regular political phenomenon that has vexed Minnesota government since it was first identified in early 2011.

Planet Dayton occurs when its sole inhabitant, Governor Mark Dayton, leaves Planet Earth and moves into a world only he knows and understands. It's a world completely divorced and disconnected from the reality here on Planet Earth.

Planet Dayton has appeared at other times, notably when the governor signed a farm equipment repair tax into law which he claimed he didn't know about, signed a Vikings stadium bill containing personal seat licenses which he claimed he didn't know about, and gave bonuses to MnSure executives who presided over the disastrous roll out of ObamaCare in Minnesota.

This week, Planet Dayton returned to the Capitol as Dayton has now made a provision regarding the State Auditor Office an issue that is holding up a special session agreement.

This provision would allow counties (other local units can already do this) to contract with private sector entities to conduct certain financial audits instead of using the State Auditor.

The problem here is that Dayton himself, just days ago, signed that very provision into law!

Yes, you read that correctly. Dayton is now holding up the special session over a law he just recently signed.

If this was so important, you may ask yourself, why didn't he veto the bill, along with all the others he vetoed?

That's Planet Dayton.

Only on Planet Dayton would a governor sign a bill on week and then make it a special session issue the next week.

House Speaker Kurt Daudt would be wise to simply tell the governor to pound sand on this one. Dayton signed it, he can live with it.

PALACE COUP?

Speaking of the impending special session, the Watchdog had an interesting conversation with one of our Capitol sources this week regarding the role of the governor in negotiations recently.

This source remarked that if you look closely, observers can see that negotiations have moved from the governor's mansion to the Speaker's office at the State Office Building.

Moreover, those negotiations have included the lieutenant governor, Tina Smith, but not the governor himself.

This sources, closely connected to negotiations, believes that the governor has been frozen out of the final negotiations by his own team.

While the reasons for that exile aren't known for certain, this same source theorizes that the reason is that the governor, in the opinion of the DFL team,

has been too eager to compromise with Speaker Daudt, with the dropping of the pre-K universal education program being a case in point.

If true, it's rather amazing and concerning to contemplate that the state's chief executive is on the sidelines of an important and critical issue (special session).

This source also made an astute observation in noting that the mainstream media has been camped in front of the Speaker's office during this time but has failed to ask why the negotiations are no longer at the mansion and why the governor isn't directly involved in the negotiations.

That's the media for you. Asking all the hard questions.

VOTING RIGHTS - BIG ISSUE!

The issue of granting voting rights to felons who are ineligible to vote under current Minnesota law had a high profile this past legislative session, bringing together a traditionally liberal coalition along with the Liberty faction to support the bill.

The bill didn't get enough traction to pass, at least for the time being.

What's interesting is that the larger context of voting rights - and apportionment - has been missing from the public discourse, even though the issue will be considered soon by the United States Supreme Court.

The Court has agreed to hear a case arising out of Texas that considered exactly "who" is to be counted when a state considers drawing legislative maps. In other words, this is a case that falls squarely on the "one person, one vote" doctrine first articulated in the 1960s under *Baker vs. Carr* and its progeny.

This is a big deal not only because it touches on the fundamental issue of exactly who our representative republic is for, it also helps determine the balance of power between rural America and urban America.

In general, the current practice is for states to count all citizens when determining population counts for the purpose of drawing political maps.

The lawsuit challenges this practice and asserts that non-citizens and others ineligible to vote be removed from that count.

Those "ineligible" to vote would include felons whose voting rights have not yet been restored.

In other words, is the push to restore felon voting and other measures like "motor voter" (automatically registering people to vote when they apply for a drivers' license or a renewal) a liberal ploy to get ahead of the possible court outcome and get folks who tend to vote Democrat included under possible new court decision?

Recent voting trends have clearly shown that rural America is becoming a deep red and urban America a much deeper blue. Political polarization is a fact.

Thus, a more expansive view of who counts in determining population tends to favor Blue America while a more restrictive view would favor Red America. Conservatives and libertarians who support felon voting should be aware of this issue and think carefully about it before supporting felon voting, especially if they represent a rural district.

GARBAGE GARBAGE

Liberals and the Liberal Media are ga over the possibility of Bloomington getting all progressive and moving to government-run trash hauling, which has become something of a cause celebre for The Movement. In fact, it's very much a part of the radical environmental movement.

Under government-run trash systems (euphemistically called "organized collection"), the government squashes the free market for trash service and confers either a monopoly or a cartel system upon a favored hauler.

In exchange for this monopoly, the haulers agree to the city's demands regarding pricing and other aspects of trash service.

Some of these demands include reporting citizens who aren't recycling or agreeing to pricing models that charge above-market rates for large trash cans while charging below-market rates for small cans.

The liberals are searching for a victory because most cities that have looked at going to this type of waste collection model have rejected it (more on that in a moment).

Roseville, Brooklyn Park, Fridley, and Anoka are just a few examples of cities that rejected government-run systems in favor of retaining the free market.

Why is that?

It helps to see why when one examines the purported reasons for going to government-run in the first place, especially in light of what is happening in Bloomington (and possibly your city in the future).

The first argument is that going to government-run collection will reduce road wear and tear, thus "saving our streets."

There is no evidence that the small reduction in truck traffic will have measurable effect on extending road life.

No city that has considered or even implemented government-run collection has quantified any real savings.

This is because by far and away the biggest cause of road deterioration in Minnesota is the weather, something no government can master. The freeze/thaw cycle is the problem in Minnesota.

If your city starts down this road, ask your elected officials a simple question. If they move to government-run collection, how much will property taxes be cut to reflect the road savings? Guess the answer.

Here's what the Bloomington public works director had to say about road wear and tear: *"The reduction of garbage trucks realized by organizing collection...would not likely have a noticeable impact on actual safety or **result in the need for less roadway maintenance.**"*

The second argument is that government-run collection will enhance safety by getting "all those big tucks off the street."

Again, in typical liberal fashion, there is a lot of emotion in the argument and very little fact. In Bloomington and in Brooklyn Park, both cities (which are major cities) conducted research and discovered that garbage trucks were not involved in traffic accidents, save for one in Bloomington where the other driver was 100% at fault.

Again, here are the words of the Bloomington public works director: ***"Historically, garbage trucks have not contributed to the accident history in Bloomington. In fact, staff is not aware of a single incident involving a garbage truck in recent history."***

*"The reduction of garbage trucks realized by organizing collection...**would not likely have a noticeable impact on actual safety** or result in the need for less roadway maintenance."*

The other major argument is that government-run collection will save citizens money. Again, typical liberalism in the belief that a monopolistic/cartel economic model will result in a better service at a better price than under capitalism.

This is an age-old liberal tenet, the belief in the power of government.

And just like with all liberalism, the result is only a sleight-of-hand to make things appear better.

Prices under government-run collection often look less expensive because government plays games with the numbers.

How?

For example, they subsidize the service under their model, meaning that citizens indeed pay less for trash service but pay more for other taxes that subsidize trash. An example is the city doing the billing service, but paying those employees from the general fund, not the trash fund.

Another example is charging less than market for trash, but charging over-market prices for things like yard waste or bulk item collection. Another scam is to institute fees that consumers would never accept if they had a choice. A real world example of this is the "lid fee," whereby a fee is charged if a trash can is at the end of the driveway with the lid not secured.

A final example is a selective process in determining what the cost of trash is in a particular city. For example, Bloomington determined the market rate for trash based on a measly 270 invoices, which equates to only .75% of city households. They then used the mean instead of the median to further exaggerate savings to citizens. The city council was clearly embarrassed at a public hearing when they were called out on this and directed staff to rework the numbers.

Finally, cities that go this route routinely hire trash "consultants" to help them through the process.

So far in Bloomington, the city has spent over \$400,000 on consultants for this process.

How many potholes could be filled with \$400,000?

June 12, 2015

Public Policy Commentary

In This Issue:

Quote of the Week: "Dayton, in an effort to avoid the third state government shutdown in a decade, vociferously opposed allowing legislators to amend the pending budget bills. He said he would have 'zero tolerance' for attempts to slow down the special session, and he threatened to campaign against legislators in their districts if they oppose his efforts for a fast-tracked solution."

- Star Tribune 6/11/15

1. DFL DeBakkle

DFL DEBAKKLE

Late last night, pursuant to authority vested in his office by the Minnesota Constitution, Governor Mark Dayton issued a proclamation calling the Legislature into special session at 10AM this morning.

That's where the order and predictability end.

Even though the governor and all four legislative leaders affixed their signatures to an agreement defining the parameters of the special session, there are strong indications that the agreement may not mean much to the rank and file legislators, who will retain and exercise the rights inherent to their office once the special session convenes.

Recall that under the state's constitution, the governor has the authority to call a special session but the legislature retains the sole authority to end it.

In addition, a special session is just like a regular session in that bills are subject to regular debate and amendment.

It will be interesting to say the least to see whether DFL Senate Majority Leader Tom Bakk can rally his troops to honor the agreement he signed and end the special session in good order.

The stakes are high. If the special session devolves into chaos because the Senate DFL majority can't honor the agreement, that caucus puts itself as

significant political risk as the public has demonstrated little tolerance for legislators who can't finish their job on time.

It's strange in one sense that most citizens can't name one policy initiative in these bills yet they demonstrate little tolerance for things dragging on. Perhaps it's because they can identify with deadlines in their own work lives and the fact that they would suffer some sort of punishment for failing to meet deadlines.

To say the least, the special session period (the timeframe starting when the regular session adjourned) has been an utter and absolute disaster for Governor Dayton and the DFL.

Even if the special session manages to conclude today, lasting damage has been done to the DFL that will carry over into the 2016 election cycle.

In the collective memory of the Watchdog staff, it's hard to recall more DFL dysfunction and backbiting than what we've witnessed over the past three weeks.

How unfortunate.

This observation includes the 2003 legislative session, when Governor Pawlenty and the House GOP majority schooled DFL Senate Majority Leader John Hottinger and rolled him on the budget, leading to Hottinger's ouster as leader.

In other words, no matter how this turns out, Governor Dayton and Senator Bakk will emerge as the biggest losers from this special session.

Throughout, Dayton has looked weak, indecisive, ineffective, petulant and petty.

Dayton's troubles started when he vetoed major spending bills, against the strong advice of his staff, according to our sources near the governor.

In short, Dayton was Planet Dayton.

The governor failed to appreciate that these spending bills had bi-partisan support, negating the often convenient narrative that the GOP majority had overreached and the governor was merely acting as the voice of reason in the process.

It's also apparent that governor lacked a convincing, decisive and well-defined reason for those vetoes, which made it difficult for him to lay out for legislators and the public both a reason for a special session and special session legislative objectives around which he could rally both the DFL base and the public at large.

Instead, Dayton looked petty and weak as he vetoed the bills and then flailed about, changing his objectives for a negotiated budget deal. It was a classic case of moving the goal posts, which sowed nothing but doubt, confusion, and some bewilderment in the legislature, the media, and the public at large.

First, it was all about universal pre-K education. When it failed to get any traction, especially among educators and education experts, Dayton dropped the proposal.

Next, it got really bizarre when he made a small change in the Office of the State Auditor the centerpiece of his special session strategy.

Most Minnesotans can't name the State Auditor, don't know the office exists, and really don't care about it.

Holding up the state budget and threatening a partial government shutdown over obscure language impacting an obscure office will never rally the public or move votes. While Dayton normally leads a parade of one, he led a parade of two on this issue. Himself and the Rebecca Otto, the State Auditor.

It also didn't help that Dayton decided to plant his flag on an issue that he signed into law just days before. It fed the narrative that the governor is rash, impulsive, and frequently out of touch.

Then he decided to drop the issue, leaving nearly everyone in the state to wonder, "Why the heck did he do this in the first place?"

The other major loser in this drama is Senate Majority Leader Tom Bakk.

Like Dayton, Bakk has looked extremely weak and ineffective throughout.

As Senate Majority Leader (and leader of the Senate DFL caucus), Bakk had a simple (not necessarily easy) task during this process. He needed to negotiate a deal he could pass in the Senate and then execute.

That result is very much in doubt at this point.

First, Bakk very publically disengaged from the negotiating process by publically stating that the governor and the Speaker should make the deal.

This diminished his stature and sent a message to his caucus that he wasn't interested in protecting and advancing the Senate DFL agenda on these very large budget bills.

It exposed a huge rift in his caucus that has led to some very public sniping within his caucus and exposed a schism with DFL activists and opinion leaders. There's even a petition making the rounds in DFL circles calling for Bakk's ouster as Senate leader.

In turn, these events have led to both public sniping and private enmity among DFLers. It's true Democrat-on-Democrat violence.

The governor has threatened to campaign against Democrats who attempt to squash the negotiated agreement.

DFL Senators, in turn, have publically rebuked the governor, with Senator Barb Goodwin expressing the sentiment of many of her DFL colleagues by remarking that Dayton "isn't going to ram this (the agreement) down our throats."

There has also been no shortage of recrimination and infighting among DFL-aligned special interest groups.

This dynamic is exemplified by the fight between labor unions and environmentalists over the Environment appropriations bill.

Environmental groups have made a concerted effort to undermine the governor by calling on DFL legislators to vote against the negotiated bill.

On the other side, labor unions have publically called for just the opposite.

The point of contention are various provisions in the bill that offer policy changes designed to benefit the mining industry in northern Minnesota.

Clearly, the biggest winner here is House Speaker Kurt Daudt.

While there will be an ongoing debate within the GOP family regarding the wisdom of various compromises Daudt made, there can be no denying (even though some will) that Daudt has displayed a mastery of the process that is

remarkable, especially for a new Speaker who is going up against both a DFL governor and DFL Senate majority.

Daudt has successfully turned the public debate away from the "GOP shutdown" narrative and instead framed the narrative as one that centers on an erratic governor and a DFL family that can't seem to govern effectively.

In short, this special session is all about the DFL.

The message discipline among Republicans has been outstanding, with the Speaker himself demonstrating the poise and leadership that Minnesotans want to see at times like this.

The contrast between Daudt and Dayton couldn't be clearer.

One is calm and collected while the other is so petulant and out of control, it has led the Star Tribune to publish an opinion that questions the governor's rhetoric and choice of words.

While the DFL has been caught up in a public blame game, the Speaker has simply and powerfully stated "We will honor the negotiated agreement and pass it without amendment."

This publication urges the Speaker and his caucus to stick to their guns.

Mr. Speaker, who have an agreement signed by the parties. Please don't reopen any aspect of this agreement if the DFL fails to honor it. If that happens, get on the airplane and leave town.

If there is a failure of this process, that's on the DFL, not on you and your caucus.

Pass these bills and adjourn.

The DFL is in a box. If they don't honor the agreement, things will only get worse for them, especially if this drags on and a partial shutdown ensues. The layoffs will happen to a constituency that is overwhelmingly supportive of the DFL anyway.

Finally, we would note the good work of Senate Minority Leader David Hann in this process.

He has played his role well, staying in the background as needed, giving Senator Bakk a spotlight in which to hang himself and the Senate DFL caucus.

When a man is hanging himself, step back and give him some more rope.

Hann has judiciously recognized that a "less is more" strategy is called for at this time.

His moment will come at election time, when the Senate GOP will remind the public of Bakk's antics and inability to govern in an adult manner.

The DFL has already inflicted major damage on their brand. We will see whether they can stop the bleeding or whether they will chamber another round and shoot themselves in the other foot.

Stay tuned.

June 19, 2015

Public Policy Commentary

In This Issue:

Quote of the Week: "No, you can't always get what you want. But if you try sometime, you just might find, you get what you need."

- Mick Jagger

1. The Bottom Line.
2. That House is Divided!
3. The Liberals Were Wrong - Again.

THE BOTTOM LINE

So it's done. The 2015 Not-so-Special Session has concluded and the legislature has adjourned until March of 2016.

The Watchdog and other political observers have weighed in over the course of the past few weeks on the whole situation, offering analysis and insights.

As expected, there is a rather large divergence in opinion in the conservative/libertarian family regarding the performance of the GOP in both the regular and especially the special session.

The bottom line for the Watchdog staff is that given the makeup of state government, Speaker Daudt and the GOP did very well against Governor Dayton and the DFL Senate.

First, Governor Dayton was forced to abandon his number one priority, universal Pre-K education, which would have instituted a massive and incredibly expensive (and intrusive!) education program.

Second, the Senate Majority Leader Tom Bakk was forced to walk away from his number one priority, a gas tax at the wholesale level.

Third, the GOP won major policy victories, including eliminating the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) Citizens' Board and a new policy allowing counties to contract with private entities to conduct audits.

Fourth, the GOP skillfully navigated the special session period, securing a good, negotiated outcome while eviscerating the hoped-for DFL narrative that Republicans can't govern when they're in charge and always drive the state into chaos and shutdown.

In fact, the GOP did great on that front. While the House GOP gets most of the attention because of their majority status, it shouldn't be lost on readers that it was the Senate GOP that played the adult in the room in the Upper Chamber and provided the key votes to pass the budget while securing a pledge for tax reform next year in exchange for that bailout.

Conversely, the special session exposed a DFL party riven by internal strife, back biting, acrimony and a host of significant personality conflicts.

Talk about a sideshow! Watching the DFL-on-DFL violence was something to behold - and thoroughly enjoy.

Besides the legislative outcome, the political outcome of the special session was strongly in favor of the GOP.

The DFL looked weak, indecisive, and at war with itself. The GOP, on the other hand, was united, purposeful, and poised.

This certainly has not been the outcome of previous special sessions.

Again, the outcome wasn't all roses for the GOP, but that is due to the nature of divided government and not because of flaws or errors in GOP strategy.

As expected, some in the family are bitterly complaining about the outcome. But to believe their narrative one is required to engage in some significant suspension of disbelief. Similar to the kind of suspension of disbelief it requires to enjoy movies like Star Wars or Terminator 3: Rise of the Machines.

Thinking that the GOP could somehow force the DFL to fully implement the GOP agenda is the stuff of pure fantasy, divorced in every way from the reality of the situation.

Art imitates life and provides the vivid metaphor.

So, if Speaker Daudt and the GOP played to the Rolling Stones and their ode to recognizing the possible, some Tea Party folks are still clinging to Steve Winwood's rebellion against reality:

*Dear Mr. Fantasy play us a tune
Something to make us all happy
Do anything, take us out of this gloom
Sing a song, play guitar, make it snappy
You are the one who can make us all laugh
But doing that you break out in tears
Please don't be sad if it was a straight mind you had
We wouldn't have known you all these years*

THAT HOUSE IS DIVIDED!

Democrats have spent a lot of time lately penning editorials and letters to the editor talking up "unity" and describing all the neat dogma and tenets of the Liberal worldview that bind them together.

No wonder. The past few weeks have seen rifts develop in the DFL that haven't been seen in some time.

On the federal level, outright civil war has broken out among Democrats over trade, with the Trans-Pacific Partnership trade deal serving as a flashpoint.

Despite the president's direct lobbying efforts, Congressional Democrats rejected a key portion of the package, rebuking the president in the process.

Moreover, the opposition was led by Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi.

On the state level, environmental issues have been the primary cause of the family feud.

Mining issues of the silica, ferrous, and non-ferrous kind have resulted in more warfare and strife.

On one side are pro-labor Democrats who support the high paying jobs (mostly union) that these mines offer in rural Minnesota.

On the other side are liberals, mostly from the urban core, who side with environmental radicals and passionately oppose mining.

This rift was put on full display during the special session, when a provision of the environmental spending bill contained a provision to eliminate a citizen board advising the PCA. The environmental wing of the DFL opposed the provision while the pro-labor wing supported it.

The rift took down the bill initially in the Senate and resulted in the Senate GOP extracting concessions regarding tax relief in order to pass the bill.

Senate Democrats were so fractured and divided over this and other special session issues that they held a closed door meeting for over two hours immediately after the special session concluded in the wee hours of the morning. New leadership and votes of "no confidence" were discussed in detail, sources tell the Watchdog.

All this comes on top of the horrible relationship between Governor Dayton and Majority Leader Bakk, the former gubernatorial rivals who saw their strained relationship meltdown in nuclear fashion over massive pay raises for highly-compensated executive branch political appointees.

Dayton, who has always struggled with self-control, predictably swung to heated rhetoric in describing his relationship with Bakk, describing him as a "conniver" and a "backstabber." Dayton went so far as to state that he couldn't again meet alone with Bakk as there apparently needs to be a witness to what is said.

The louder liberals proclaim DFL unity and shout about GOP factionalism, the better off Minnesota and America will stand, because surely the opposite is true.

No wonder the DFL so readily agreed to not reconvene until March of next year. What a circus.

THE LIBERALS WERE WRONG - AGAIN

Perhaps the most fundamental philosophical difference between conservatives and liberals is that conservatives recognize the nature of humans and seek to craft public policy that recognizes that nature.

For example, conservatives recognize that humans naturally seek comfort, which in turn causes humans to seek wealth and prosperity, meaning in turn that public policy should recognize, encourage, and reward wealth seeking behavior.

Liberals, on the other hand, obsess over the way humans SHOULD behave, as they define the word "should."

Frequently, the way people "should" behave is contrary to the liberal world view, which leads to despotic and tyrannical law making, because forcing people to act contrary to their nature requires force.

This difference has been on display recently in two areas that have been the subject of intense liberal social engineering, those areas being automobiles and housing.

These issues have been on display recently because the liberals have suffered a setback in both areas.

In housing, liberals have yelled long and loud for years that people need to live in tighter, denser urban settings that are more "sustainable" than the large houses with large lots that have become the standard in American home building over the years.

It is a Liberal article of faith that zoning laws should be used to prevent people from living in the suburbs or exurbs while steering them into the urban core.

The theory goes that after being forced to live this way, people will get used to it and start to embrace living like people in Tokyo.

In other words, people will move away from the natural tendency to seek comfort through large and amenity-filled homes and instead gladly live in a micro apartment and share a small plot of grass with hundreds of neighbors and their bratty kids.

Hardly.

Last year, for the first time, the average size of the American single family home topped 2,600 square feet. One-third of those homes were over 3,000 square feet, according to an article in the Star Tribune.

By comparison, the average square footage of a single family home in 1973 was 1,660.

This is happening despite the fact that there are fewer people, on average, living in those homes today than 40 years ago.

And this despite the best efforts of liberal policy makers to discourage such a thing.

The same holds true of the car. For years, liberal policy makers have attempted to force Americans into subcompact, electric vehicles, like the Chevy Volt.

Large pick-up trucks and SUVs are anathema to liberals, spewing carbon into the atmosphere and giving Americans the kind of freedom of movement that mass transit just can't match.

In fact, the two go hand in hand, with large vehicles giving citizens access to large houses out in the suburbs.

Today, just like in recent years, large truck sales provide the lion's share of car maker profits, with demand continuing to rise.

In fact, some manufacturers are having trouble keeping certain models in stock.

Try as they might, liberals will never defeat human nature, at least in the long run. In the short run, regimes like Cuba and North Korea have forced citizens to live a certain lifestyle, but freedom always ultimately prevails. And when it does, human nature prevails.

Watch Cuba. As capitalism takes hold and freedom prevails, Cubans will seek bigger houses and bigger cars.

No one in Cuba will proclaim years from now that they endured years of totalitarianism and oppression in order to drive crappier cars and live in smaller apartments.

In sum, capitalism is about living big and dreaming big. It's about celebrating human achievement and the blessings of liberty and freedom.

It's an optimistic celebration of man's triumph over the challenges of nature as we mold our surroundings to fit our needs and enhance our quality of life.

So make it happen, Watchdogs. Celebrate the end of the legislative session by firing up your SUV, running the riding lawnmower, and sitting on your deck while enjoying a cigar and cooking up some tasty red meat on the grill while giving thanks and praise to America and capitalism.

June 26, 2015

Public Policy Commentary

In This Issue:

Quote of the Week: Capitalism demands the best of every man-his rationality-and rewards him accordingly. It leaves every man free to choose the work he likes, to specialize in it, to trade his product for the products of others, and to go as far on the road of achievement as his ability and ambition will carry him. His success depends on the objective value of his work and on the rationality of those who recognize that value. When men are free to trade, with reason and reality as their only arbiter, when no man may use physical force to extort the consent of another, it is the best product and the best judgment that win in every field of human endeavor, and raise the standard of living-and of thought-ever higher for all those who take part in mankind's productive activity.

- Ayn Rand

Quote of the Week II: The point is, ladies and gentleman, that greed, for lack of a better word, is good. Greed is right, greed works. Greed clarifies, cuts through, and captures the essence of the evolutionary spirit. Greed, in all of its forms; greed for life, for money, for love, knowledge has marked the upward surge of mankind. And greed, you mark my words, will not only save Teldar Paper, but that other malfunctioning corporation called the USA.

- Gordon Gekko

1. Capitalism Works.
2. King-Size Injustice.

CAPITALISM WORKS

Pope Francis late last week released his encyclical on global warming, entitled "Laudato Si."

A lengthy and ambitious work, the document addresses global warming specifically, but is really more about capitalism, the environment, and the economic state of mankind.

Addressed to "every living person on this planet," the Pope states, "I would like to enter a dialogue with all people about our common home."

The Watchdog is pleased to accept that invitation.

While readers of this publication well know that we consider the issue of man-made global warming to be so much bunk, we really take issue with the Pope's condemnation of capitalism.

And make no mistake about it. His encyclical is a very direct and caustic attack on capitalism.

To quote:

"We need to reject a magical conception of the market, which would suggest that the problems can be solved simply by an increase in the profits of companies or individuals."

"At one extreme, we find those who doggedly uphold the myth of progress and tell us that ecological problems will solve themselves simply with the application of new technology and without any need for ethical considerations or deep change."

"The culture of relativism is the same disorder which drives one person to take advantage of another, to treat others as mere objects, imposing forced labour on them or enslaving them to pay their debts. The same kind of thinking leads to the sexual exploitation of children and abandonment of the elderly who no longer serve our interests. It is also the mindset of those who say: Let us allow the invisible forces of the market to regulate the economy, and consider their impact on society and nature as collateral damage."

"Is it not the same relativistic logic which justifies buying the organs of the poor for resale or use in experimentation, or eliminating children because they are not what their parents wanted? This same "use and throw away" logic generates so much waste, because of the disordered desire to consume more than what is really necessary."

At the outset, it is clear that Francis bases his thesis on two critical flaws.

The first is that he misunderstands the nature of capitalism and capitalists.

Capitalism does not exploit other human beings or fail to honor the intrinsic value of each human.

To the contrary, capitalism honors the intrinsic value of people by giving them a means to deal with each other in voluntary exchanges based on the freedom of each person to act in the marketplace to the extent that they wish.

Moreover, capitalism allows each person to go as far as their talents and work ethic will take them.

Capitalism has no gulags. Capitalism has no re-education camps.

The Pope also fails to acknowledge the very real and the very important charitable work of some of the most ardent capitalists of our time.

The captains of industry of have given billions upon billions of their fortunes to charitable causes.

The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation is one prominent example of the good work the rational pursuit of profits has enabled with respect to creating a better quality of life for the underdeveloped world.

In short, the Pope ascribes only the most base, crass and nefarious motives to market actors. They are rapacious and avaricious, he says.

But what about the charitable works described above? What about the entire notion of corporate responsibility? Corporate ethics is a very real notion.

The second flaw in the Pontiff's thinking is that he condemns the basic human desire: the pursuit of our rational self-interest. Human beings are hard wired to pursue prosperity, to consume goods and services that help us live better and live well.

In fact, it is this desire that has lifted up mankind, NOT caused its downfall.

The rational pursuit of profits has caused our best and brightest over time to pour their talents into products and services that have saved lives and increased our standard of living.

On the other end, the desire of humans to consumer those goods and services has given those talented folks the incentive to create those life-changing items.

So which country created more and better life-changing things? The Soviet Union or the United States?

England or North Korea?

Japan or Albania?

The desire to pursue prosperity, either as entrepreneur or consumer, is the driving force behind a rising standard of living for all mankind.

To be clear, this isn't to say that the Pope doesn't raise very real or very important concerns.

Capitalism isn't perfect. Force and fraud happens. Environmental degradation is real. Inequality remains.

In addition, the moral questions underpinning these issues demand thoughtful consideration and contemplation. What is our duty to the less fortunate? When does consumerism cross the line into wastefulness? What is our shared duty to protect shared natural resources like air and water? These are real issues that we all need to confront.

The consideration of these issues, however, leads to our biggest criticism of *Laudato Si*.

The Pope unfairly compares capitalism to an ideal and unrealistic standard.

Yes, capitalism has shortcomings and pitfalls that must be addressed on an ongoing basis.

But compared to what?

This situation reminds us of presidential polling. Candidates who are placed against a generic candidate always fare worse than when compared to other candidates.

This is because poll respondents always see in the generic candidate their ideal (and non-existent) candidate. The real candidate is always compared to the perfect candidate.

That same dynamic is at work here.

Compared to the ideal economic system, capitalism looks bad. After all, it's been famously said that capitalism is the worst economic system ever conceived - except for all the others.

Unfortunately, that ideal system doesn't exist. Never has, never will.

How ironic that the Pope condemns the only economic system that honors what he honors.

Capitalism is hands down the best system to recognize the dignity of the individual, lift them from poverty, and best protect the environment.

The inconvenient reality for the Pope is that the only alternative to capitalism is some form of a command and control economy.

Clearly, those systems place the power of the state over the rights of the individual. Those systems preach the priority of the "common good" over the needs of the individual. Those systems exploit people and have wrought severe damage to the environment.

There is severe inequality in North Korea, where a political elite enjoys a lavish lifestyle while millions are denied the most basic human needs like food and shelter.

China has nearly destroyed their environment.

The dictators of Cuba have systematically imprisoned, tortured, and killed political opponents.

The undeniable truth is that capitalism is the unquestioned champion of human dignity and security.

Only one economic system places the individual over the state. That's capitalism.

KING-SIZE INJUSTICE

As this issue goes to press, the Supreme Court of the United States has just issued its ruling in the King vs. Burwell case, the one dealing with public subsidies for those who purchase insurance on a health insurance exchange.

By way of background, the case is based on a challenge to federal tax subsidies that are offered for insurance purchased on both the federal exchange and those operated by states.

At issue is plain language in the health care law that authorizes subsidies for insurance purchased on an exchange "operated by the state."

The challenge argued that the language made it clear that there were only subsidies for insurance purchased on a state exchange and not the federal exchange.

The very plain language of the text makes it clear that subsidies are unavailable for insurance purchased on the federal exchange.

Despite that plain language, the Court ruled 6-3 that the subsidies should be available for the federal exchange as well.

The ruling was clearly a political ruling. It is clear that a majority of the Supreme Court, led by Chief Justice Roberts, has decided that it won't take on ObamaCare.

Playing politics like this only diminishes the credibility and authority of the Court.

It's now obvious that we as a country should re-examine the long-standing tradition in American jurisprudence that the Supreme Court is the last word on the law.

This idea is embodied in an early Supreme Court decision in the case of Marbury vs. Madison that articulated that the Court has the final authority "to say what the law is."

If the Court is simply going to act as a political and not legal body, there is no reason why this powerful authority should be conferred upon it.

An extra-judicial body consisting of 9 un-elected, unaccountable people is antithetical to our way of life.

July 3, 2015

Public Policy Commentary

In This Issue:

Quote of the Week: "When I use a word, it means just what I choose it to mean - neither more nor less." - Humpty Dumpty

Quote of the Week: "The question is, whether you can make words mean so many different things." - Alice

Quote of the Week: "Words no longer have meaning if an Exchange that is not established by a State is 'established by the State.'" - Justice Antonin Scalia

SPECIAL FOURTH OF JULY EDITION! HAPPY BIRTHDAY AMERICA!

1. Tricky Dick Obama, Slick Barry.
2. The Liberty Minnesota Scorecard is Here!
3. Inspirational Words.

TRICKY DICK OBAMA, SLICK BARRY

Any American citizen paying any attention whatsoever must admit that our Chief Executive has significant relationship issues with the concepts of integrity and truthfulness.

Frankly, he has problems being truthful.

Some of these incidents are well documented, such as when he declared that running up more national debt was "[unpatriotic](#)," or when he [declared](#) that if you like your health care, you can keep it."

Would you believe that Barack Obama's views on gay marriage are even more duplicitous and politically expedient?

In the past 15 years, Obama has somersaulted and pirouetted around the issue in a manner that would earn a gold medal in verbal gymnastics, if such an award existed.

You won't believe the timeline on this one!

1996: "I favor legalizing same-sex marriages, and would fight efforts to prohibit such marriages." This response was given to a questionnaire he filled out for a gay rights organization when he was running for the Illinois Senate.

1998: In the same questionnaire, Obama was now "undecided" on the issues of same-sex marriage, repealing the state's ban on gay marriage, or co-sponsoring a repeal of the ban on gay marriage.

2004 (U.S. Senate candidate): "I am a fierce supporter of domestic-partnership and civil-union laws. I am not a supporter of gay marriage as it has been thrown about, primarily just as a strategic issue."

2006: "I believe that American society can choose to carve out a special place for the union of a man and a woman as the unit of child rearing most common to every culture. ..."

2008: "I believe that marriage is the union between a man and a woman. Now, for me as a Christian, it is also a sacred union. God's in the mix."

2008: "I believe marriage is between a man and a woman. I am not in favor of gay marriage."

2010: "I have been to this point unwilling to sign on to same-sex marriage primarily because of my understandings of the traditional definitions of marriage. But I also think you're right that attitudes evolve, including mine."

2012: *"At a certain point, I've just concluded that for me personally, it is important for me to go ahead and affirm that I think same-sex couples should be able to get married."*

2015: "This ruling is a victory for Jim Obergefell and the other plaintiffs in the case. It's a victory for gay and lesbian couples who have so long for their basic civil rights. It's a victory for their children, whose families will now be recognized as equal to any other. It's a victory for the allies and friends and supporters who spent years, even decades working and praying for change to come."

So, in the span of 7 years, marriage went from a "sacred" union between one man and one woman to an institution available to same-sex couples.

Talk about a flip-flop, even by Obama standards.

And don't think Hillary Clinton hasn't done her own impersonation of Mary Lou Retton on this subject.

Hillary in 2000: "Marriage has got historic, religious and moral content that goes back to the beginning of time, and I think a marriage is as a marriage has always been, between a man and a woman."

Hillary in 2015: "Every loving couple & family deserves to be recognized & treated equally under the law across our nation. #LoveMustWin #LoveCantWait."

Talk about pandering. But they will continue to do it so long as the voters let them get away with it.

THE LIBERTY MINNESOTA SCORECARD IS HERE!

It's here, Watchdogs. The scorecard that measures exactly where legislators stand when it comes to liberty issues. The scorecard is so valuable because it measures legislators' ACTIONS on these issues, not their RHETORIC.

So, let's do this.

Here are the top 5 Senate scores when it comes to liberty:

1. Branden Petersen (R - Andover): 90%
2. Dave Thompson (R - Lakeville): 79%
3. Roger Chamberlain (R - Lino Lakes): 72%
4. Dan Hall (R - Burnsville): 67%
5. Julianne Ortman (R - Chanhassen): 67%

The Top 5 in the House are:

1. Steve Drazkowski (R - Mazeppa): 58%
2. Jerry Hertaus (R - Greenfield): 54%
3. Jim Newberger (R - Becker): 54%
4. Eric Lucero (R - Dayton): 52%
5. Kurt Daudt: (R - Crown): 50%

What's missing here? Where are all those "liberal" Democrats who are concerned for the right of individuals?

We know what happened. They ran into the reality that they can't implement their policies without the force of government.

Having said that, these scores don't say much for the legislature's commitment to liberty. These scores aren't too impressive. In school, Sen. Petersen would be the only "A" while Sen. Thompson would have been the only "B."

Perhaps most important, this scorecard should put Rep. Drazkowski on notice. His score is evidence of the biggest disconnect between liberty rhetoric and liberty actions on the part of a legislator.

If you talk the liberty talk, you need to walk the liberty walk.

Now on to the public shaming of those legislators who demonstrated the least concern for liberty this past legislative session.

The Senate:

1. Tony Lourey (DFL - Kerrick): 11%
2. Melissa Wiklund (DFL - Eagan): 13%
3. Alice Johnson (DFL -Blaine): 13%
4. Vicki Jensen (DFL - Owatonna): 13%
5. Four legislators were tied for 5th with 14%

The House:

1. Tara Mack (R - Apple Valley) 19%
2. Lyndon Carlson (DFL - Crystal): 22%
3. Ron Erhardt (DFL - Edina): 22%
4. Sandra Masin (DFL - Eagan): 22%
5. Paul Rosenthal (DFL - Bloomington) 23%

Something must be in the water in the south Metro, with six legislators scoring in the bottom 5 in both bodies.

On the other hand, Thompson and Hall must have taken the anti-dote. Talk about both ends of the spectrum.

Read the entire scorecard [here](#).

INSPIRATIONAL WORDS

When, in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bonds which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to

which the laws of nature and of nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. That to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed. That whenever any form of government becomes destructive to these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness. Prudence, indeed, will dictate that governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly all experience hath shown that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed. But when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same object evinces a design to reduce them under absolute despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such government, and to provide new guards for their future security...

July 10, 2015

Public Policy Commentary

In This Issue:

Quote of the Week: "The government and its employees live in a parallel universe of high salaries, water-tight job protections, wonderful benefits, early retirements, beautiful new offices, bountiful staffs, you name it. They do it all with our money, often when they don't even have it yet."

- Joe Soucheray

1. The Race is on!
2. The Most Important Supreme Court Case You Haven't Heard Of.

THE RACE IS ON!

One of the big political news items this week was the announcement of state Senator Branden Petersen (R- Andover) that he has decided against seeking re-election in 2016.

Petersen was by far the Senate's most outspoken libertarian member, often leading the charge to protect liberty interests, especially individual privacy rights against the increasing intrusion of the Surveillance State.

But before we get too deep into this story, the Watchdog takes a moment to note another announced retirement, that of state Senator Dave Brown (R - Becker). Senator Brown was a principled conservative who conducted himself with the utmost integrity and skill. The Watchdog thanks Senator Brown for his excellent service to the people of Minnesota and wishes him the best of luck in all future endeavors. He was one of the good guys and will be sorely missed in the Senate. Thank you, Dave!

Now back to Petersen. First, the Watchdog is sorry to see him go. As mentioned, he was a true champion for liberty and was always willing to vote his conscience, no matter what the political calculus happened to be regarding that issue. No reasonable person can claim that Sen. Petersen wasn't principled and guided by his values.

While there were multiple factors that played into his decision, including consideration of his young family, a major aspect of that decision was legislative pay.

In what is becoming an all-too-familiar scenario, bright young Republicans are abandoning legislative service because the financial price is simply too much to pay.

While service in the legislature certainly shouldn't provide enrichment, neither should it come with a severe financial penalty.

A legislator shouldn't have to choose between paying the bills and serving in the legislature.

The simple fact is that serving in Saint Paul has become nearly a full-time job that doesn't allow for meaningful outside employment unless a legislator can find a very unique situation that allows for being away from the office for 5 months a year as well as the time needed to run a campaign.

While it is unfortunate the governing has become a full-time job (the legislature should go back to meeting every other year), the reality is what it is.

There can be no denying this. While many GOP legislators put on a public face, most every one of them will privately admit that legislative service entails some brutal financial hardships.

There have been many outstanding conservatives who have left (or never run at all) because of this circumstance.

Celebrating the low wages of legislative service is a classic example of cutting of the nose despite the face.

If we want good conservatives to forgo the private sector opportunities that the job entails, there needs to be a bit of a bump.

Now, it doesn't need to be close to the obscene pay raising the governor recently bestowed on his political appointees. Common sense should prevail, which is always in short supply in the governor's office.

Now, the big question.

Who takes the seat?

Fortunately, the GOP has a very deep bench in Senate District 35 and there are a number of people who have expressed interest in possibly running.

Among those taking a look at running:

Abigail Whelan, current state Rep. in the district;
Jim Goodrich, GOP activist and Andover City Council member;
Sheri Bukkila, Andover City Council;
Kathy Tingelstad, former state Rep.;
Jim Abeler, former state Rep.;
Don Huizenga, GOP activist;
Andy Apilkowski, GOP activist.

For those of you wondering about state Rep. Peggy Scott, we can report that she is not running for the seat, which makes sense. With a gavel in hand, it wouldn't make sense for her to run to become a junior senator, and one who could be in the minority.

So what's the handicap on this one?

In the opinion of the Watchdog staff, Rep. Whelan is the front runner. As an endorsed Republican for the House, she clearly has the confidence of the delegates.

Moreover, she has successfully run a recent campaign for the legislature. Proving that she knows how to run and win a campaign of this type.

We have also been impressed with her freshman term thus far. Rep. Whelan has demonstrated a good mix of knowing when to lead on an issue and when to step back and learn the ropes in Saint Paul.

As a young female legislator, she has been a good face for the GOP in the northern suburbs and has fit in well with the other outstanding conservative women who have stepped forward in the county to execute a positive, pro-growth, pro-jobs agenda.

Our dark horse candidate is Andover councilman Jim Goodrich.

Jim and his wife are long-time GOP activists and delegates who are well-known and respected by the delegates who will confer the endorsement next year.

He ran an excellent and successful campaign for city council last year, working hard and proving that he knows how to run and win.

Goodrich also has a number of other advantages, including the fact that he recently retired. If he ran, he would no doubt have the time needed to introduce himself to voters and get his message to a broad audience.

Our "never mind" candidate would be former state Rep. Kathy Tingelstad. With such a deep bench, it is hard to envision the delegates giving the nod to a person who was a staunch advocate of Northstar rail and one of the infamous "override six," who joined with Democrats to override Governor Pawlenty's veto of a \$6 billion transportation tax increase.

That dog simply don't hunt in this neck of the woods.

Moreover, her more enterprising opponents would no doubt also dig up video of Tingelstad's votes against her own caucus on procedural votes, which is considered an act of disloyalty. It's one thing to have a principled difference of opinion on an issue. It's quite another to buck your team on procedure.

The most infamous example is her vote against a GOP motion to take a floor recess at a critical time during the 2006 legislative session, resulting in state Rep. Marty Seifert delivering a memorable 45 minute filibuster that allowed the GOP team time to caucus issues in private and craft a floor strategy.

Tingelstad has no path to either the endorsement or a primary victory and that's a fact.

Stay tuned, Watchdogs.

THE MOST IMPORTANT SUPREME COURT CASE YOU HAVEN'T HEARD OF

The Supreme Court of the United States has handed down two very important and far-reaching cases this year regarding both ObamaCare and gay marriage.

Both cases have rightly dominated the news cycle.

But there is another case out there that should draw the attention of every Watchdog in the country.

It's a case that could have alter the nation's political landscape for generations.

And the media has said little about the case.

The case, entitled *Friedrichs v. California Teachers' Association*, centers on a challenge to so-called "fair share" dues that public employees are required to pay to their union.

"Fair share" dues are less than full membership dues, designed ostensibly to cover the cost of representing the individual employee while segregating away the dues that are used to political purposes.

Rebecca Friedrichs, an Orange County public school teacher, has argued in the lower courts that these compulsory dues violate her right to free association and that when it comes to public sector unions, there is in reality no distinction between union activities and political activities.

She has got a great case and may very well prevail, given what the Court has said recently about the precedent that has been used to justify "fair share" since 1977.

That year, the Court issued the "*Abood*" ruling, holding that a public employee could not be compelled to pay union dues for political activities, but could be compelled to pay for other union activities.

In that case, Justice Powell disagreed with the rationale underpinning the majority's support for "fair share" dues.

Wrote Powell, "To the extent that school board expenditures and policy are guided by decisions made by the municipal, State, and Federal Governments the union's objective is to obtain favorable decisions and to place persons in positions of power who will be receptive to the union's viewpoint. In these respects, the public-sector union is indistinguishable from the traditional political party in this country."

In a recent case, *Harris v. Quinn*, the Court came close to outright overruling *Abood* but stopped short because the case did not deal with full-fledged public employees.

However, Justice Alito made comments that give conservatives hope that this case will finally free public employees from compulsory union membership.

Wrote Alito, "In the public sector, core issues such as wages, pensions, and benefits are important political issues, but that is generally not so in the private sector. In the years since *Abood*, as state and local expenditures on employee

wages and benefits have mushroomed, the importance of the difference between bargaining in the public and private sectors has been driven home."

In short, Alito said that in the public sector, all union issues are ultimately political. Thus, if employees cannot be compelled to fund political activities, they cannot be compelled to pay dues at all against their will.

Essentially, a favorable ruling would immediately institute "Right to Work" for every public employee in the country.

It's that big of a deal, folks.

The Court will likely hear arguments later this year and then issue a ruling in 2016.

This is one you will want to watch!

July 17, 2015

Public Policy Commentary

In This Issue:

Quote of the Week: "Money is only a tool. It will take you wherever you wish, but it won't replace you as the driver."

- Ayn Rand

Editor's Note: The Watchdog pauses to remember the Marines who were murdered in Tennessee this week.

1. The Door Doesn't Even Revolve Anymore.
2. The Circular Firing Squad.
3. A Most Dubious Distinction.

THE DOOR DOESN'T EVEN REVOLVE ANYMORE

Democrats are a lot not known for their modesty or discretion. In fact, it's just the opposite. The audacity, bravado, and plain ol' chutzpah of your average Democrat can be breathtaking.

Right here in the Land of 10,000 Lakes, our Democrats are no different even though we have a Scandinavian tradition of quiet introspection.

Apparently the DFL DNA outweighs the other genes.

We have a DFL Senate leader who demanded a \$90 million office building to serve his part-time wants for one.

We have a DFL senator under FBI investigation for misappropriation of state funds used by a non-profit in which he helps oversee.

We have yet another DFL senator who proposed to simultaneously serve as a senator and work as the highly paid executive director of a group that frequently seeks favors from the legislature.

Not content to let the Senate DFL hog the ignominious limelight, the House has now gotten into the act, with a DFL state Rep. who has taken a job with a company he helped with legislation that recently passed.

Remember when we beleaguered taxpayers only worried about the revolving door of politicians leaving office and then trading in their connections to make money?

Back in the good old days, we worried about the short amount of time between leaving office and cashing in?

The DFL has taken things to a new and brazen level.

The door no longer revolves.

Now, the Democrats simply stand on both sides of the line, with one foot in elective office and one foot in making a living for those they help at the Capitol.

Rep. Schoen, a DFLer from Cottage Grove, has been a driving force behind the legalization of medical marijuana, helping pass the legislation that became law last year.

This week, it was announced that Schoen had taken a paid position with LeafLine labs, a company that holds one of two state-issued licenses to produce and sell medical pot.

The company stated that Schoen would be paid to consult on security issues because their last security consultant had left.

The same news report indicated that Schoen was a patrol officer with the Cottage Grove department.

With all due respect, what is so special about that? There must be thousands and thousands of patrol officers around the state. Why pick this one?

It appears that the distinction is that this one also happens to be a legislator.

It stands to reason that a security consultant for the pot industry would come with a more specialized knowledge of security issues, perhaps a retired FBI agent or Secret Service agent.

This publication is left to wonder what the skills required for routine policing have to do with the specialized skills needed to analyze and create protocols for transporting cannabis, hardening a building against theft, or protecting employees against sophisticated threats from high level criminals.

What is more troubling is the timing of all this.

When we say "recent" we mean recent. As in this year.

On March 5th, Schoen co-sponsored a bill that offered a suite of helpful items to LeafLine Labs and the other medical marijuana licensee.

For example, the bill extended the duopoly enjoyed by LeafLine from one to three years, which is a big benefit.

To restate, this is an extension of an artificial fencing of the market in favor of LeafLine for an additional two years.

On April 7th, the bill was passed out of a House committee.

On May 18th, near the end of session, the House voted on a bill that contained language nearly identical to the language in the bill Schoen co-authored, including a two-year license protection period instead of the three in the original bill.

The bill, House File 1792, passed 107-26, with Schoen voting in the affirmative.

This timing begs the question of when Schoen was offered employment by LeafLine and when he accepted that offer of employment.

Did he ever vote in support of the helpful language after he had been offered or accepted employment?

This situation bears further investigation, to say the least.

It is highly unlikely that Rep. Schoen would have been offered this job had he not been in the legislature.

Clearly, there appears to be a link between Schoen's legislative service and the employment with LeafLine.

Is this the new standard? Help a business at the Capitol and then get a job with them while you still hold your elective office?

This is a new political low.

The House now needs to determine exactly what the relationship is between Schoen and his new employer.

THE CIRCULAR FIRING SQUAD

This publication has regularly reported on the various circular firing squad activities of various Republicans who spend ten times as much time and energy going after fellow Republicans as they do trying to defeat Democrats.

While most thoughtful activists have realized that this activity rarely results in a better result at the polls, some have not - and probably never will.

This past week, the Watchdog received an email from a guy named Jake Duesenberg asking us to invest in some program called the "Bounty Hunter Program."

The email claims that the GOP is "controlled by RINOs," which stands for "Republican in Name Only."

The stated purpose of this program is to "rid the GOP of its liberal faction."

Ok. Then what?

The dream of having 201 fire-breathing, government-loathing legislators is one the Watchdog shares.

The one small problem with that dream is that it's a full-blown fantasy.

Like wishing you were Tom Brady and married to Giselle.

Or like wishing you were Derek Jeter, with the net worth of Bill Gates.

Simply put, it will never happen.

So how does this plan, if successfully implemented, get us to a sustainable Republican governing coalition in Saint Paul?

Who are these RINOs? Is the district they represent one where a conservative can win? For example, Sen. Jeremy Miller represents the Winona area, which is DFL leaning. He is probably considered a "RINO." He would probably agree that he is a moderate. And he's also the most conservative candidate who can carry that district.

So is the goal to oust a guy like him and concede the seat to a Democrat?

Is there a plan to get the successful conservative challenger elected?

Perhaps the answer is to snort some more pixie dust and believe a hardcore conservative can win there.

Next, is there a DFL Bounty Hunter Program? Is there a plan in place to defeat Democrats?

Just what is the strategic purpose of this program?

From what we can discern, it's about a few people feeling good about attacking fellow Republicans with whom they disagree.

And, by the way, what is the criteria for being a "RINO" and who gets to define the term?

This is just another in a series of bad ideas.

The strategic goal is a sustainable center-right governing coalition.

We get there by getting behind the most electable, most conservative candidate that any given district will support.

Step three is to whip the Democrat opponent like a wayward dog.

Step four is to win and govern.

We don't get there with goofball ideas like this one.

It won't fly anyway.

What's the over/under that this "program" won't raise \$5,000 anyway?*

(*Excludes the profligate amounts of money Bob Cummins wastes donating to losing causes, potentially including this one.)

We'll take the under.

A MOST DUBIOUS DISTINCTION

The news has been filled with all sorts of fawning accolades for state Reps Phyllis Kahn (DFL - Minneapolis) and Lyn Carlson (DFL - Crystal), who now share the record for the longest tenure in Minnesota House history.

Taking office in 1973, both have served 15,532 days each.

Color us unimpressed.

Making a career out of politics is no achievement.

Yuk.

July 24, 2015

Public Policy Commentary

In This Issue:

Quote of the Week: "Kelm-Helgen said closed-door discussions are necessary for 'public monies to be protected.'"

- Star Tribune quoting Michelle Kelm-Helgen, explaining why negotiations regarding Vikings stadium overruns are kept away from the public, even though it's public money at stake.

Factoid of the Week: The Vikings football stadium will cost \$327 million more to build than the New Horizons space project, which recently sent a vehicle to explore Pluto. That difference will surely be greater once all the cost overruns for the stadium are taken into account.

1. Dayton Fumbles Again;
2. More Good Stadium News;
3. Bits and Pieces.

DAYTON FUMBLES AGAIN

Is Mark Dayton the most incompetent chief executive to ever lead the state? It's becoming an important question.

Perhaps historians will put Dayton into the mix with figures like Nero, Caligula, and Jimmy Carter.

The Vikings stadium plan Dayton and his team engineered continues to shock taxpayers.

This week we learned that the stadium may be as much as \$50 million over budget already.

Moreover, the Stadium Authority, designed to represent the taxpayers, is in closed-door negotiations with the stadium contractor regarding these overruns.

To start, why in the world are the taxpayers negotiating these overruns? Why is the taxpayer contribution not capped? Why is there apparently ongoing exposure?

Moreover, negotiations on behalf of the taxpayer are being led by two people, violating a core principle of both leadership and negotiating.

A core military principle is "unity of command," meaning that all military operations are led by one commander, ensuring that there is no confusion regarding orders, strategy, or objective.

The same holds true for negotiations for the same reasons.

Having more than one leader creates confusion, chaos, and dissention.

And when those two leaders are political appointees who were chosen for political connections more than talent or experience, you've got a real problem.

One of the leaders is Ted Mondale, who is where he is today because fate chose Walter Mondale to be his daddy.

The other is Michelle Kelm-Helgen, who is one of the stable of Mark Dayton confidants who has jumped from job to job with Dayton since he was elected.

The most pointed criticism regarding this matter has come from Duane Benson, a Stadium Authority board member who has blasted the process, blasted the leadership of Monday and Kelm-Helgen, and will soon step down from the Authority.

So who is Duane Benson?

He graduated with Honors from Hamline University.

He played pro football for 11 seasons.

He served in the Minnesota Senate for 14 years.

He was the executive director of the Minnesota Business Partnership for 9 years.

He is a small business owner, operating a cattle ranch outside of Lanesboro.

He has served on numerous corporate and non-profit boards.

If you were on a jury, who would be the most credible witness? Duane Benson, Ted Mondale, or Michelle Kelm-Helgen?

Duane Benson says the operation is screwed up, the finances are in the soup, and there is a lack of leadership.

The other two say that isn't the case.

This publication finds Duane Benson to be the credible eyewitness.

Heck, maybe Dayton should consider appointing his horse to replace Mondale. It could be a change for the better!

MORE GOOD STADIUM NEWS

Of course we're being sarcastic. Make that more "good" stadium news. The financial news web site "MarketWatch" has listed the Vikings stadium as one of the 5 worst taxpayer stadium deals in the country.

Here's what they had to say, in part:

How do you get taxpayers to chip in \$500 million on a more than \$1 billion stadium when only one city, Indianapolis (\$620 million), has ever paid that much? Tell them you'll move their 54-year-old NFL franchise to Los Angeles.

Vikings owner Zygi Wilf did just that and got the state of Minnesota and the city of Minneapolis to go along for the ride. With the Hubert H. Humphrey Metrodome's roof collapse moving games in 2010 and competing L.A. stadium plans just waiting for a team, Minnesota panicked and came up with a plan for a new stadium on the Metrodome site that the state would pay for through "charitable gambling." Though the plan was approved in 2012, the funding portion never worked out and led to a tax on cigarette inventory instead.

Minneapolis, meanwhile, will end up paying \$678 million over its 30-year payment plan once interest, operations and construction costs are factored in. The city earned a Super Bowl hosting gig in 2018, but also got a 150-page list of Super Bowl demands from the NFL that will only cost the host city and state more money.

Thanks, Governor Dayton. The hits just keep on coming.

BITS AND PIECES

Dayton Demands More Spending: Governor Dayton this week demanded that more funding for pre-K programs be a part of any tax cut package in next year's legislative session.

Readers will recall that there was no tax bill last legislative session, leaving almost \$1 billion on the bottom line for tax cuts next session.

The answer ought to be a resounding "no" to the governor's demands. The state budget for the next two years has been set. State government spending will rise 8% under this budget. In the meantime, inflation is expected to clock in at about 4% and household incomes around 5%.

There is no need for more government spending.

Is there a government program the governor doesn't like?

Donald Trump: The difference between John McCain's military record and his Senate record shouldn't be difficult to comprehend. Yes, McCain is a war hero. He endured horrific abuse and torture in an infamous POW camp. He didn't break. He also didn't take an offer to leave early when it was offered. He's a war hero - period.

In the Senate, McCain has accumulated a voting record that causes heartburn for many conservatives. That's a fact.

It's real easy to distinguish between the two.

Unless you're name is Donald Trump.

To be clear, The Donald is a self-absorbed, pompous jack ass. Even among the egos running for president, he's in a class all by himself.

More importantly, Trump is no conservative. In fact, he's really not a Republican.

Check his views on taxes (he's said he's for more).

Check him out on abortion (he's favors partial birth abortion).

He's for gun control.

He's also said he's "probably" a Democrat.

Trump's carnival barking in the GOP will thankfully end soon.

This publication predicts a third party bid for Trump.

Senate District 35: The race to replace Senator Branden Petersen has generated a great deal of activity, although much of it remains under the surface at this point.

A number of people are actively considering entering the race, taking informal steps to form a campaign and position themselves to run next year.

The Watchdog is aware of at least four serious candidates who are thinking of getting in the race.

Above the surface, GOP activist Andy Aplikowski has announced he is running.

Stay tuned, folks. This race is likely to be a real barn burner on the GOP side.

Already, controversies are brewing and the prospect of an almost sure election win for the Republican left standing will make for some sharp elbows.

And it's only July of 2015.

Opposition research files are already making the rounds.

The Senate District 35 Screening Committee will have its work cut out.

And that's a good thing. A vigorous endorsement contest will forge a strong winner who will be ready for the rigors of the general election and service in the Minnesota Senate.

This thing is far from over.

July 31, 2015

Public Policy Commentary

In This Issue:

Quote of the Week: "Racism is the lowest, most crudely primitive form of collectivism. It is the notion of ascribing moral, social or political significance to a man's genetic lineage-the notion that a man's intellectual and characterological traits are produced and transmitted by his internal body chemistry. Which means, in practice, that a man is to be judged, not by his own character and actions, but by the characters and actions of a collective of ancestors.

Racism claims that the content of a man's mind (not his cognitive apparatus, but its *content*) is inherited; that a man's convictions, values and character are determined before he is born, by physical factors beyond his control. This is the caveman's version of the doctrine of innate ideas-or of inherited knowledge-which has been thoroughly refuted by philosophy and science. Racism is a doctrine of, by and for brutes. It is a barnyard or stock-farm version of collectivism, appropriate to a mentality that differentiates between various breeds of animals, but not between animals and men.

Like every form of determinism, racism invalidates the specific attribute which distinguishes man from all other living species: his rational faculty. Racism negates two aspects of man's life: reason and choice, or mind and morality, replacing them with chemical predestination." - Ayn Rand

1. Gone Fishin';
2. Unions and Government a Toxic Mix.

GONE FISHIN'

Greetings Watchdog. Welcome to this week's edition of our fine publication, which has been declared a Cecil-the-Lion-Free-Zone. Everything that needs to be said about that incident has been said.

Here in Minnesota, there is another low-level freak out taking place, this one happening on Lake Mille Lacs, where our always-competent Department of Natural Resources has declared that the lake may soon be closed to Walleye fishing soon because quota limits for the year are fast being reached.

The lake is still open to fishing Bass. And Northern Pike. And Muskies. And every other type of fish found in the lake subject to taking under law.

Heck, the lake is also still open to swimming, boating and jet skis.

No, it isn't Three Mile Island, despite Governor Dayton inciting panic around the state regarding the issue, which may turn out to be more harmful than helpful.

Of course, the governor thinks the solution to this issue is more government, in the form of a special session of the legislature to magically fix in one bill a fishing problem years in the making and one which doesn't lend itself to easy answers.

On top of that is the predictable call for a big bailout of local businesses, which has become the moral norm for government these days. That is, to insulate every citizen from risk and the negative outcomes that are an inherent fact of life.

There is no doubt that this issue could bring about significant economic issues for the area. That's understood, but it doesn't relieve us from asking tough questions regarding the solution.

Thank goodness Speaker Kurt Daudt and his leadership team are putting the brakes on the Dayton's freight train and counseling a more thoughtful, deliberate approach to the issue.

The governor's simplistic approach is also unrealistic. The lake is a complex ecosystem that has been under strain for generations. In short, we have been loving Mille Lacs to death.

Thus far, the Watchdog has a couple of takeaways from this issue. The first is the wisdom of taxpayer bailouts.

Some brave soul with an election certificate ought to stand up and ask why private, for-profit businesses should get taxpayer bailouts regarding this situation or any other for that matter.

Any person who opens a business takes on the risk of both the known and the unknown.

Yes, the situation is unfortunate the potential for significant economic dislocation in the area is high.

But should that matter?

Is it a proper function of government to insulate a business from downturns?
We think not.

If not, where does it end? How to distinguish between those who get a bailout and those who don't? The ugly reality is that either everyone gets a bailout or political muscle decides who wins.

Shortly, the market place, which efficiently allocates resources, is displaced by a government-run spoils system, which rewards political clout and distorts market efficiency.

Moreover, these schemes are inevitably infected with waste, fraud, and abuse. See FEMA for examples. You can start with the tattoos and breast enhancements purchased with Katrina cash.

In addition, these programs, especially as they grow in size and scope, engender a moral hazard.

As the safety net for business grows, business become desensitized to risk. Once again, market efficiencies are distorted because risk is a critical factor in both asset allocation and asset valuation.

Of course, one bailout program on one lake won't bring down our entire system of free enterprise.

But it will certainly put a crack in the system. And such is the death of societal institutions. They rarely die through catastrophic blows. Instead, it is the death of a thousand paper cuts inflicted over years, decades, and generations.

There are businesses across Minnesota that fail every day. The market has determined that the business isn't viable and the resources of that business should be redeployed to a higher and better use.

It is a very necessary and often uncomfortable reality of economics. But the alternative is worse, although it may play better politically.

The second aspect of this affair is the rather shocking racism expressed by some people who live in the area of Lake Mille Lacs.

In following social media, the Watchdog has been taken aback by the ugly racism expressed towards the Indian Tribes who fish the lake.

While the tribal practice of taking Walleye by gill net has engendered controversy, the comments posted have gone way beyond that.

Stereotyping an entire race as all drunk, on welfare, or all shiftless and lazy is patent racism and just as patently false.

Moreover, it has absolutely nothing to do with fishing practices and the ecology of the lake.

While the Watchdog is no expert regarding the state of the Mille Lacs Band of Indians, a bit of research shows that the Band is the 40th largest employer in the entire state of Minnesota (according to the Minneapolis Saint Paul Business Journal). Also, one contact with Grand Casino has reported that the vast majority of jobs at the casinos go to non-Indian people (meaning white folk).

Yes, we've also read of crime problems on the reservation.

That all goes to show that, just like any society, this one appears to have its share of successes and failures.

Let's hope that GOP leaders, especially those in the area, condemn these ignorant rants and stay focused on the facts and on solutions.

Pandering to race baiters and bigotry has no upside.

No, the Indian tribes shouldn't be above answering objective questions about fishing practices, but neither should these practices serve as a platform for race baiters to sound off and pollute the ears of rational thinkers.

The racial views of some folks are nothing short of appalling. And in 2015, no less.

UNIONS AND GOVERNMENT A TOXIC MIX

Citizens around the country are getting a hearty and cynical chuckle out of news articles reporting on unions seeking exemptions or taking advantage of "escape" clauses in minimum wage laws that allow the union to pay its employees a lower wage than the minimum they supported.

Seattle and Los Angeles are two cities where this issue has appeared recently.

But here's another aspect of the story you probably haven't heard. And it's just as ugly as the Fight for \$15 nonsense itself.

In an [opinion piece](#) published by the Washington Policy Center, unions have proposed these campaigns as a means to blackmail employers.

The scheme works something like this. Under one scenario, unions approach employers, asking them in large numbers to unionize. These employers are threatened with a minimum wage campaign if they don't comply.

Under the second scenario, these minimum wage laws have exemption clauses for union employers to act as an enticement to unionize.

In other words, artificially raise the cost of being non-union in order to make unionization more economically attractive.

Yes, it's worse than you thought.

Let's all enjoy some more government.

August 7, 2015

Public Policy Commentary

In This Issue:

Quote of the Week: "Well first of all, tell me: Is there some society you know that doesn't run on greed? You think Russia doesn't run on greed? You think China doesn't run on greed? What is greed? Of course, none of us are greedy, it's only the other fellow who's greedy. The world runs on individuals pursuing their separate interests. The great achievements of civilization have not come from government bureaus. Einstein didn't construct his theory under order from a bureaucrat. Henry Ford didn't revolutionize the automobile industry that way. In the only cases in which the masses have escaped from the kind of grinding poverty you're talking about, the only cases in recorded history, are where they have had capitalism and largely free trade. If you want to know where the masses are worse off, worst off, it's exactly in the kinds of societies that depart from that. So that the record of history is absolutely crystal clear, that there is no alternative way so far discovered of improving the lot of the ordinary people that can hold a candle to the productive activities that are unleashed by the free-enterprise system." - Milton Friedman

1. Ready, Willing, and UnAbeler;
2. 911 or 411?

READY, WILLING, AND UNABELER

Ugh, does this guy ever go away? After 16 years of growing government as a legislator, after a U.S. Senate campaign that utter failed (this guy couldn't even beat out Mike McFadden), and after a stint as a revolving-door lobbyist, Anoka's very own Jim Abeler has announced that he is considering running for the state Senate to replace the retiring Branden Petersen.

This in addition to the chatter of Abeler running for Anoka County commissioner.

No word on whether Abeler is also considering running for dog catcher, railroad commissioner, and Greek Finance Minister.

Maybe Abeler will tell us when he decides what he wants to be when he grows up.

The notion that the GOP delegates in Senate District 35 would endorse Jim Abeler is rather preposterous.

First, Abeler is now working as a registered [lobbyist](#), running through the revolving door and apparently wanting to walk back in.

Haven't we had enough of politicians blurring the line between elected official and lobbyist?

And even though he's now a registered lobbyist, Abeler also has a history as a career politician.

In fact, if Abeler ran for the state Senate in 2016, he will have not skipped even a single election of late, having run for re-election to the House in 2012, election to the U.S. Senate in 2014 and now possibly the state Senate in 2016.

He's run 9 election cycles in a row, starting with 1998. 2016 would make it 10.

Third, Abeler compiled a voting record in the Minnesota House that will cause the delegates to blow a gasket, especially in a Senate District dominated by strong conservatives and Tea Party affiliated voters.

Here's what the Watchdog had to say about Abeler's U.S. Senate campaign back in June of 2013.

Abeler the candidate stated: "Government spending is out of control and unsustainable. Massive debt to foreign countries threatens our sovereignty. Our children and grandchildren are born into a future as indentured debtors of our country's careless spending. When we are dependent on the government, we are absolutely not free."

In response, the Watchdog remarked: "That's great and all, but it will indeed require some remarkable verbal and political gymnastics to reconcile this statement with Abeler's voting record. Without doing any research, delegate and activists should ask Abeler how his statement can be squared with the following votes:

One of six House GOP members to vote to override Governor Pawlenty's veto and impose a \$6 billion transportation tax on Minnesotans;

Voted to fund Hiawatha Light Rail Line;

Voted against allowing school districts to opt out of the Profile of Learning;

Not only a supporter, but a champion of the \$317 million boondoggle we call Northstar commuter rail;

Voted for a \$400 million tobacco tax increase disguised as a "health impact fee."

Bought into the global warming scam by voting for the "25 by 25" mandate that requires 25% of the state's energy come from renewable resources;

Voted for a "cap and trade" system to artificially limit carbon emissions;

Voted for numerous bonding bills filled with pork and financed with debt;

Voted to remove the requirement that school boards must put a property tax levy on the ballot;

Voted for the Vikings stadium."

Some folks are just addicted to The Game.

911 OR 411?

It was encouraging this week to see GOP legislators putting a damper on Governor Dayton's talk of a special session to provide taxpayer-funded bail outs for resort owners on Lake Mille Lacs.

Instead of dialing 911 like Dayton has, the GOP has dialed 411, noting that a good deal of fact finding and analysis needs to be undertaken before even beginning to entertain notions of a special legislative session.

Actually figuring out the scope of the problem is a critical first step that Governor Dayton completely skipped in his typical Ready! Fire! Aim! manner of "leadership."

Moreover, this publication is highly skeptical of bailouts for resort owners.

At the outset, it has to be asked if this kind of activity is a proper function of government (it isn't).

Next, it has to be asked where this type of bailout will end (it won't).

Then, there will be the inevitable waste, fraud, and abuse associated with this bailout as the DFL acts surprised when scammers use bailout money to buy jet skis, tattoos, and breast enhancement.

Putting all that aside, it must also be asked whether this is truly an "emergency."

After all, an "emergency" has as a central element unpredictability. A tornado strikes. A 500-year flood event. A terrorist attack.

Here, it was public knowledge way back in early 2015 that the Walleye quota on Mille Lacs was going to be 40,000 pounds.

That was a clear and convincing red flag for those who rely on the lake for a living.

In fact, the Mille Lacs Band tribe has testified before the legislative task force that they altered their business plan for the resort they own on the lake in response to the lower quota, anticipating a reduction in Walleye fishing or an outright band.

If a resort owner ignored this information and failed to prepare, is it the duty of his neighbor to bail him out through the force of government?

And speaking of disasters in the making, it's quite interesting to compare Dayton's actions regarding Mille Lacs compared to what's happening up on the Iron Range.

With iron ore prices severely depressed, the Iron Range is again experiencing significant economic dislocation.

In the face of all this, Dayton has continued to cast doubt on mining projects on the Range, such as the Polymet mine.

These mining projects would bring hundreds of high-paying jobs to the Range, running from short-term construction jobs to long-term jobs in the mines.

You would think that Dayton would be foursquare behind creating these jobs.

Nope. Instead, he may act as an obstacle to approval.

Unfortunately for Dayton and the Democrats, this issue splits the DFL base right to the core, with blue collar folks wanting the jobs and urban elites

demanding that rural Minnesota remain pristine so as to not disturb the views from their lake homes not disturb their viewpoint that nature is more important than man.

Let them eat cake, so to speak.

The Watchdog predicts Dayton will ultimately side with the enviro weenies and drag his feet on approving mining permits and applications.

After all, this is the guy who grew up in the Cities as a trust fund kid. His ex-wife is one of the foremost enviro weenies in the country.

That Dayton drinks his tea with the same upturned pinky as these folks is not to be overlooked.

In the end, the governor is no different from other DFL leaders like Barack Obama. At core, they are elitist and out of touch.

They use the blue collar masses to gain political power.

And those same masses are to blame, as they let those elites exploit them.

Go ahead governor, prove us wrong.

August 14, 2015

Public Policy Commentary

In This Issue:

Quote of the Week: "Economic progress, in a capitalist society, means turmoil."

- Joseph A. Schumpeter

1. Taming the Leviathan.
2. Scott Walker - Keynesian.
3. Six to Watch.

TAMING THE LEVIATHAN

The proposed special session to bail out resort owners on Lake Mille Lacs has become a political and policy flashpoint for good reason.

The debate the governor's proposed bailout has generated is good and it's needed.

The concept of bailouts is not only bad public policy. It's also the justification that has been used more and more frequently to grow government.

Think about it. It has become rather routine for some distressed industry to turn to government to avoid bankruptcy and dissolution.

Recent editions of the Watchdog have explored the reasons why bailouts are bad public policy.

Here are four questions we would ask the governor and his representatives if we sat on the legislative working group considering the bailout.

Question #1: When a private business encounters distress, a basic and fundamental response is to restructure outstanding debt and access credit facilities in order to maintain cash flow avoid collapse.

What evidence is there that these businesses are unable, or will be unable to restructure their debt? Will there be documents or testimony provided from the resort owners or their creditors?

Thus far, there has been zero testimony provided in this regard.

Next, the proposed bailout terms are in essence access to a credit facility. In this case, the taxpayers are taking on all the risk while government provides to real metrics for assessing both the need of each applicant and the risk to the taxpayer of offering that credit.

What evidence do we have that private sector banks and other lenders aren't an option for these resort owners? Will there be testimony from either resort owners or private sector lenders that private sector lending isn't a viable option?

It appears so far that government is acting as the lender of first resort, not last resort.

Question #2: Some have suggested that government should be involved in bailing out resort owners because the state is responsible (culpable) for the losses of the resort owners.

If there is an issue of fault, responsibility, or culpability, why isn't that issue best settled in a court of law?

In court, a neutral finder of fact can determine the facts, assign fault, assess damages and fashion appropriate remedies.

In government, the merits mean little. Instead, outcomes are heavily influenced by political clout and political considerations.

Why is this legislative working group better equipped to determine these issues than a court of law?

In other words, if resort owners have indeed been harmed by the negligence of government, why not have the parties prove up their cases before a judge and jury?

Question #3: Another bailout option being discussed are property tax "abatements," a concept whereby the county, in its own discretion, would reduce property taxes on affected resort owners.

The complication is that the governor's office is talking about having the state reimburse 100% of the abatements out of the state treasury.

What evidence do we have that the counties in question are in need of reimbursement? What kind of budget reserves do they hold? What evidence is there that they can't absorb the reduced property tax revenues?

So far, there has been zero testimony provided or documents submitted.

Moreover, explain why a front-end promise of 100% reimbursement won't trigger a moral hazard whereby the counties will go nuts with the abatements to curry political favor while suffering no consequences thanks to yet another bailout - in this case the state providing a property tax bailout to counties.

Question #4: Where does this end? As the government gets deeper and deeper into the bailout business, there is a greater and greater need for clear rules regarding when government will step in and provide bailouts. So far, those ground rules are nonexistent.

How will government pick winners and losers between different industries and different situations, much less pick between different businesses around Lake Mille Lacs?

Government does a horrible job picking winners and losers.

Perhaps that's why the better policy is to keep government out of the bailout business and let the market decide.

The outcome may at times seem harsh, but at least the outcome is fair and the rules clear.

SCOTT WALKER - KEYNESIAN

Almost unbelievably, Governor Scott Walker this week vaporized his chances of becoming president by signing into law a \$250 million public subsidy for a new arena for the Milwaukee Bucks NBA franchise.

In doing so, Walker dutifully aped all the talking points of the many politicians who screw the taxpayers by forking over millions in subsidies to billionaire owners and their millionaire employees.

Signing the bill was bad enough.

The fact that some of the investors in the team are involved in the Walker campaign is worse and presents additional issues.

Perhaps what's worst, in our view, is Walker spouting tired, old, and disproven Keynesian economic principles in defense of actions.

He stood before the microphones and claimed, as so many liberals do, that an "investment" of \$1 taxpayer dollar will result in economic activity many times greater than that dollar.

Walker wants us to believe that a \$250 million taxpayer "investment" will shower hundreds of millions more in economic mana from heaven for both Milwaukee and the entire state of Wisconsin.

On top of this, we have recently learned that Walker also has trouble understanding and managing personal finances. He apparently has many thousands in credit card debt he has racked up, including a Sears credit card, of all things.

A guy who believes in taxpayer-funded stadiums shouldn't be president.

A guy who believes in the Keynesian Multiplier Effect shouldn't be president.

A guy who runs up credit card debt he can't timely repay shouldn't be president.

A guy who owns a Sears credit card shouldn't be dog catcher, much less president.

Pay cash for that Craftsman drill, Scotty.

And tell the Milwaukee Bucks to pay cash - their own - for a stadium.

SIX TO WATCH

In Minnesota, the state Senate is on the ballot only every four years (with the exception of the first election cycle after redistricting).

2016 will be a year in which all 67 senate seats are on the ballot.

Republicans need to gain six seats to capture the majority.

While the path to gaining six can take a number of different paths, it's interesting to note that there are six DFL senators who represent a district that features two GOP House members.

Readers will recall that each senate seat has two house seats within it.

Those six are:

District 1:

Sen. Leroy Stumpf
Rep. Dan Fabian
Rep. Deb Kiel

District 2:

Sen. Rod Skoe
Rep. Dave Hancock
Rep. Steve Green

District 17:

Sen. Lyle Koenen
Rep. Tim Miller
Rep. Dave Baker

District 21:

Sen. Matt Schmit
Rep. Tim Kelly
Rep. Steve Drazkowski

District 24:

Sen. Vicki Jensen
Rep. John Petersburg
Rep. Brian Daniels

District 57:

Sen. Greg Clausen
Rep. Tara Mack
Rep. Anna Wills

August 21, 2015

Public Policy Commentary

In This Issue:

Quote of the Week: "He hasn't had a particularly successful tenure. So why not speak out as bluntly as possible and have some fun?"

- Larry Sabato, political science professor, speaking of Mark Dayton's last days as a U.S. Senator (5/29/06).

1. Lame Duck or Dead Duck?
2. Bits and Pieces.

LAME DUCK OR DEAD DUCK?

The people of Minnesota should have seen this coming. They were warned. There was a large body of evidence pointing to the likely outcome. And they did it anyway.

Despite all the warning signs, they went ahead and elected Mark Dayton governor. Twice.

It is painfully obvious that Mark Dayton's tenure in public office has been marked by two things and two things only: 1) an inability to achieve results; and 2) a propensity to lash out and attack others whenever he doesn't get his way.

Seriously, this guy is completely devoid of leadership skills and any real talent whatsoever.

He's the Vanna White of politics. Because of his family name, he fell into a couple of political jobs where he sort of just spins the letters and collects his paycheck.

The latest epic fail on Dayton's part was his inability to rally the legislature, including fellow Democrats, to support a special session regarding the Lake Mille Lacs fishing shutdown.

Putting aside the bad public policy the special session would have supported, it's really quite stunning to reflect upon the way the legislature collectively ignored the governor and effectively killed the idea of a special session right away.

Finding a vocal supporter of Governor Dayton in the legislature is about as easy as finding prosperity in North Korea.

Mark Dayton is truly leading a parade of one. As this publication has noted in a sort of satirical way: Planet Dayton has a population of one.

We suppose any corporate trainer would tell you that a lack of vision combined with a childish personality is a toxic combination for organizational success.

Of course, Dayton's self-assigned grade of "F" for his Senate tenure is famous.

Even well-known and mild mannered Professor Larry Sabato called Dayton "not particularly successful."

What isn't so well known is that Dayton was known in Washington for his childish name calling and lashing out as well.

For example, he lashed out at fellow liberal Senator Russ Feingold over a policy difference, calling Feingold's vote, "an overreaching step by someone who is grandstanding and running for president at the expense of his own party and his own country."

Geez, sound familiar?

It is therefore not surprising that we are seeing the same pattern emerge here in Minnesota.

Back in 2011, Dayton had a DFL legislature and a historic opportunity to create a legacy, even if it is one the Watchdog would have called ignoble and ugly.

Really, all he did was raise taxes by \$2 billion to feed the various DFL constituencies that depend upon raiding the treasury as their mission.

That's it.

In scrounging for something nice to say, you could list the Vikings stadium as an accomplishment, although the funding mechanism failed in a huge way and had to be replaced by - you guessed it - a tax increase.

And he also gave his political appointees a fat raise, even though the whole

experience alienated the DFL Senate Majority Leader, kind of an important guy if you want things to move in the Senate.

Calling him a "backstabber" and saying that you can't trust him to the point of refusing to meet alone with him could be construed as "lashing out," right?

Dayton wanted a huge transportation plan. Nope. He wanted universal pre-K education and even forced a special session over it. Didn't happen. A judge has ordered him to make changes to the state's civil commitment program for sex offenders. Nothing has happened.

Take a look at this year's special session. Dayton was so inept and disengaged, the leaders of the House and Senate eventually put together a deal themselves without the governor's input.

In addition to failed legacy items, Dayton has also presided over some spectacular failures which also rank among the worst in modern Minnesota history.

We mentioned the Vikings stadium funding.

There's also MnSure, the state's ObamaCare exchange, which has failed in countless ways and cost the taxpayers hundreds of millions.

Though not surprising, it's extremely troubling to contemplate how the mainstream media has so protected this failed governor.

Dayton's spectacular ineptitude has never been subject of media exploration.

No reporter has had the integrity to point out these failures and ask why.

Although the name calling and lashing out has been reported, no editorial board has called out Dayton for it.

While it's hard to imagine Dayton faring worse than his current record of failure, he has entered lame duck territory, always a tough spot for any chief executive.

With lame duck status around his neck and the smoldering wreckage of burned bridges all around him, it is quite likely the legislature will continue to ignore Governor Dayton and go their own way.

There is even a good deal of hallway chatter at the Capitol that Mark Dayton

won't finish his current term, choosing to resign at some point and turn the reigns over to Lieutenant Governor Tina Smith.

Isolating Mark Dayton is good for the taxpayers, but it's nonetheless breathtaking to watch a failed governor in action.

Lurching aimlessly from one failed initiative to another while loudly blaming others for those failures is a real spectacle.

This governorship is over. If it even started.

BITS AND PIECES

Speaking of the mainstream media, the Star Tribune unleashed a big hit piece this week on Brad Rixman, the founder and job creator of Pawn America.

The newspaper hit Rixman for his generous political giving and then tied it to unsuccessful legislative efforts to slather more regulation on certain types of loans that pawn shops make to people called "payday loans."

The insinuation is that Rixman's giving provided a perverse incentive to legislators to kill otherwise noble public policy goals regarding so-called "payday" lending.

Would you be surprised to learn that Rixman gives most of his money to Republicans?

Or course not. That's why the Star Tribune covered it.

We're waiting for the article that exposes the millions the Teachers' Union has given to Democrats in Minnesota tied to the utter failure to advance common sense education reforms like teacher tenure, vouchers, alternative pathways to licensure, and the forced paying of union dues.

And speaking of school choice, the Cato Institute had a great piece this week shattering the liberal talking point that there is no evidence that school choice works.

The latest battleground in this ongoing war is Wisconsin, which has led the way in school choice and is therefore a target of liberals, especially with Governor Scott Walker seeking the White House.

Here's the truth regarding Wisconsin:

...the Wisconsin Legislature commissioned a comprehensive five-year study

by researchers at the University of Arkansas. The research team matched and compared children at private schools in the choice program to similar students at Milwaukee Public Schools. The study concluded that children in Milwaukee who used vouchers were more likely to graduate from high school, enroll in four-year colleges and persist in college.

These findings are very similar to those of "gold-standard" studies done nationwide. Among 13 peer-reviewed studies on voucher programs that use research methods based on random assignment, all but one study concluded that vouchers benefit students (the other was unable to detect an impact). In addition, recent work by a Harvard economist demonstrates that giving low-income families better educational options can help improve social mobility for children.

And finally, one for our "Let's all enjoy some more government" category.

The IRS may be able to visit political retribution on conservative groups but they can't protect the sensitive personal data you're forced to give them under threat of imprisonment.

The IRS now reports that it underestimated the number of taxpayers who may have been hacked.

The number of hacked accounts has now tripled to some 334,000.

The IRS also was wrong about the start date of the hack, first believing it started in February but thinking it started last November.

Why is it that revised government numbers always go the wrong way?

Maybe it's time to stop taxing income and look to other less intrusive ways to fund government.

September 4, 2015

Public Policy Commentary

In This Issue:

Quote of the Week: "I would rather stick a fork in my eye than run for congress."

- State Representative Pat Garofalo (R - Farmington)

1. Senate District 35 Race Gets Another Candidate;

2. The Scorecard has Landed;
3. Democrats in Glass Houses;

SENATE DISTRICT 35 RACE GETS ANOTHER CANDIDATE

Yesterday, the hotly contested Republican race for the Senate District 35 endorsement got another entrant.

Alex Huffman of Andover announced his candidacy, stating that he has the "leadership experience" to serve in the Senate, according to a press release.

His leadership experience includes prior service in the Army's legendary Special Forces, the "Green Berets." After passing the Special Forces Selection and Qualification courses, Huffman served in the 10th Special Forces Group (Airborne) and the 20th Special Forces Group (Airborne).

As a veteran, Huffman is involved in a number of groups that serve veterans and address the needs many of them have after serving their country in combat roles.

Currently, he and his wife and small business owners, owning and operating both a dance studio and dance clothing company.

Huffman is a family man, married to Amber and a father to Grace, his 18 month-old daughter.

After his announcement, Huffman contacted the Watchdog to further explain his desire to run and vision for Minnesota and Senate District 35.

Regarding his motivation, he stated that he sees political service as an extension of his military service. "I consider serving my country the highest honor. My military service around the world instilled in me a passion for America. That same service put me in multiple leadership roles that few people ever experience. I'll be ready to serve from day one."

Huffman describes himself as both a social and fiscal conservative. He tells the Watchdog he is a staunch supporter of the Second Amendment and believes in the sanctity of human life. Supporting traditional marriage is also important to him.

On fiscal issues, he says simply, "Government spends too much. We need to bring it down."

Finally, Huffman told the Watchdog he will abide by the GOP endorsement. "Although my military service and business obligations have limited my participation in Party activities, I'm a proud Republican and the GOP endorsement is important. I'm going to be working very hard over the coming months to introduce myself to delegates and share with them my vision for Minnesota."

More information on the Huffman campaign can be found [here](#).

It promises to be a spirited race.

Stay tuned, Watchdogs!

THE SCORECARD HAS LANDED

Hey, Watchdogs. It's a special time of year here in Minnesota. Yes, the State Fair is upon us, with all the good things that come with it. Sweet Martha's Cookies, cheese curds, pronto pups - and the Taxpayer's League of Minnesota score card.

The TLM scorecard remains the gold standard in judging the actions, not words, of our legislators on all matters fiscal and economic.

This year is no exception, as the League has compiled an excellent score card that tells you, the taxpayer, where our legislators truly stand on fiscal issues.

There were some surprises this year in that Senate Republicans on the whole scored much higher than their House counterparts.

Of course, the Democrats all failed miserably as they always do on these things.

Without further ado, let's recognize those who were particularly good and those who will be wearing the dunce cap of fiscal knowledge.

Senate high scores:

Sen. Roger Chamberlain (R - Lino Lakes) 100%

Sen. Dan Hall (R - Burnsville) 100%

Sen. David Osmeck (R - Mound) 100%

Sen. Dave Thompson (R - Lakeville) 100%

Runner Up:

Sen. Michelle Benson (R - Ham Lake) 92%

Sen. Branden Petersen (R - Andover) 92%

Senate Dunces Cap:

Sen. Ron Latz (DFL - Saint Louis Park) 0%

Sen. Kathy Sheran (DFL - Mankato) 8%

Sen. Barb Goodwin (DFL - Columbia Heights) 8%

Sen. Terri Bonoff (DFL - Minnetonka) 8%

House "High" Scores:

Rep. Eric Lucero (R - Dayton) 75%

Rep. Jerry Hertaus (R - Greenfield) 67%

Rep. Pat Garofalo (R - Farmington) 67%

Rep. Jim Nash (R - Waconia) 67%

Rep. Jim Newberger (R - Becker) 67%

Rep. Cindy Pugh (R - Chanhassen) 67%

House Dunces Cap:

Rep. Joe Atkins (DFL - Inver Grove Heights) 17%

Rep. Ray Dehn (DFL - Minneapolis) 17%

Rep. Jason Isaacson (DFL - Vadnais Heights) 17%

Multiple Democrats at 25%

You can check all the scorecards [here](#).

DEMOCRATS IN GLASS HOUSES

There is no shortage of Democrats who are crowing about the recent troubles of state Reps. Tara Mack (R - Apple Valley) and Time Kelly (R - Red Wing) who were cited last week by law enforcement for allegedly being involved in some "romantic" activities in a Dakota County public park.

Both strongly deny the contents of the law enforcement report, going so far as to call them "lies."

The Watchdog isn't going to stand as a finder of fact here.

If they are guilty of the conduct charged, they need to be held to account for their infidelity to powers other than this publication.

If the park ranger at the center of this is guilty of embellishing or falsifying his report, he needs to be held to account.

The larger point for this publication is the rank hypocrisy of the Democrats who want to rub this incident (none of it proven at this point) in the face of Republicans everywhere.

Do you guys really want to get into that game?

Okay. Let's bring up the name Kerry Gauthier. Remember him? We do.

He's the former DFL state Rep. from Duluth who had some zipper problems of his own.

After posting on Craig's List looking for anonymous gay sex, Gauthier was busted at a Duluth area rest stop and [admitted](#) to a State Trooper to having oral sex with a teenage boy.

Gauthier was 56 at the time.

After a citizen called police, the trooper found Gauthier behind rest stop building with his zipper down and his shirt tail poking out.

So the next time your Democrat work buddy or neighbor wants to get on a high horse about this, you can always tell them that the DFL owns this guy.

September 11, 2015

Public Policy Commentary

In This Issue:

Editor's Note: The Watchdog remembers 9/11 and will never forget that fateful day.

Quote of the Week: "What I did was allowed. It was allowed by the State Department. The State Department has confirmed that."

- Hillary Rodham Clinton 9/7/2015

Quote of the Week II: "That was a mistake. I'm sorry about that. I take responsibility."

- Hillary Rodham Clinton 9/9/2015

Harold Hamilton Says: "Perhaps 'Ready for Hillary' is directed towards the Federal Bureau of Prisons."

1. Fair Poll Results;
2. Big Development on Light Rail;
3. DFL Shame.

FAIR POLL RESULTS

One of the great traditions of the Great Minnesota Get Together is the issues poll conducted at the booth run by the Legislature and the presidential straw poll at the GOP booth. No, we don't care about any polls conducted by the DFL. They're called Star Tribune polls.

While neither of these polls is scientific, they provide a window into the sentiments of voters and provide some fodder for discussion in the "dog days" of summer.

There were some positive results for Watchdogs regarding the issues poll. Over 73% of respondents agreed that the state constitution should be amended to protect personal electronic data from government snooping without a warrant. Good news, although we would love to meet the 18% who think government doesn't need a warrant to snoop on them.

A majority also favor making fireworks legal and thereby eliminating one more Nanny State law. Yes, we can handle our own fireworks. And yes, we know how to get to South Dakota to buy them anyway.

74% also agreed that seniority should NOT be the primary factor in teacher layoffs. The GOP has been fighting to eliminate the "last in, first out" law for years but has been unable to get past the opposition of the Teachers' Union. You know, the union that claims that it's all about the children.

In other good news, a strong majority favored requiring school levy referenda to be voted upon at a regular election. Many districts schedule these property tax increase votes at odd dates, driving down turnout and increasing the chances the levy will pass.

Three of these issues are very strong and important issues. They should form the basis of the GOP unified campaign agenda for 2016, when all 201 seats in the legislature are on the ballot.

Let the DFL stand in opposition to 70+% issues.

When combined with the self-dealing we've seen out of the DFL (multi-million dollar parking garages for the legislature, criminal indictments for Community Action), the GOP should have a powerful narrative for 2016.

But the poll also contained some bad news.

60% support publically funded preschool for 4 year-olds. Because government does such a good job educating them when they are older than that. Cradle to grave Nanny State is the goal for them.

58% favor increasing the Metro sales tax to pay for mass transit. Apparently, these low information voters haven't heard that the state is running a multi-billion surplus. They also haven't heard that light rail and commuter rail are ultra-expensive and don't have the population density to make them viable without hefty taxpayer subsidies.

The results of the GOP presidential "corn poll" were interesting to say the least.

Trump: 25.5
Carson: 20.7
Fiorina: 13.3
Walker: 8.1
Rubio: 7.3
Paul: 7.3
Cruz: 5.3
Kasich: 3.9
Bush: 3.2
Christie: 1.3

Huckabee: 1.3
Jindal: 0.7
Santorum: 0.5
Graham: 0.3
Perry: 0.3
Gilmore: 0.1
Pataki: 0.1

The takeaway from this poll is that the three hottest candidates on the GOP side, Trump, Carson, and Fiorina, all share common characteristics.

Namely, all three have no political experience and all three have accomplishments in fields outside of politics.

We will leave it to others to debate the particular merits of these three, especially Trump, but it cannot be denied that they are rising because they are perceived as anti-politicians.

Conversely, the two candidates who have experienced the most precipitous fall of late, Bush and Walker, are both perceived as classic politicians.

Although Bush has an extensive resume outside of politics, he's part of the Bush Dynasty and in this environment that fact hurts him in a big way.

Walker has no such pedigree, but his resume outside of politics is paper thin. Even Walker's own biography on his presidential web site contains just one two-sentence paragraph describing working for IBM while in college and then a period of work for a non-profit.

It's obvious that Republican voters are craving three things from their candidates: authenticity, straight talk, and a record outside of politics.

These voters understand that Washington is horribly broken and out of control. They have no faith that cookie cutter Establishment candidates have the courage to fix it.

They're tired of broken promises and bromides proffered every four years about "plans to save Social Security" and "plans to balance the budget within four years" and "plans to rip the tax code out by the roots."

It never happens. In fact, it gets worse.

There's a strong perception that Washington, on both sides of the aisle, is controlled by Establishment elites and there's an uprising brewing.

These voters want authenticity. They don't want scripted speeches with the same old promises listed above.

They don't want the starched white shirt with the sleeves rolled up and the red tie.

They don't want the obligatory photo of the candidate walking through a farm field wearing a red plaid shirt and jeans while talking to some old geezers in overalls and a John Deere hat.

They don't anymore television ads showing the candidate sitting at a kitchen table gesturing forcefully while a group of citizens representative of our demographics nods approvingly.

This is the year of the anti-Establishment candidate.

The more a candidate can prove they aren't with the Establishment, the better they will fare.

That's the name of the game this cycle.

BIG DEVELOPMENT ON LIGHT RAIL

We hope readers didn't miss a huge development this week in the saga of Southwest Light Rail, the \$2 billion (and counting) project to run light rail from Minneapolis to Eden Prairie, so long as it doesn't go through the tony, upscale Minneapolis neighborhoods populated by liberals who think light rail is sweet idea - for other people.

This week, Met Council chairman Adam Duininck said that the Council would not do an end run around the legislature by offering the remaining \$138 million in state funding through "certificates of participation" that don't need legislative approval.

This means that the 2016 legislature will be asked to fund that remaining \$138 million of state obligation through the regular and customary legislative process of bonding.

First, chair Duininck should be given credit for exercising some restraint and wisdom in deciding that this is the kind of decision that properly belongs in legislative hands.

More importantly, this is a great opportunity for Republicans in the House and Senate to proudly and forcefully deny this funding.

This project is a massive boondoggle.

What else can you say about a project where even the supporters acknowledge that express bus service from Eden Prairie to downtown Minneapolis is faster?

Republicans would do much to strengthen the brand and show leadership by saying "no!" to this one.

Having said that, it will be incumbent on Republicans to also forcefully push their own vision for transportation.

Simply saying no to SW light rail isn't enough.

If the GOP wants to retain control of the House and capture the Senate, results need to be shown.

This publication thinks the House GOP offered a great transportation bill last session. Drive it home.

But start with a strong statement of principle by killing light rail.

DFL SHAME

Of course, it never ends with these guys but this weeks was especially ignominious for the Blue Team.

There was the hypocritical. Congressman Rick Nolan, the King of Email Spam, sent out one of his many, many, many, many emails this week blasting the GOP for "unfinished business" in Washington.

Oh, really?

Congressman Nolan failed to note that when his party was in control, they failed to even pass a budget bill. For example, in 2010, the Democrats in the U.S. House and Senate didn't pass a single budget bill even one spending bill, according to Politifact.

Then there's the opaque. Governor Dayton announced this week that he won't be releasing his tax returns anymore.

It's no secret that the governor is a trust fund kid.

What we all really want to know is how much he gave to charity. Recall that in 2012, Dayton gave a measly \$1,000 to charity.

Dayton apparently only believes in "charity" at the point of a gun. Otherwise known as taxation.

Finally, there's the fraudulent. A federal grand jury handed down indictments against the DFL-connect folks who ran Community Action of Minneapolis, a non-profit that is accused of bilking the taxpayers out of hundreds of thousands of dollars that were converted to personal use like vacations and spa trips.

Prominent DFLers, including state Senator Jeff Hayden and Congressman Keith Ellison sat on the board of directors.

The Watchdogs believes this to be the tip of the iceberg. We wouldn't be surprised to see this whole operation emerge as one big DFL slush fund. Stay tuned.

September 18, 2015

Public Policy Commentary

In This Issue:

Quotes of the Week: "Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker denies he's a career politician - even though he has been in elected office since he was 25 years old and first ran for office when he was 22." - Associated Press

1. Debate Wrap-Up;
2. Irrational Exuberance over the Uninsured;
3. Union Leader Blasts Dayton.

DEBATE WRAP-UP

We know our loyal readers all tuned in to some extent on Wednesday night and you all have an opinion regarding who won the debate, who lost, who isn't a serious candidate, who had the best one liner, the best suit, the best tax plan, etc.

More than all that, the biggest takeaway for this publication is that we have a remarkably strong Republican field. There are a number of accomplished candidates who are well qualified to lead America.

This debate highlighted all that. Yes, a crowded field of 11 encouraged a bunch of interrupting, one-liners, and other stunts to grab attention, but that's the nature of an event that will winnow the field of hopefuls.

If you look past the juvenile stuff, you could see serious candidates who spent a good chunk of time discussing important issues.

Compare this situation with that of your liberal friends. Their front runner is a sleaze bag who's about as warm and engaging as a bag of hammers. She's got an equally sleazy husband and America is sick of their smarmy, fake BS. They're criminals, really.

After that, there is no viable alternative. The second place guy in that pack is an avowed socialist from a Podunk state who appeals to about 2% of the populace. His solution is simply more and more poisonous government.

It's well over a year until election day, and the best the Democrats can do is hope that their failed vice president, who has been in government his entire life, will jump into the race, hair plugs and all.

Heck, that party is afraid to even hold real debates.

The difficult and crowded GOP nominating field will make the eventual nominee that much better. It will make him (her?) tested, refined, and experienced in handling the hot and bright lights of presidential scrutiny.

Any big criticisms of last night are really nit picking if you step back consider the big picture.

Here's what we saw last night, from the big stuff to the mundane.

The winner last night was either Carly Fiorina or Marco Rubio.

We're really impressed with the governor from a Midwestern state who balanced the budget, created jobs, took on the special interests, and is a serious man with a proven record of both political and policy achievements. His name is John Kasich. He could be a great VP candidate or cabinet member.

Kudos to Ben Carson for not wearing the dark suit, white shirt, and red tie. Nice suit, doctor.

Donald Trump will certainly flame out at some point. He's an entertainer. Court jester. Class clown. At some point, America will either tire of the schtick, or realize that we're electing a president and it's time to get serious.

Rand Paul put in a rather bland performance. His ideas push the envelope of mainstream GOP thinking. The presentation should match the boldness of the ideas.

Scott Walker needed to hit a home run last night and he only singled to right field with the predictable "Apprentice" riff on Trump. Not enough for a man who is better known so far for his puzzling statements than anything else.

For a party so committed to individual liberties, who do so many of the candidates care about what some people put into their bodies? Rand Paul is the only who made any sense on the issue of marijuana.

Ted Cruz was not blessed with an authoritative speaking voice.

Donald Trump exudes an arrogance and haughtiness that only Barack Obama can equal.

While some call it boring, there is something very refreshing and appealing regarding Ben Carson's serious and studious demeanor. Poise matters.

Carly Fiorina has represented the Sisterhood well. It's obvious that years of climbing the corporate ladder and the battles in the boardroom have proven her mettle. We have no doubt she has the resolve to make the tough decisions demanded of a president. Obama ought to call her for some tips.

Jeb Bush needs to show he's human. His marijuana use statement was the closest he came to demonstrating any kind of mass appeal. So far, he wins the Mitt Romney Award for the candidate who looks most uncomfortable pumping his own gas or wearing a faded pair of jeans.

We would pay good money to see Chris Christie prosecute Hillary Clinton, figuratively or literally.

The debate once again demonstrated the wonder of the system created by the Framers. When you think about the way most countries select their leaders, Providence has blessed us with a pretty darn sweet process. It's the worst system ever devised, except for all the others.

Fiorina, Rubio, Kasich, and Carson all trended up last night. The rest either flat lined or trended downwards.

IRRATIONAL EXUBERANCE OVER THE UNINSURED

Predictably, there was much braying and prattling on over Minnesota's drop in the number of citizens lacking health insurance.

Let's get a grip, for a moment.

First, the vast majority of those obtaining health insurance did so through a government program, not through the private sector. Thus, there should be no happy surprise that when government hands out health care, the number will drop.

In fact, given the expense and the monstrosity ObamaCare has become, it would have been far cheaper and far better public policy to simply give those people a check to buy health insurance.

This is similar to the irrational cheerleading over DFL budget "management" of state finances.

They jacked up spending a couple of billion and then turned around and extorted a couple of billion plus to cover the spending spree.

They then crow that high taxes and big government spending result in budget surpluses.

That's like a heroin addict stealing a wallet because he needs \$50 for a score. The wallet had \$60, so the addict praises his thievery as a positive. "It made me \$10 bucks and covered my habit!"

The rooster indeed causes the sun to rise in the world of the DFL.

Then again, if we're the Democrats responsible for this mess, you have to look for any port in a storm.

UNION LEADER BLASTS DAYTON

It has become increasingly apparent that Democrats are caught on the horns of a serious dilemma.

As the Watchdog has explored numerous times in the past, the DFL has more and more alienated construction trade unions by kowtowing to radical environmental interests.

Silica sand, ferrous mining, non-ferrous mining, oil/gas drilling, pipelines, and land development are all activities that are the bread and butter of skilled construction trade members.

They haven't been getting much love from Democrats lately and that frustration has boiled over something fierce.

Local 49 of the International Union of Operating Engineers published a statement this week ripping the Dayton administration for their handling of the Sandpiper Pipeline permitting process.

Read this one for yourself. Whoa!

9/15/15

A couple months ago, the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission (MPUC) on a 5-0 vote unanimously approved the certificate of need permit for the Sandpiper pipeline project. Yesterday, the Minnesota Court of Appeals reversed this decision.

What is beyond frustrating at this point for the workers and businesses that sit and wait for clarity about this project is the utter joke that the MPUC, and Minnesota state agencies have made of the permitting system in Minnesota. The MPUC, at the urging of the Dayton administration, completely changed the permitting process for this pipeline by separating the certificate of need and route permits. Historically, those permits were run concurrently, and an environmental review was done before final decisions were made on both the certificate of need and the route.

The certificate of need was thrown out because the MPUC deviated from their own process, and violated their own rules that govern them. The Dayton administration pushed for these changes and this new process, which turned out to be illegal. Furthermore, the same environmental extremists that called for the MPUC to change their process and supported that decision then filed this lawsuit to say it was illegal.

The entire episode is shameful, and is the very reason that vast majorities of the American people have lost faith in our government and the regulatory and political process. The MPUC, and the government agencies that advise them have got to stop trying to appease extremist fringe groups that are purposefully using the permitting process as a weapon to stop any and all natural resource projects in Minnesota.

The record on Sandpiper is clear. The counties along the Enbridge route support the project. The people that submitted comments on the project supported the project overwhelmingly. Northern Minnesota desperately needs the family sustaining jobs and economic development that this \$2.5 billion project will bring. The people that live there want this project.

It's time that government listen to the will of the people, and stop placating extremists.

Local 49 calls on the MPUC, and the Dayton administration that advises them, to clean up their own mess. No more delays. Follow the Court's order in a way that keeps a final decision on this project on the time schedule it was on.

The hard working men and women that build this state's infrastructure deserve a government that does their job as efficiently as they do theirs.

Glen D. Johnson
Business Manager/Financial Secretary
International Union of Operating Engineers Local 49

September 25, 2015

Public Policy Commentary

In This Issue:

Quote of the Week: "We need the jobs. Jobs are important. But those aren't the jobs we want. In this modern age, these projects are going to be man camps ... that clear out the community, create a lot of crime, prostitution, gambling. All kinds of community problems and tend to drive out other sustainable jobs."

- Bill Hansen, DFL Candidate for House District 3A, referring to construction workers who would build the Polymet Mine

Quote of the Week II: "Mr. Hansen has degraded our members for his own personal and political gains. He clearly has a delusional and skewed view of current-day construction workers and the value they bring to their families and community."

- Mike Syversrud, President of the Iron Range Building and Construction Trades Council

1. Farewell, BP;
2. So Who Got Rejected?
3. Why Walker Failed.

FAREWELL, BP

Big news this week was the sudden and unexpected resignation of state Senator Branden Petersen (R - Andover).

Petersen, who had earlier announced that he would not seek re-election in 2016, had previously said he would finish out his term.

In an interview with local media, Petersen observed that he had "checked out" from his legislative duties and didn't think it was right for him to occupy the office if he wasn't fully engaged.

While Petersen's vote on gay marriage hogs the biographical spotlight of his legislative service, Watchdogs will long remember his important role in re-asserting the role of liberty in conservative thought and Republican legislative action.

Unfortunately, Republican mainstream thought has been dominated by a "Big Government Conservative" view that is comfortable with Big Government so long as it is deployed in the service of Republican legislative goals.

Government funding for "faith-based" non-profits, domestic surveillance in the name of "security," prisons overflowing with non-violent offenders in the name of a "war" on drugs.

Petersen's service should be noted for his efforts, many successful, to help change the GOP conversation and add liberty considerations to policy deliberations.

Petersen's resignation will trigger a special election to replace him.

Because of when the resignation took place, Governor Dayton has fairly large leeway in deciding when to call the special election. Essentially, he can call whenever he wants, so long as the winner is elected in time to join the next regular legislative session, which will convene in March of 2016.

There is a crowded GOP field, which is mostly populated with conservatives and Jim Abeler, the former ultra-moderate who became a registered lobbyist who now wants to be a Senator, perhaps to get his Northstar train running up to Saint Cloud.

The field is wide open and unsettled. It will be interesting to see which candidates make the cut, especially with a couple of them toting significant baggage from Internet rants that unfortunately for them cannot be deleted from the permanent record.

Leadership, judgment, and temperament will be the things delegates in this district will be looking for in candidates.

To be honest, with the exception of Abeler, these candidates are very close on the issues and are all conservative. Thus, the discriminators will turn on personality traits like poise and bearing.

Over the next few weeks, the Watchdog will be exploring the candidates in more detail, helping our readers get a better idea of who exactly are the men who want to be the next senator from District 35.

SO WHO GOT REJECTED?

Unions, especially government worker unions, are having themselves a real good time dancing on Scott Walker's political grave.

Social media is rife with union leaders spiking the ball in Walker's end zone, claiming that Walker's political demise is some sort of evidence that voters - Republican voters! - have rejected the reforms that he implemented to bring unions under some sort of reasonable control.

Well, if that's the case, then why have over 100,000 Wisconsin government employees rejected THEIR OWN union, and walked away from paying dues and having membership?

It looks to this publication like the ones who got rejected are the very union bosses who are claiming victory.

Walker went down like the Titanic because he was a horrible candidate not ready for prime time.

His only good policy idea was that regarding unions, and freedom from them. The fact that 100,000 Wisconsin government employees agree with him is proof positive.

WHY WALKER FAILED

Ugh, that was ugly. Very ugly. Scott Walker ran one of the worst presidential campaigns we've seen in a long, long time.

There were four essential reasons his campaign blew up like the Hindenburg. First, Walker was boring, stale, and scripted.

The hype said he was a tough talking, Harley riding, straight shooter from a blue state who took on the biggest kids on the block and beat them like a rented mule.

Instead, we saw a mealy mouthed, boring, and way too predictable candidate who did everything according to the tired old playbook.

He had the starched white shirt, the red tie, and sleeves rolled up. He had the video of him walking through the corn field talking with old guys in John Deere hats. He had the family photos with the wife and kids holding the fishies they caught on wonderfully sunny day at the local lake.

In short, Walker was the Stepford Wife of the campaign. Robotic, bourgeoisie, and suburban.

In this day and age, America wants candidates who can inspire and entertain. If your guy can't do things like wow them on Jimmy Kimmel or appear in a Sports Center ad, he won't win.

This is especially true in a year when every voter hates the status quo. The more you walk, talk, look and smell like the Establishment, the worse off you are.

Walker was as exciting and tasty as a rice cake found under the couch cushions.

Second, Walker was unfocused and failed to stay on message.

His critics want to say he was obsessively focused on union busting.

To the contrary, he spent too little time on this subject. In a crowded field where the candidates are similar on most issues, it's imperative to craft a narrative, to carve your niche in the political market place.

Instead of focusing on strengths, led by union reforms, Walker spent a great deal of time talking to voters about his weaknesses, especially in the area of foreign affairs, which led to the third big problem.

Once Walker got off message, he tended to say some really dumb things. He reinforced his lack of foreign policy expertise by claiming, for example, that he ready to be Commander-in-Chief because he survived all those unwashed hippies banging on pots and pans down at the Capitol protesting Act 10.

He thought building a wall along the Canadian border was an idea worth exploring.

Embarrassing. Face in palm embarrassing.

He claimed he wasn't a career politician even though he's been in office nearly his entire adult life.

Fourth, Walker was a flip flopper whose inability to decisively take a stand on important issues make him look weak and equivocating.

Walker adopted multiple positions on abortion, immigration, and ethanol.

He signed into law a \$250 million public subsidy for the NBA's Milwaukee franchise to build a new stadium.

He even screwed up his signature issue on union reform.

After passing Act 10, which applied to government unions, Walker should have stopped.

In politics, you have to know when you've won.

Instead, Walker went on to push very controversial reforms in the private sector, ones opposed by many Wisconsin businesses and other groups friendly with Republicans.

By doing so, Walker muddied the waters of his victory and moved away from a clear cut victory the public clearly supported.

It's like Walker quarterbacked his team to a Super Bowl win and then came out for the fifth quarter.

Who is Scott Walker and what does he stand for, exactly?

In short, as the campaign wore on, GOP voters became unsure as to who he was and what he stood for.

With numerous alternatives, voters and donors moved away from Walker and towards others like Fiorina and Rubio.

The final act was Walker's proposal to gut federal unions. In what should have been a supreme moment of strength for the man who conquered unions in Wisconsin, his proposal reeked of desperation.

The man who marched his team down the field for the big win in Wisconsin was down to throwing a hail mary.

It failed. There would be no immaculate reception for Scott Walker.

October 2, 2015

Public Policy Commentary

In This Issue:

Quote of the Week: "The DFL majority has done what it does best, which is to raise taxes on Minnesota families. I'm more than happy to say this is a DFL product and a DFL result with a few Republicans who helped them because I wouldn't want to take any credit for this piece of work."

Governor Tim Pawlenty, reacting to the override of his veto of a tax-raising transportation bill (2/27/2008)

1. The Gas Tax Emerges;
2. Blue Collar Win.

THE GAS TAX EMERGES

Ladies and gentlemen, we have our first flash point issue of the critical special election race to succeed state Senator Branden Petersen in Senate District 35, which covers a large chunk of central and northwest Anoka County.

On Wednesday of this week, former state Rep. Jim Abeler, who is running for the Petersen seat, appeared on the "Up & At 'Em" radio program to discuss his candidacy.

During the interview, a caller wanted to know why Abeler joined 5 other House Republicans (known as the "Override Six") in helping the DFL majority override Pawlenty's veto of a multi-billion transportation bill, the centerpiece of which was a gas tax increase.

In response, Abeler made the bold claim that his override vote was part of a Machiavellian-style conspiracy in which Pawlenty only pretended to oppose the override so he could keep the mantle of a fiscal conservative while running for president while enjoying the enhanced revenue.

To quote Abeler: "This was actually the Pawlenty plan. We found out after the fact that he wanted to be president and so he couldn't have his fingerprints on any revenue raising things and so the best thing for him was to have some people like us do that."

In response, host Jack Tomczak asked him if Pawlenty ever told that to Abeler. The answer from Abeler was hardly the kind of thing that would be admitted in any court of law.

He replied that Pawlenty at some unnamed date, unnamed place to unnamed people said "I don't want to be overridden." That statement clearly doesn't support Abeler's version of events. But Abeler recounted the statement in a way that made Pawlenty sound like he said it in a sly sort of way that insinuated a "wink and nod" approval of an override.

Moreover, Abeler supported his conspiracy theory by saying that an unnamed colleague had a conversation with an unnamed Pawlenty staffer at an unnamed time and place whereby the mystery staffer admitted to the mystery colleague that the override "worked out" for the Pawlenty administration.

While the Watchdog can't stand as any kind of fact finder regarding all of this, one would have to believe Tim Pawlenty to be a liar of remarkable quantity and quality to find this narrative plausible.

In our extensive research, the Watchdog has uncovered mountains of newspaper articles, television reports and radio material in which Governor Pawlenty is extremely critical of the override vote.

Moreover, does it really matter what Governor Pawlenty said?

In other words, this is about more than two men named Abeler and Pawlenty.

It's also about the taxpayers. Even if Pawlenty conspired with others to fashion an override, does that make it an acceptable vote for Abeler?

The override vote was a major tax increase and a regressive one at that.

Regarding that 2008 vote, it's also disappointing to hear Jim Abeler invoke faulty and incorrect emotional rhetoric to justify the vote.

Specifically, he has mentioned the I-35W bridge in this regard.

It is well-established that the bridge very likely collapsed because of an engineering design flaw regarding gusset plates and not deferred maintenance or other factors related to a belief that transportation wasn't properly funded during the Pawlenty administration.

While it is true that the 2008 gas tax increase brought new revenue into the transportation budget, it is just as true that a re-allocation of existing resources was also an option to enhance transportation funding. The legislature simply decided to raise this tax instead.

Which brings us to the most important issue: the here and now debate regarding transportation.

There is no doubt that transportation funding will one of the most important issues confronting the legislature when it returns in March of 2016.

Recall that at the end of the 2015 session, the House and Senate had both passed transportation funding bills that were sitting in a conference committee.

Because of the biennial nature of the legislature, those bills are still alive and the conference committee is still alive.

This means that the legislature in 2016, with a new Senator from District 35, will attempt to reconcile these bills and pass a transportation funding bill.

This is a big deal because the House plan (the GOP plan), contains no tax increases while the Senate plan (The DFL plan) relies on multiple tax increases.

To be clear, the Watchdog finds the House GOP plan to be the better plan. It pumps \$7 billion in new funding into transportation over the life of the proposal without raising taxes.

This is done by re-allocating money from the state's general fund, which is running a surplus.

In addition, prioritizing spending instead of raising taxes is something the Watchdog and all conservatives expect of our elected officials.

There are too many politicians who favor the government budget over the family budget and that needs to stop.

So now we come to the heart of the issue. In Senate District 35, which candidates stand opposed to a gas tax and other tax increases and which ones stand in another place?

Simply put, every delegate in Senate District 35 should ask the candidates a simple question: Will you vote against any transportation funding bill that contains tax increases?

In the Wednesday radio interview, Jim Abeler demurred and didn't answer the question.

On Thursday, one Abeler's opponents, Alex Huffman, clearly stated he opposes a gas tax increase and favors re-prioritizing spending. This statement was given on the same "Up & At 'Em" radio program that hosted Abeler the day before.

While the Watchdog has not heard other GOP candidates for this seat weigh in, delegates should also query Andy Aplikowski, Don Huizenga and Reid Oines where they stand on this issue.

In fact, the Watchdog would be happy to publish all candidate responses for our readers to see.

Please email responses to harold@anokacountywatchdog.com.

The Watchdog encourages our readers to listen to the podcast of both Abeler's and Huffman's interviews to hear for themselves what the candidates said.

Check the September 30th and October 1st shows.

<http://www.twincitiesnewstalk.com/media/podcast-up-and-at-em-upandatem/>

Be an informed voter!

BLUE COLLAR WIN

Readers of the publication know that we have regularly commented on the growing schism within the core DFL base between the environmental elites and the blue collar folks who make a decent living in many of the industries the elites love to hate, such as mining and pipelines.

Of late, the environmental elites have had the upper hand in DFL politics, primarily because they have more money and most DFL candidates are fellow Metro area elitists, like Mark Dayton and Tina Smith.

Nowhere was this split on bigger display than in the DFL primary special election in District 3A. This district covers a massive swath of NE Minnesota and is the largest House district in the state by area.

It is also a flash point for this divide as the DFL population is split by blue collar natives who mine and log for a living and transplanted urban environmental elites.

Because of the death of incumbent state Rep. David Dill, a special election will be held in early December.

Just this week, a DFL primary election was held to determine the candidate who would advance to the general election to face a GOP and Independent candidate.

And boy, did that campaign get rough and tumble.

The blue collar wing was represented by Rob Ecklund, a trade union member and unabashed supporter of mining.

The environmental wing was represented by Bill Hansen, who opposed mining with vigor.

He also apparently has little regard for those who work in that field. In comments caught on video, Hansen fanned the flames by saying that developing the mines in NE Minnesota would mean "man camps" filled with gambling, violence and prostitution.

Boom! Ignite the powder keg.

The statements provoked a massive backlash from the construction trades, who blasted Hansen for his comments and spurred strong efforts to defeat him in the primary.

It worked.

The blue collar wing scored a decisive victory as Ecklund dispatched Hansen with relative ease.

All in all, this campaign proved that the division between these two camps is growing and will continue to do so.

This is the great DFL crack up that almost no one is talking about.

Republicans would be smart to go after these blue collar voters, who tend to be pro-life, pro-family, gun owners, people of faith, and people of modest means who are resistant to tax increases to fund liberal social engineering.

In other words, these are the people Obama dismissed as "clinging to their guns and religion."

The electoral benefits of courting these voters would mean much to a GOP that hasn't won a state-wide office in Minnesota for many years.

October 9, 2015

Public Policy Commentary

In This Issue:

Quote of the Week: "We are fast approaching the stage of ultimate inversion: The stage where government can do anything it pleases while the citizen must have permission to act; which is the stage of the darkest period of human history. It is the stage of rule by brute force.

- Ayn Rand

1. Senate District 35 Update;
2. Health Care Debacle;
3. A Disgrace.

SENATE DISTRICT 35 UPDATE

Last week's column regarding Senate District 35 candidate Jim Abeler's recent radio interview, particularly his comments regarding a gas tax, generated a tremendous amount of feedback - particularly from the Abeler's opponents.

Readers will recall that Senate District 35, located in Anoka County, will see a special election in the near future because current senator Branden Petersen will resign the seat at the end of this month.

The resignation has resulted in five people, including Abeler, announcing that they intend to run in the special election as Republicans.

Those opponents were quick to weigh in on both the gas tax as well as taxes in general.

Alex Huffman was the first to contact the Watchdog, sending an email that announced that he had signed the Taxpayer's League of Minnesota pledge against raising taxes as well as a separate pledge to oppose raising the gas tax.

The email was consistent with Huffman's previous, more general pronouncements regarding his position with respect to government spending. His campaign press release stated that he believes, quite simply, that government spends too much.

Close behind Huffman's announcement was that of fellow GOP candidate Andy Aplikowski, who also announced that he had signed the Taxpayer's League pledge against both raising the gas tax and raising taxes in general.

His announcement noted, Whoever wins this Special Election will serve in the 2016 Legislative Session. Governor Dayton will demand another Gas Tax increase. I have signed the Taxpayers League of Minnesota's 2016 No New Gas Tax Pledge to oppose another new gas tax increase in the upcoming 2016 Session.

I have also signed Taxpayer Protection pledges with both the Americans for Tax Reform and the Taxpayer's League of Minnesota.

We don't have a revenue problem in Minnesota, we have a priority problem. The reason Minnesota is climbing to the top of the list of highest taxed states is because of our addiction to spending. That's why I have signed the Taxpayer Protection Pledges for both the Americans for Tax Reform and Taxpayer's League of Minnesota.

We must be honest with Minnesotans about long term sustainable budgeting solutions instead of the spend and tax policies that have grown the state budget 30% in the last 5 years.

The Watchdog was also contacted by candidate Don Huizenga, who wrote of his strong resistance to a gas tax. He noted that it was Abeler's vote in favor of a gas tax in 2008 that caused Huizenga to challenge Abeler for the GOP endorsement that year.

Huizenga stated simply that he is a "NO" on a gas tax increase.

The only candidate besides Abeler who didn't contact the Watchdog was Reid Oines. Having said that, it appears pretty clear that Oines would likely oppose a gas tax and other taxes.

His campaign Facebook page contains a campaign update in which he pledges to vote against ALL spending increases and only vote in favor of spending reductions.

That only leaves Jim Abeler. To the best of this publication's knowledge, Abeler has not stated his position on a gas tax increase. As the Watchdog noted last week, Abeler did not directly answer the question in his "Up & At 'Em" radio interview recently.

Isn't it about time he answer the question?

And speaking of commitments and promises, we know that many GOP delegates and activists are wondering where these candidates stand regarding honoring the GOP endorsement.

Thus far, the Watchdog is aware the Alex Huffman and Andy Aplikowski have pledged to abide by the GOP endorsement.

The Watchdog invites Abeler, Oines and Huizenga to contact Harold Hamilton and offer their position regarding the GOP endorsement.
harold@anokacountywatchdog.com.

HEALTH CARE DEBACLE

There was more bad news this week for government-directed health care as many health insurance providers announced significant premium increases for the coming year.

This news was yet more evidence that governmental interference in health insurance markets doesn't result in better healthcare or better prices.

But remember the promises?

The Democrats, led by Barack Obama and Mark Dayton, promised the usual liberal alchemy of public policy.

With some more government, all that ails the world can be cured.

With more government, America could somehow offer increased access, increased quality, and lower costs. Magic!

Of course, that never happened. It could be argued that access was increased, with the government forcing citizens to subsidize other citizens' health care.

There is no evidence that quality has increased and it is most certainly not true that costs were lowered.

It's hard for any thinking person to see how creating incentives for more people to consume more health care would result in lower costs.

But then, this wasn't a case of innocent liberals falling victim to their idealistic, utopian thinking.

As we all know, the Obama administration very intentionally misled the American public regarding Obamacare.

And now those liberal chickens are very much coming home to roost.

Check out these increases for Minnesotans buying individual plans:

Blue Cross Blue Shield MN: 49%

Blue Cross Plus: 45%

Preferred One: 39%

HealthPartners: 32.2%

Group Health: 31.3%

UCare: 27.3%

The fundamental reality is that more government rarely results in a better outcome for society.

The promises are never realized, the size and power of government increases, and all productive Americans pay the price.

ObamaCare will go down in history as one of the greatest government power grabs in American history.

A DISGRACE

A Washington, DC based think tank has analyzed graduation rates in 50 major American cities and their analysis concludes that Minneapolis has the lowest graduation rate of those 50 cities.

Although not surprising, the result is nonetheless a disgrace.

In many respects, our inner city public schools represent a microcosm and ultimate conclusion of liberal policy and thought.

The schools are controlled by government employee unions, resulting in little to no accountability for those tasked to educate children.

The school board is comprised of liberals, who institute feel-good policies that focus on emotion and feelings while discounting results and ignoring the reality that everyone has differing talent levels.

But the schools alone aren't to blame. Liberal policies have facilitated the breakdown of the family, meaning that children come to school not ready to learn.

They live in a toxic stew of crime, broken families, a lack of role models, and a culture that accepts dependence instead of demanding independence.

While this publication is quite tempted to let Minneapolis citizens wallow in the government they elected, the children who are most affected are blameless and deserve better.

It is for that reason that conservatives will continue to fight for kids who are trapped behind a Berlin Wall of Liberalism, and suffering for it.

October 16, 2015

Public Policy Commentary

In This Issue:

Quote of the Week: "Whoever built that line...and stopped miles short of Saint Cloud should win idiot of the year award."

- Governor Mark Dayton

Quote of the Week II: "Knoblach said he will continue to support expansion of the Northstar rail project and will continue to work to secure funding for it."

- News report quoting state Rep. Jim Knoblach (R - Saint Cloud)

1. Groundhog Day;
2. She Didn't Really Do That Well;
3. Gangster Government.

GROUNDHOG DAY

Wow. How many times do we need to go over this issue? In government, no matter how bad the public policy, if it's popular enough, people will continue to push it, so long as it's popular. You see, in government, there is only one metric that matters - the voting metric. If a politician thinks an issue will win votes, that issue will be pursued no matter the cost or other merits.

And so it goes with Northstar commuter rail, the horribly expensive and failed rail project that has joined the ranks of failed government mega-projects.

And like other failed mega-projects, the apologists claim that the program can be rescued if we only dump some more money down the rat hole.

Like welfare programs.

Like the Minneapolis public schools.

Like ObamaCare.

And on and on.

A long-running meme that has gained some bi-partisan steam of late is the claim that Northstar would be successful if it only ran to the metropolis of Saint

Cloud, with all 66,000 residents, making it the largest city in Minnesota, behind Minneapolis, Saint Paul, Bloomington, Duluth, Rochester... well, you get it.

As with any sales con job, things have to start with some revisionist history which supports a misleading and false narrative.

The narrative in this case is that Northstar wasn't done "right" in the first place. There was a huge mistake in not running the line to Saint Cloud.

This is where the con job actually has two branches. Under one narrative, dastardly conservatives secretly torpedoed Northstar and prevented the line from going to Saint Cloud. This narrative didn't gain much traction because Tim Pawlenty, Norm Coleman, House Speaker Sviggum, and just about every Republican in the legislature all voted for Northstar, with exception of a few principled conservatives.

The latest false narrative is simply that the Washington bureaucracy "screwed up" in the same way that the mail man might deliver a letter to the wrong address. You know, a simply \$317 million mistake.

Of course, the apologists are hoping that you all forget that the same Federal Transit Administration (FTA) that is being labeled incompetent was the same one that was so highly praised when Northstar was first being debated.

Whenever correct thinking people pointed out the obvious problems with running commuter rail through sparsely populated exurban counties, supporters would immediately cite FTA metrics and data to show the "scientific" basis for such a stupid idea.

The FTA said a decade ago that it didn't make sense to run Northstar to Saint Cloud. Not a shred of empirical data has been produced since then to challenge that data.

But that doesn't matter, because the intelligentsia of the Granite City believe that running the train up to their burg will create jobs, spur development, be a mark distinction, solve hunger and generally make everything OK.

Just like Northstar has done for Anoka County, right?

Here's a good idea for the people of Saint Cloud, including those Republicans who think it a good idea to waste money on making a boondoggle a bigger boondoggle.

Pay for it yourself.

If you're so convinced that this is a great thing for Saint Cloud, then pay for it. Levy the taxes needed to pay for the extension and then enjoy all it brings to you.

It's quite obvious that Saint Cloud has joined the ranks of other cities that specialize in trolling at the state and federal coffers for money.

Whether it's their civic center (competing against other government-funded civic centers), arena improvements for Saint Cloud State, or this not so shiny, not so new train, the people of Saint Cloud have joined the others in the great game to get a snout in the public trough down in Saint Paul.

And we wonder why the country is bankrupt.

Shame on any elected official who would pander to voters in supporting an expansion of this white elephant.

SHE REALLY DIDN'T DO THAT WELL

The Watchdog has many loyal DFL readers, who appreciate our "principle before party" approach to the issues as well as the stinging satire for which Harold Hamilton is so well known.

So let's stop with the victory lap for Hillary regarding her debate performance this week.

She wasn't that great. She was up against the junior varsity. No, make that the 9th grade team.

Simply put, she's the tallest midget on the Democrat side in this presidential contest.

A 74 year-old self-described socialist from the backwaters of a place called Vermont is her biggest challenger.

This is a guy who called global warming the biggest security threat to the American people!

Let's face it, none of Hillary's competition is a legitimate candidate for the presidency of the United States.

The fact that there's so much concern over the state of her campaign points to the reality that she's a weak candidate, primarily because she is as sleazy as her lying husband.

The fact that Hillary won by two touchdowns over the political equivalent of the Little Sisters of the Poor doesn't change that reality.

So have at it, all of you who are ready for Hillary.

She put the beat down on unranked opponents this week.

Come next year, she will be playing for a national title.

GANGSTER GOVERNMENT

Philosophically, Democrats tend to enjoy big and intrusive government not because it helps people, but because it helps PARTICULAR people, namely themselves.

Thus, education isn't really about the kids. It's about the teachers' union.

Social programs aren't about the less fortunate. They're about the bureaucrats who make a buck off that system.

Confirmation of that viewpoint was on full display this week as Community Action of Minneapolis (CAM) scandal opened a new and quite expected chapter.

Coming as a surprise to no one, it was revealed this week that CAM staffers and board members were accused of siphoning off taxpayer money to pay for personal expenses like spa trips and even maintenance work on a personal residence.

Folks, if you think this is isolated or just a one-time deal, think again.

It is the rational for the entire system, as Democrats see it.

Four legs good, two legs better!

October 23, 2015

Public Policy Commentary

In This Issue:

Quote of the Week: "Senate Republicans called on the Subcommittee on Ethical Conduct to reconvene and resume deliberations over the complaint against Sen. Jeff Hayden regarding his conduct as a board member for Community Action Minneapolis (CAM). Senate Republican Leader David Hann reminded subcommittee Chairwoman Sandy Pappas in a letter that the subcommittee voted to reconvene within thirty days of the completion of an investigation of CAM by the Minnesota Department of Commerce. That investigation was completed and made public on June 29, 2015, more than 100 days ago."

Minnesota Senate GOP Caucus

SD 35 ELECTION UPDATE

The news regarding this election just keeps blowing up. There is news upon news this week that you need to know.

Okay, Watchdogs, the special election to replace Sen. Branden Petersen got real this week as Governor Dayton signed a writ of Special Election, setting key dates. Here they are:

Special Election Day: February 9th, 2016

Primary Election: January 12th, 2016

Candidate Withdrawal Date: December 15, 2015

Candidate Filing Period: December 8 to December 14, 2015

According to our sources, the Senate District 35 GOP will hold their endorsing convention on Saturday, November 14th.

Those same sources also tell the Watchdog that the Senate District 35 GOP Screening Committee will begin its work on November 5th.

The work of that committee will be extremely important as it is charged with the task of vetting the candidates regarding their suitability to hold office and represent the Republican Party in a high profile special election.

The committee will ask candidates about their background, especially with regard to past incidents which could reflect negatively on both the candidate and the Party in general.

Brushes with the law, public comments, money problems and other subjects must be on the table.

This is an important function of the local Party because the DFL, led by Governor Dayton, has very intentionally established a long time-frame for this election.

The election isn't until February of next year.

This was done in order to give the DFL and their big money allies plenty of time to spend all that money beating up on the GOP endorsed candidate.

The person who earns the GOP endorsement will surely spend nearly three months taking a carpet bombing from the DFL and allied groups like the Alliance for a Better Minnesota and Education Minnesota, the teachers' union.

This will be the only race on the agenda because it's a special election. In other words, all DFL guns will be trained solely on the GOP endorsee.

If the endorsed Republican has past problems like a criminal conviction or a failure to pay debts, it will hand the liberals issues tailor-made for their attack machine.

In this era of the Internet and social media, past indiscretions become etched in a permanent record, sitting ready to be discovered by liberal opposition researchers. Sitting there like a time bomb, ready to explode.

Thus, it will be vital that the GOP endorsee be a person of unquestioned integrity and correct living.

Even the smallest mistakes will be blown out of proportion in the general election, forcing the GOP into a defensive mode. In politics, "if you're explaining, you aren't gaining."

Moreover, the reality is that the candidates in this race all very, very similar on the issues (Jim Abeler being the exception).

When it comes to taxes, guns, and the role of government, the candidates are all close.

Therefore, other distinctions, like character and temperament, will take on an outsize role in selecting the endorsee.

Stay tuned.

In related news, candidate Reid Oines has submitted to Harold Hamilton a candidate statement, as follows:

"I will not support any gas tax increase no matter what the form. I also do not support any increase in motor vehicle registration fees or a 0.5% increase in the sales tax for the seven county metro area. If this means voting against a roads and bridges bill to vote against any tax or fee increase, I will do just that."

"I do not support any attempt in the future to create a mileage based user fee."

"The state legislature and the governor need to start acting as responsible leaders by creating budgets that meet the core responsibilities of education, transportation and public safety first. As this is accomplished, it doesn't mean running up the spending or increasing taxes. It means that funds need to be spent reasonably and responsibly while each state department needs to create an atmosphere of increased efficiency while reducing waste. It also means sacrifices will need to be made in non-essential areas of the budget in order to meet the needs of the core responsibilities."

"Since state residents and businesses were overtaxed a few years ago it has now resulted in a projected surplus that the legislature doesn't want to 'give it back'. So, let's put this surplus to good use instead of frittering it away on non-essential wants. Let's use the surplus to repair and upgrade the state's roads and bridges."

###

This week also saw the entrance into the race of another candidate, this one on the DFL side.

Loyal Watchdog readers will surely recall the name of Roger Johnson, a liberal stalwart well-known to readers and the Anoka County political scene.

Roger is one of our favorite resident liberals, known to many for his [awesome hair](#), lack of humility, and lack of political success.

Of course, Roger is running only after an outcry of support from a "Draft Roger" movement that threatened civil unrest and economic upheaval in Coon Rapids if Roger didn't acquiesce to their demands and throw his hat in the ring.

As a DFL news [release](#) noted, "Long-time community resident and activist, Roger Johnson, in response to a "Draft Johnson" effort, has agreed to seek the endorsement of the Senate District 35 DFL party to fill this impending vacancy."

Lucky us.

We actually miss Roger. For many years, he ran for every office under the sun and we could all set our calendars by Roger's regular and frequent quest to elected - to anything.
But he never won.

This time won't be any different, but it will be entertaining to watch Roger and his Hair educate the Great Unwashed Masses with respect to his credentials, surely unparalleled in the history of this great state.

Cicero, Charlemagne, and Roger Johnson.

Earlier in this piece, the importance of character and integrity in politics was discussed.

Consistent with that view, it is axiomatic that a man is surely known by the company he keeps.

Those men include Jim Abeler, who has been racking up and endorsements and glowing reviews from a variety of political personalities.

We leave it you, loyal readers, to decide if those nice words are a benefit or a burden to Jim as he seeks the GOP endorsement.

Those kind words begin with the same liberal Roger Johnson referenced immediately above.

In his press release announcing his candidacy, Roger had this to say about Jim Abeler:

"I am aware," Johnson added, "of the interest that a half dozen or more conservatives have in maintaining their hold on this Petersen seat. Of particular note is the interest of former House member Jim Abeler. I consider Jim to be a friend. In fact I encouraged Jim to move to the Anoka County Board where he is sorrowfully needed to bring a modicum of reasoned

compromise to the budgeting process there. That would provide him with quicker access to his personal health-client base, his considerable real estate investments, and his large and growing family, all of which deserve his focused leadership, Johnson advised. **"It's time for someone else to handle advancing our progressive local citizens' issues through appropriate state legislation."** (Emphasis added).

###

Talk about the Judas kiss.

But that's not all. Jim also earned the endorsement and praise recently of former Governor Al Quie.

Readers will recall that Republican Al Quie served as governor from 1979-1983, a very dark period of economic turmoil for Minnesota and the nation.

Readers will also recall that Quie campaigned on a platform of reducing taxes to spur economic growth.

And readers will surely recall that Quie instead reneged on that promise and agreed with the DFL to raise taxes, taking more money out of the pocket of families who were suffering through a recession so that government could have more money.

Like Quie, Jim Abeler also voted to raise taxes, even overriding Governor Pawlenty's veto to do so.

It's not surprising that two tax-raising Republicans should find common cause.

The GOP Screening Committee's first order of business should be to vet Jim Abeler for any and all endorsements. Talk about information that could embarrass the candidate and the Party!

OH THOSE HYPOCRITICAL DEMOCRATS

The Liberal world view has never made sense to this publication.

But the cognitive dissonance and outright hypocrisy of late is stunning.

First, Democrats in Washington expressed exasperation that the railroad industry is having trouble meeting a government-imposed deadline to install safety equipment that didn't exist and has to be built from scratch.

Exasperation over deadlines? Yeah, that goodness the federal government never misses deadlines, such as passing budgets or even implementing ObamaCare.

Second, Saint Paul liberals showed up in droves with pitchforks in hand to boo Mayor Chris Coleman over a plan to install parking meters on Grand Avenue.

And nary a peep is heard from these people when Coleman raises their property taxes 30%.

Liberals are also aflame over allegations that the Benghazi investigation may be politically motivated and involve altered documents.

That sounds a lot like what some scientists have done to promote the idea that man-made "climate change" is real.

And on the presidential campaign trail, we hear a lot of talk from Democrats over outrage that "corporate titans" are getting rich off their employees.

But they don't seem to be as concerned that politicians are living large off of taxpayers.

Like state Sen. Jeff Hayden, who apparently owes the taxpayers reimbursement for items like spa trips he paid for with taxpayer money.

Amazing.

October 30, 2015

Public Policy Commentary

In This Issue:

Quote of the Week: "The questions that have been asked so far in this debate illustrate why the American people don't trust the media."

- Texas Senator and presidential candidate Ted Cruz

Quote of the Week 2: "Even in New Jersey what you are doing is called 'rude.'"

- New Jersey Governor and presidential candidate Chris Christie

1. Liberal Media Meets its Match;
2. Another White Elephant in the Making.

LIBERAL MEDIA MEETS ITS MATCH

After years of building and building, the conservative movement finally went eye-to-eye with the Liberal Media and had the moment of truth we've all been waiting to witness.

On Wednesday night, Texas Senator Ted Cruz called out and absolutely demolished the three CNBC anchors who were moderating the GOP debate.

Cruz, channeling decades of conservative angst and anger, took the three liberal mouthpieces straight to the woodshed and opened a can of whup a\$\$, excoriating them for their bias and unwillingness to treat the debate with the respect it deserved.

While we could simply run a link to the Youtube clip, Cruz's comments are important enough to republish them for all our readers to enjoy in their entirety:

QUINTANILLA: Senator Cruz. Congressional Republicans, Democrats and the White House are about to strike a compromise that would raise the debt limit, prevent a government shutdown and calm financial markets that fear of -- another Washington-created crisis is on the way.

Does your opposition to it show that you're not the kind of problem-solver American voters want?

CRUZ: You know, let me say something at the outset. The questions that have been asked so far in this debate illustrate why the American people don't trust the media.

(APPLAUSE) This is not a cage match. And, you look at the questions -- "Donald Trump, are you a comic-book villain?" "Ben Carson, can you do math?" "John Kasich, will you insult two people over here?" "Marco Rubio, why don't you resign?" "Jeb Bush, why have your numbers fallen?" How about talking about the substantive issues the people care about?

(APPLAUSE)

QUINTANILLA: (inaudible) do we get credit (inaudible)?

CRUZ: And Carl -- Carl, I'm not finished yet.

CRUZ: The contrast with the Democratic debate, where every fawning question from the media was, "Which of you is more handsome and why?"

(LAUGHTER)

And let me be clear.

(CROSSTALK)

QUINTANILLA: So, this is a question about (inaudible), which you have 30 seconds left to answer, should you choose to do so.

CRUZ: Let me be clear. The men and women on this stage have more ideas, more experience, more common sense than every participant in the Democratic debate. That debate reflected a debate between the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks.

(LAUGHTER)

And nobody watching at home believed that any of the moderators had any intention of voting in a Republican primary. The questions that are being asked shouldn't be trying to get people to tear into each other. It should be what are your substantive positions...

#END TRANSCRIPT#

And with that exchange, Ted Cruz launched himself into the history books as the Republican who most directly and articulately called out the Liberal Media and put them on notice that this campaign cycle, they won't get away with it.

Perhaps it's simply time that we acknowledge the simple truth that media is biased and therefore shouldn't moderate these debates, given the lack of transparency and the outright charade that pretends that these moderators are objective and unbiased.

Instead, the Republican National Committee (RNC) and the Democratic National Committee (DNC) should each pick a person and both picks would then moderate every debate, both Republican and Democratic.

In that way, viewers would know the political bias of each moderator and both views would be represented in every debate, instead of the current system where only the liberal world view is represented in asking the questions.

It's high time to ditch this game where the moderators pretend to be objective and the candidates and viewers go along with the scam.

ANOTHER WHITE ELEPHANT IN THE MAKING

In other news as unsurprising as the news that the media is biased, we learned this week that the Metro area's latest light rail project, the Bottineau Line, is now estimated to cost hundreds of millions more than what has been reported for some time.

The line was originally projected to cost just over \$1 billion. The news estimate is \$1.48 billion, a whopping 50% increase in the estimated cost, which may yet rise again, according to news reports.

That's because there are additional unknown factors that may contribute another rise in the estimate.

An increase of this magnitude is nothing short of stunning. Any private business that saw a project mushroom in cost by 50% would see heads roll. Officers, board members and shareholders would never tolerate that kind of shoddy cost estimation, barring extremely unusual circumstances.

Unfortunately, these kind of massive price shocks are far from unusual when dealing with light rail.

In fact, these kind of double digit cost increases are a regular feature of these projects.

So common, in fact, that it leads this publication to wonder if the projects aren't intentionally low balled at the start to mitigate opposition.

Then once the project gets far enough along in the process, the true costs are revealed so the question moves from being one of viability to one of "now that we own it, how do we make it work?"

Of course another feature of this game is that the government then makes cuts to the line in order to make the totally outrageous cost somewhat marginally less outrageous.

But we all know how that works out. After the line gets up and running, the government then turns around and builds the things it cut out in the first place.

Remember when the Northstar rail Fridley station was cut out in order to make the numbers work? That station was later built with state money.

And remember when the Ramsey station for Northstar rail was cut because it was too close in geographic proximity to other stations?

Yep. That was also built later on with state money.

Republicans in the legislature have a duty to fight these projects with every effort they can muster in Saint Paul.

Any Republican who would support this buffoonery has no right to wear the GOP label.

As loyal readers know, the Watchdog rarely draws a line like this but in this case it's sorely needed.

Rail is a bust, a scam, and a white elephant.

There is no good reason to build rail in the Twin Cities.

This isn't Tokyo or London. We simply don't have the population density to support rail.

A total disaster.

November 6, 2015

Public Policy Commentary

In This Issue:

Quote of the Week: "If you think governor of the state doesn't matter, I've made three appointments to the Public Utilities Commission now, and that's made a big difference -- a big difference."

- Governor Mark Dayton

Definition of the Week: "Temperament: "a person's or animal's nature, especially as it permanently affects their behavior.

Definition of the Week: "Judgment:" the ability to make considered decisions or come to sensible conclusions.

SENATE DISTRICT 35 RACE HEATS UP!

Wow, Watchdogs! The special election in Anoka County to replace the resigned Senator Branden Petersen is coming into very sharp focus. The problem is that the focus paints a very muddled race at this point, with many delegates undecided (and unhappy) with the endorsing convention just over a week away.

The biggest news this week is that a prominent and well-known name within Anoka County GOP circles has announced his candidacy for the open Senate seat.

The Watchdog can report that Brad Sunderland, the current chairman of the Senate District 35 Republican Party, has temporarily stepped down from his position to run.

The Sunderland family has a long history of activism and leadership in Anoka County GOP politics. Sunderland's name recognition and political experience makes him a serious and legitimate candidate despite the late entry.

Below is Sunderland's press release:

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Brad Sunderland at basunderland@outlook.com

Sunderland Announces Candidacy for Senate District 35 Seat

Ramsey, MN -- Brad Sunderland will run for the Senate District 35 open Senate seat vacated by Senator Brandon Petersen. Currently a Ramsey resident, Brad has resided in the district for over 20 years. He moved to Andover as a teenager, and later on lived with his wife, Dion, and their three children in Coon Rapids for many years. Brad and his family have developed many connections and a love for their local community. The Sunderland family has had children attending Legacy Christian Academy (formerly Meadow Creek Christian School) and Anoka High School for the past 16 years. They attend Constance Evangelical Free Church in Andover, MN.

Brad has a great deal of leadership experience as a small business owner and employer, youth coach, and political activist. Brad has been helping conservative Republicans win office for the past 30 years, through grass roots politics, including door knocking, literature drops, get-out-the-vote calling, and fund raising. Brad has also served as Chair of Senate District 35 Republicans.

"I'm a proud fiscal and social conservative who fully embraces and supports the Minnesota Republican Party Platform. I am especially interested in making government smaller and more efficient, promoting better schools through more local control and robust accountability, and protecting and defending religious, political, and economic liberties, especially the right to life."

"I believe that my political values, character, and temperament are consistent with those of our local community, and would be honored and humbled to receive the endorsement of the Senate District 35 Republicans. If endorsed, I will work diligently to win and keep this seat in the Republican column."

###

The Watchdog did not speak directly with Sunderland, but we have spoken with a number of sources who believe Sunderland entered the race in part out of a concern that the current field of candidates did not offer the Party a person who was both conservative and electable.

This theory is supported by the contacts this publication has had over the past few weeks with GOP leaders and activists at various levels. Many of these people are concerned that Jim Abeler lacks the conservative values they hold while Andy Aplikowski and Don Huizenga have past issues that harm their ability to be elected and promote the Republican brand.

Regarding Abeler, his voting record is well known to any regular reader of this publication.

A vote to override Governor Pawlenty's veto of a massive transportation tax increase; multiple votes in favor of Northstar commuter rail; voted for a \$400 million tobacco tax increase disguised as a "health impact fee;" a lifetime Taxpayers' League of Minnesota score of 52%.

This publication is aware of concerns raised regarding Don Huizenga's past blog posts as well as allegations of previous contact with law enforcement.

Because the Watchdog could not independently verify those concerns as this edition went to press, we will not publish the details of those allegations unless and until they can be independently verified.

Regarding Aplikowski, the Watchdog was able to independently verify the concerns raised regarding both Aplikowski's blog postings as well as the existence of a criminal conviction.

When contacted by email for a response, Aplikowski replied "call me."

According to the Minnesota criminal courts database, which is accessible to the public via the Internet, Andrew Allen Aplikowski has a conviction on his record for violating Minnesota statutes 340A.502, which deals with procuring, giving, or selling alcohol to obviously intoxicated persons.

<http://www.mncourts.gov/Access-Case-Records.aspx>

The statute reads: 340A.502 SALES TO OBVIOUSLY INTOXICATED PERSONS.

No person may sell, give, furnish, or in any way procure for another alcoholic beverages for the use of an obviously intoxicated person.

The offense happened in Duluth with a disposition date of May, 15, 1996. The case reference number is 69-T7-96-606080. The disposition of the case was "guilty."

There is no arrest record attached to the Internet file, so it isn't possible to determine the circumstances surrounding the incident, without contacting the local police department and asking for a copy of the incident report, arrest report, or whatever documentation was prepared by local law enforcement.

Moreover, the Watchdog has spoken to GOP sources who are quite concerned regarding various comments Aplikowski has made over time on his blog entitled "Residual Forces."

<http://residualforces.com/>

Of particular concern is a blog posting dated September 11, 2013 in which he makes a number of comments that in the minds of some Republicans cast serious doubt on Aplikowski's temperament, judgment, and ability to effectively represent the GOP as an endorsed candidate for the state Senate.

These sources have pointed out the following excerpts as problematic and inflammatory.

"Frankly Obama and the Democrats have done more damage to America in the last 5 years than the terrorists did in the last 12. That is something that I will never forget and I hope my fellow Americans wake the fuck up."

"Fucking commies."

"I've come to realize that our attempts at defeating terror was a mistake."

"We'd better wake the fuck up quick..."

"What the fuck is this administration really up to?"

"Bush destabilized the Middle East..."

"But what I don't understand is why we are still fighting Bush's war..."

While it is the delegates of Senate District 35 who will ultimately decide whether or not Aplikowski is fit to carry the GOP banner in light of this record, some of these comments should be troubling to any reasonable person.

For example, it's hard to picture respected conservative Senators like Michelle Benson, Dave Thompson, David Hann or Dan Hall exhorting people to "wake the fuck up" or referring to political opponents as "Fucking commies."

Republicans rely on their elected leaders to speak to our shared principles and values in an articulate, positive, adult manner. Running a potty mouth doesn't inspire anyone and certainly doesn't promote the GOP brand.

Most importantly, stating that Democrats have hurt America more than terrorists is outrageous and appalling.

While this publication shares the view that most Democrat policies aren't right for Minnesota or America, to state that they are below the many attacks that have murdered thousands of Americans is way, way, way beyond the pale.

We all clearly remember 9/11 and the thousands of innocents murdered in cold blood that day.

Hijacked airplanes, towers falling, people leaping to their deaths to avoid being burned alive.

Would Aplikowski make that same comment to the faces of 9/11 survivors or the families of those who died that day?

The delegates and leaders of Senate District 35 GOP have a very important task in front of them as they vet the candidates and confer an endorsement.

May they exercise wisdom and good judgment and in picking a candidate.

November 13, 2015

Public Policy Commentary

In This Issue:

Factoid of the Week: When Jim Abeler walked into the Capitol in Saint Paul, the state's general fund biennial budget was \$24,179,031.00. When he left, it was \$39,587,385.00. That's an increase of about 60%.

Factoid of the Week: Since Barack Obama assumed the office of President, Democrats have lost 13 Senate seats, 69 seats in the U.S. House, 12 governorships, and over 900 legislative seats.

Factoid of the Week: The Keystone XL pipeline expansion would have created 42,000 construction jobs.

Factoid of the Week: 56% of Minnesotans disapprove of the job Barack Obama is doing as president.

LIBERALS LOVE THE SUBURBS

They sure do - when it suits them. Although it didn't garner major headlines this week, the Minneapolis NAACP sued the state of Minnesota, claiming that the state was failing to perform its constitutionally mandated duty to educate children, specifically including minority children.

The crux of the suit is that state education policies have resulted in segregated schools in the urban core and that those segregated schools show not only a disproportionate number of minority students concentrated in certain schools, they also show a disproportionate share of minority students who are failing academically.

The lawsuit seeks remedies which include asking the court to redraw school district boundaries, which would presumably mean creating districts that result in minority students from the urban core being in the same district as white students living in the suburbs.

This lawsuit is so ironic and even a bit bizarre on so many levels.

To start, the lawsuit, even though filed by the NAACP, is premised upon the rather illogical and quite troubling proposition that these children are failing in large part because they are in predominantly black schools.

There is no logical connection between something being predominantly black and failing.

In other words, just because a school is predominantly black doesn't mean that it's inferior.

There are a number of private and charter schools around the nation that are predominantly black and their test scores are sky high. Instead, we think it might have something to do with the way these schools are run. More on that in a moment.

Conversely, the thought that black children will suddenly become successful simply by sitting next to white kids at lunch is illogical as well.

And don't tell us that the point is that predominantly white schools have better facilities and offer better opportunities than predominantly white schools in the suburbs. Minneapolis spends far more per pupil in their public schools than the majority of suburban schools.

What seems to be clear is that these plaintiffs want access to suburban schools because those schools offer students, on the whole, who are desirable from an association standpoint because they boast behaviors that breed success. Behaviors like a strong work ethic, academic achievement, and a willingness to delay gratification for a greater reward.

What's ironic is that these students obviously were inculcated with those behaviors by suburban and exurban parents who have been blasted by the urban liberal set as essentially ignorant Neanderthals who cling to their guns and religion.

There has been no shortage of contempt heaped upon the suburban/exurban lifestyle by the liberals.

We drive trucks that pollute the planet. Our houses are too big. Our yards are too big. Our carbon footprint is too big.

We go to church. We oppose abortion. We don't like high taxes. We like guns. We don't embrace government as solver of our problems.

We often vote Republican. Gasp!

But suddenly, our schools (really, our kids) are in demand. Suddenly, venturing out to the suburbs is desirable.

What is most ironic, however, is that these plaintiffs are seeking to escape a situation that they themselves have helped to create.

It is a simple fact that both the urban core and black citizens vote in overwhelming numbers for liberal DFL lawmakers.

In turn, these DFL lawmakers go to Saint Paul and Washington and vote for policies that result in bad schools and kids who come to those bad schools not ready to learn.

Start with the complaint that most Minneapolis schools are predominantly black while there are schools in the district that are overwhelmingly white, according to the lawsuit.

Duh. That situation is quite by design. White wealthy liberals never live by their own rules.

Indeed. It's quite naïve to think that white liberals live by the policies they create.

Liberals believe that their policies are good - for others.

Light rail is good policy, until it seeks to run through the Kenwood neighborhood.

Wind power is good policy, until it blocks the ocean view off Martha's Vineyard.

Minnesota's high taxes are good policy, until the Dayton Trust Fund moves to South Dakota.

ObamaCare is good policy, except for the very members of Congress who voted for it.

Moreover, the very same people who have filed this suit have very likely supported politicians who bow and prostrate themselves before Education Minnesota, the teachers' union and perhaps the most powerful special interest in Minnesota politics.

Education Minnesota couldn't care less about the state of schools in Minneapolis.

The union has one mission: to maximize pay and benefits while minimizing accountability.

This is the union that opposes school choice, opposes standardized testing, opposes meaningful teacher evaluation, and opposes anything other than seniority-based layoffs.

The union is focused on this mission like the Terminator. They have no remorse, no pity, can't be reasoned with, and won't stop - ever.

Forget about the children. As the Terminator would say, "Negative. It's not in my mission parameters."

Helping kids isn't within the mission parameters of Education Minnesota.

The same holds true of policies that hurt families and children.

After all, poor learning cannot be placed solely at the feet of the school system.

All too often, kids come to school wholly unprepared to learn. All too often, school becomes a welfare agency instead of a place of learning.

Liberal social policies since the Great Society have done nothing to promote stable families, especially among segments of society that are most in need of a structured family unit.

While the indictment of liberal social policies would run many pages, the common and most damning thread tying them together is that they promote dependency and have the effect of making millions of Americans wards of the state.

Now, the cynical man would say that this is all be design, creating a perfect system of vote buying for the Democrats.

Those who receive the welfare feel obligated to vote to keep the benefits flowing while the bureaucracy that administers the welfare also votes to keep those programs well-funded.

It's certainly a tragic state of affairs. No nation can long afford to have millions of its citizens relegated to the economic sidelines. Society is becoming more complex and more sophisticated.

It takes even more knowledge to be productive and sell one's labor. It takes even more knowledge to navigate basic life functions like buying insurance, buying a house, saving for retirement, etc.

This publication couldn't agree more with the plaintiffs in this lawsuit. They are clearly frustrated with the current circumstances that trap their children in failing schools. Writ large, they are probably also frustrated with a system that creates a vicious cycle of joblessness, dependency, and hopelessness.

But the answer is not to file a lawsuit over schooling. Putting kids on a bus out to the suburbs for a few hours a day doesn't cure the sickness. It only addresses some of the symptoms.

Instead, those who live in this situation should demand from their elected officials public policies that encourage behavior that breeds success while establishing conditions that are conducive to wealth creation and economic growth. This includes government staying the heck out of the way in certain instances.

If elected officials don't comply, then they should be replaced with politicians who are more responsive.

Instead of a lawsuit, these plaintiffs should pick up a broom and "clean house."

Truly, we all get the government we deserve.

November 20, 2015

Public Policy Commentary

In This Issue:

Quotes of the Week:

"Allah blessed our brothers and granted them what they desired. They detonated their explosive belts in the masses of the disbelievers after finishing all their ammunition. We ask Allah to accept them amongst the martyrs and to allow us to follow them." - ISIL statement regarding the Paris massacre

"I think the analogy we use around here sometimes, and I think is accurate, is if a JV team puts on Lakers uniforms, that doesn't make them Kobe Bryant."
- President Obama referring to ISIS January 27, 2014

"ISIS isn't necessarily evil. It is made up of people doing what they think is best for their community."
- Dan Kimmel, DFL candidate for the MN House

THE WAR

If it wasn't obvious to you on September 11, 2001, it should be painfully obvious to you now that there is a war raging, a war against radical Islam.

It is the defining issue of our generation and will occupy the efforts of serious world leaders for the foreseeable future, primarily for two reasons.

First, this not a war between America and radical Islam. It isn't a war between the West and radical Islam. It is nothing short of a war between all of the civilized world and radical Islam.

This is because radical Islam seeks nothing short of the tyrannical goal of imposing an Islamic caliphate on the entire world. It is nothing short of seeking to convert all non-believers - or kill them like animals.

Second, the methodology and modus operandi of these terrorists is nothing short of shocking brutality and pure evil.

The leaders of this movement and their adherents are the ideological successors to Hitler, Pol Pot, Mao, and Stalin.

They kill, torture, rape, brutalize, and maim on a grand scale with absolutely no regard for the value of human life or any display of human decency.

The threat is real and it the threat applies to civilization itself.

The war will require the skilled and courageous leadership of America and her allies to assemble a Grand Coalition to prosecute the war and see it to a successful conclusion.

Unfortunately, America and many nations are lacking those skilled and courageous leaders.

Instead, the president dithers and wrings his hands, worried about offending the sensibilities of his radical liberal base as well as jeopardizing the votes of people who might be equally offended by any admission that the threat is posed by adherents to one particular religion.

It's true. Unless this publication missed it, we haven't seen any truck bombs driven by radical Methodists. We haven't seen Lutherans throwing Baptists off high buildings.

We are told that it is only a small minority of Muslims who doing the killing and maiming.

The vast majority of Muslims are peaceful and committed to the religious freedoms afforded every citizen in a civilized nation.

Fair enough. True enough.

It's still a very, very cold comfort. It's like being told to enjoy Russian roulette. Hey, 5 of six chambers are harmless. It's only that one that will blow your head off.

The lack of seriousness, primarily from the Progressive Left, is quite concerning.

Whether it's the president taking a cavalier attitude towards ISIS or students refusing to recognize victims of terror for fear of fomenting "Islamaphobia," the Left is sleeping on this issue, through both willful ignorance and a utopian view of foreign policy.

The harsh reality is that this war is a death match between radical Islam and the civilized world.

The civilized world must realize the only path to victory is giving the terrorists what they want - death.

THE ADULTS ON CAMPUS

Correct thinking people have known for some time that our colleges and universities have been infected with a Leftist ideology that is antithetical to the very foundation of a classical liberal education. Namely, the free exchange of ideas that produces young men and women who believe in their ideas and know why they believe what they do.

Instead, a Leftist ideology that seeks to impose certain beliefs on students by declaring those beliefs to be the only good and productive beliefs while all the others must be banished because they are dangerous and harmful.

Thus, those who would espouse those ideas are also dangerous and harmful.

Thus, they must be shouted down and silenced in order to protect society.

Practiced under the banner of political correctness and often implemented through "speech codes," there is a sub-specialty of shaming and silencing for various to cater to each constituency that practices group identity politics.

Those who explore differences in race are "racists." Those who acknowledge biological differences between men and women are "sexists." Even those who note the factual differences between young and old are "ageists."

The "ists" and the "isms" and the "phobias" all serve to empower one ideology and stifle all the others.

The latest incarnation of this madness can be seen in the cry for "safe spaces" on college campuses, along with warnings against "micro aggressions" and talk of "trigger warnings."

Which brings us to the University of Minnesota and a simple resolution to remember the innocents slaughtered on 9/11.

As readers know, the U of MN Student Association voted down a resolution this past week that called for a moment of silence to remember the victims of 9/11.

According to news reports, the resolution was voted down in part because of fears that a moment of silence would foment "Islamaphobia" and would violate the "safe space" of Muslim students.

The news report didn't cite any logical support for these wild assertions.

So this is what it has come down to. We now have a generation of children so bereft of principles, values, and the kind of education that produces logical thinking that they can't bring themselves to see the value and importance of acknowledging 9/11, a defining moment in American history.

Of course, there will be other excuses made regarding the logistics of the event and other things, but the bottom line is that a majority of these student "leaders" are so confused they can't discern between good and evil.

The illogical and downright silly nature of voting down such an important and unifying moment exposes these students as nothing more than petulant, spoiled brats.

To demonstrate that silliness, we have a couple of simple questions.

First, we are told that the vast majority of Americans who practice Islam are peaceful, law abiding, and proud citizens. In short, they are just like you and me.

We believe that.

So if that is true, why would these peaceful and proud citizens not be eager to stand shoulder to shoulder with their neighbors and denounce terrorism through this remembrance? In other words, this kind of activity produces no victims, it only remembers them.

Second, if the remembrance of 9/11 is a "trigger" to "Islamophobia," why not take this to its logical conclusion and demand that ALL 9/11 recognition be banned in order to forestall a bad result?

For example, why not shut down the national 9/11 museum and memorial in New York? Surely, if a moment of silence will produce anti-Islamic feelings, a museum at Ground Zero will produce hordes of ranting bloodthirsty mobs seeking revenge against Islam.

Funny, we can find not a single news article describing the anarchy and violence produced by a visit to the national 9/11 memorial and museum.

Kudos to President Kaler and Regent Dean Johnson for stepping forward and announcing that there will indeed be a ceremony to remember the 9/11 dead.

It's refreshing to see university leadership step forward and reject outright the childish behavior of the Student Association leadership.

It seems that our campuses have seen leaders and administrators cower in the face of student tantrums over perceived sleights and meritless grievances.

In this case, our student toddlers got the "time out" they deserved.

November 26, 2015

Public Policy Commentary

In This Issue:

THANKSGIVING SPECIAL EDITION

THE GREATEST UNTOLD STORY PILGRIM STORY
Or, "How Capitalism Saved the Pilgrims."

The history books and American lore are filled with stories of the people who landed at Plymouth Rock, seeking religious freedom in the New World.

Their tales of courage and perseverance in the face of untold hardship inspire us to this very day.

But did you know that these colonists practiced communism?

This communism was not borne of ideology but instead was borne of economic necessity, ironically enforced by legal contract.

Recall that the Pilgrims needed both legal permission and start-up capital to achieve their dreams.

The legal permission came from the Crown to begin a plantation and colonize their corner of the New World.

But in order to form and continue a plantation, the Pilgrims needed capital. In order to access capital, they needed investors.

Investors were found in London, but economic realities in the 17th Century created difficult problems for investors who lived in London and an investment located thousands of miles across an ocean.

Specifically, how to maximize the chances of a good return on investment?

You see, the Pilgrims wanted some form of private property as they were worried about in essence becoming indentured servants of the investment syndicate.

On the other hand, the syndicate didn't want the Pilgrims to have any private property because they were worried that rational human behavior would dictate that if private property were allowed, the Pilgrims would dedicate their

best efforts to farming their private plots while the property owned by the syndicate would be a distant second priority.

With their investment property across the Atlantic, policing the behavior of tenants was an enormous obstacle.

The outcome was that there would be no private property, at least for the seven year contract term with the syndicate.

Thus, the Pilgrims found themselves in what was a communal property system, with nothing private.

For the rest of this story, the Watchdog republishes portions of a landmark essay from Tom Bethell, whose "How Private Property Saved the Pilgrims" is a must-read.

He leans heavily on the diary of William Bradford, the long-serving governor of Plymouth Plantation.

As one might expect, the concept of communal property rights created significant problems.

Writes Bethell:

Having tried what Bradford called the "common course and condition"-the communal stewardship of the land demanded of them by their investors-Bradford reports that the community was afflicted by an unwillingness to work, by confusion and discontent, by a loss of mutual respect, and by a prevailing sense of slavery and injustice. And this among "godly and sober men." In short, the experiment was a failure that was endangering the health of the colony.

This suggests that a form of communism was practiced at Plymouth in 1621 and 1622. No doubt this equalization of tasks was thought (at first) the only fair way to solve the problem of who should do what work in a community where there was to be no individual property: If everyone were to end up with an equal share of the property at the end of seven years, everyone should presumably do the same work throughout those seven years. The problem that inevitably arose was the formidable one of policing this division of labor: How to deal with those who did not pull their weight?

The Pilgrims had encountered the free-rider problem. Under the arrangement of communal property one might reasonably suspect that any additional effort might merely substitute for the lack of industry of others. And these "others"

might well be able-bodied, too, but content to take advantage of the communal ownership by contributing less than their fair share.

Thus, the colonists found themselves at a moment of truth. A failure to adjust the current state of affairs would assuredly lead to more death, despair, and a collapse of the colony.

William Bradford's diary in 1623 reports:

"At length, after much debate of things, the Governor (with the advice of the chiefest amongst them) gave way that they should set corn every man for his own particular, and in that regard trust to themselves; in all other things to go in the general way as before. And so assigned to every family a parcel of land, according to the proportion of their number."

In short, the Pilgrims turned to capitalism to save their lives and sustain their dreams.

The experiment with capitalism yielded immediate results.

Again writes Bethell:

So the land they worked was converted into private property, which brought "very good success." The colonists immediately became responsible for their own actions (and those of their immediate families), not for the actions of the whole community. Bradford also suggests in his history that more than land was privatized.

The system became self-policing. Knowing that the fruits of his labor would benefit his own family and dependents, the head of each household was given an incentive to work harder. He could know that his additional efforts would help specific people who depended on him. In short, the division of property established a proportion or "ratio" between act and consequence. Human action is deprived of rationality without it, and work will decline sharply as a result.

Property in Plymouth was further privatized in the years ahead. The housing and later the cattle were assigned to separate families, and provision was made for the inheritance of wealth. The colony flourished. Plymouth Colony was absorbed into the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, and in the prosperous years that lay ahead, nothing more was heard of "the common course and condition."

And there you have it, loyal readers.

Capitalism saved Plymouth Colony and gave birth to the greatest nation history has ever known.

This Thanksgiving, let us all give thanks to the blessings of capitalism and the wisdom of the Pilgrims who adopted it to save their lives and give birth to a new freedom we still enjoy (although becoming endangered).

The Watchdog is thankful today that Mark Dayton is the 21st Century governor of Minnesota and not the 17th Century governor of Plymouth Colony. Surely, anarchy and cannibalism would have been the order of the day had he been in charge.

We wish all our readers a relaxing and blessed Thanksgiving!

Be well!

December 4, 2015

Public Policy Commentary

In This Issue:

Quote of the Week: "There are people at high levels in this government who have bodyguards 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The average American does not have that, and deserves the right to be able to protect their family."

- Jim Webb, former Democrat Senator, Navy Secretary, Presidential Candidate

Quote of the Week: "ISIS extremists began celebrating the mass shooting in San Bernardino hours after the massacre, creating the hashtag #America_Burning."

- Vocativ.com

OVERTAXED - AGAIN

As would be expected from a populace that is remarkably illiterate in the field of economics, there was no shortage of high-fiving and Ocho Cinco-style end zone celebrating as Governor Dayton jubilantly announced that state government has now overtaxed the citizenry a remarkable \$1.87 billion dollars.

Of course, any proper end zone dance starts with the ignorant belief that Mark Dayton was the one who threw that touchdown pass into the fiscal end zone.

In other words, the celebration starts with the belief that Dayton's tax increases caused the surplus to materialize, much in the same way that some believe that the rooster causes the sun to rise each morning.

Milton Friedman must be rolling in his grave.

On the DFL side, the salivating will now begin as the surplus is eyed as a means of growing government to pay off various liberal constituencies and deepen government dependency.

On the GOP side, this publication trusts that leadership will chart of course of returning the surplus to the private economy, especially to those from whom the money was expropriated in the first place.

This state of affairs is fairly obvious, even to the novice political observer. DFL eyes spending increases while GOP eyes tax cuts.

What isn't so obvious are the numbers under the headline number of \$1.87 billion.

While the surplus is estimated at this number, a deeper reading shows that only \$1.2 billion is "available" to legislators to dispose of as they see fit.

Whoa. Wait a minute. What happened to the other \$665 million?

Current budgeting laws have dedicated \$71 million to various environmental funds and some \$594 million dedicated to the "budget reserve."

Taking 1/3rd of the projected surplus off the table right from the start is bad public policy, regardless of the purpose of prior dedications.

This is all the more galling when one considers that the lion's share of the dedication is to a "rainy day fund."

Yes, the budget reserve makes for great sound bites and easily lends itself to an aura of political responsibility and fiscal stewardship.

The rhetoric is easy. "Just like any household or small business, state government is responsibly setting aside money for a rainy day."

The problem is that there is a stark and fundamental difference between a household or small business and state government.

That difference is that government never uses money it earns. Government doesn't create wealth, much less earn money.

When a family sets aside a portion of each paycheck, it is making a rational allocation decision regarding money the family has earned. The same holds true with a business.

Government, on the other hand, only disposes of money it has extracted, via threat of force, from the private economy.

Government only disposes of money it has diverted from the private economy.

Given these facts, the very act of government collecting money is at best a repugnant act that citizens endure in the name representative government.

Therefore, it is moral, ethical and in the best interests of capitalism for

government to extract AND retain only those funds needed to meet governmental expenditures.

Under close examination, it doesn't make good sense for government to hold hundreds of millions of dollars out of the private economy.

A return of those monies would be productively deployed by business and individuals to help stimulate the private economy.

Moreover, a return of those monies would be the ethical thing to do.

The reality is that government is only creating a massive surplus in order to insulate the government from the necessary but politically painful decisions that accompany economic downturns.

When the economy sours, government revenues decline and legislators face the choice of either cutting spending or raising taxes. Thankfully, Minnesota doesn't tolerate the kind of deficit spending allowed in Washington.

And since government never cuts taxes during a downturn, the budget reserve is nothing more than a device to keep the spending spigot open during a downturn.

In other words, when it creates a massive reserve, government is making a choice to support the government budget over the family budget.

In this sense, a budget reserve is thus little more than deferred (and guaranteed) government spending.

Republicans would be well served to challenge their DFL counterparts to eliminate or at least reduce the budget reserve and return the funds to the private economy.

THE INTERNET WILL KILL GOVERNMENT

The Internet, and the way it facilitates the Sharing Economy, will do more to promote and protect individual liberty than any other development since the invention of the long gun.

Specifically, a public policy debate has begun over the future of mass transit now that Uber is revolutionizing individual transportation and driverless cars are on the horizon.

Uber is truly a game-changing development in transportation.

With a smartphone and a simple app, a person can choose a driver and a price to pick them up at the exact time and location of their choosing and drop them off at their exact destination.

Think about a young, single mother who lives in Ramsey, MN but works in downtown Minneapolis at the IDS Center and doesn't own a car.

Prior to Uber, she her options were essentially limited to the Northstar commuter rail.

To get to work, she first has to figure out a way to get to the Northstar station, either by foot, cab, or hitchhike.

Once at the station, she must get on the train at the prescribed time. We hope she works a normal schedule because the train only runs to Minneapolis between 5:16 and 7:34 AM. So much for working second or third shift.

Once at the southern terminus at Target Field, she has to then get off the train and figure out another means to get to the IDS Center.

At the end of her day, the same holds true. Find a way to get to Target Field, between 4PM and 6:15PM. Again, so much for the second or third shift or any other unconventional work schedule.

Oh yeah. The school called at 1PM. Her child is sick and needs to be brought home. Crap.

Now consider the same person using Uber. A car directly to your home at the time of your choosing.

A ride directly to the door of your work.

The same for a ride home.

And the same for unforeseen circumstances like a sick child.

As people become more familiar using the tools of a Sharing Economy, they will rightly come to expect "just in time" services that cater directly to the individual needs and expectations of each person. The paradigm of systems serving the aggregate needs of the masses by forcing each person to subordinate their needs to the baseline of the system is on deathwatch.

In the same way that people now watch television programs, watch movies, or

bank when it's convenient for them, people will in the near future travel in a manner most convenient for them.

In short, if you thought that mass transit was inefficient and money wasting now, wait until people abandon buses and trains for Uber in larger and larger numbers.

And still the Met Council wants to spend billions on trains.

The Sharing Economy, facilitated by the exponential pace of innovation, will only accelerate the irrelevancy of government. Yes, Big Government will always be there but its reach will be limited, barring a massive totalitarian style power grab to control this technology.

And that's why the Second Amendment is still relevant to today's society.

December 11, 2015

Public Policy Commentary

In This Issue:

Quote of the Week: "Yesterday the Obama White House had the nerve to say someone else was unqualified for office. After 5 years of acting like a King and ignoring our constitution, that takes a lot of nerve. Today I would like to put a mirror in front of the Obama White House and show them the top ten things that make HIM unqualified:"

1. Tried to take over 1/6 of economy in Obamacare, wrecked the system and hurt patients and taxpayers
 2. Thinks an executive order is legislation and how you make law
 3. Fought an undeclared, unconstitutional war in Libya, turned it into Jihadist wonderland
 4. Fighting an undeclared, unconstitutional war in Syria, trying to put ISIS in Damascus.
 5. Signed into law the indefinite detention of American citizens
 6. His copy of the bill of rights obviously goes from 1 to 3, skipping 2nd amendment.
 7. Court ruled his NSA spying on every American was illegal.
 8. He has added more debt than anyone in history.
 9. Appointed an attorney general who thinks speech against Muslims is a bigger threat than terrorism.
 10. EPA rules by executive FIAT trying to kill an entire American industry and way of life (coal).
- Sen. Rand Paul (R - KY)

MORE DFL BS - THIS TIME PROPERTY TAXES

Being liberal with the facts is par for the course for any true Democrat. Whether it's keeping your health care if you like your health care or being opposed to regressive taxes, Democrats are no strangers to misleading the public.

The latest reason for taxpayers to put on the hip boots and grab a shovel comes from the pen of some state Rep. named Paul Marquart who comes from a place called Dilworth.

Marquart has been busy at the keyboard typing up letters to the editor in local

newspapers blaming Republican legislators for local property tax increases.

One example is Marquart blaming GOP state Reps. Tim Miller and Chris Swedzinski for the 9% increase in the proposed property tax levy for the city of Benson, located in far western Minnesota.

Obviously, city taxes are raised by city councils and neither of those two are on the council.

Instead, Marquart blames these two for not shelling out enough money via a program called "local government aid (LGA)," which is little more than welfare for cities.

The state raises the taxes and then ships a few hundred million around the state in the form of handouts to cities.

So the city of Benson had to raise their property taxes 9%. That's a fact. But did the city fathers in Benson raise those taxes because this is a starving city that has cut city services to the bone?

Or were taxes raised because the city made questionable spending decisions that would have been papered over with more LGA?

Let's take a look, using Benson's most recent city council budget meeting as a guide.

(Note that Benson is a city of 3,240 people located in Swift County, some 130 miles west of the Twin Cities.)

- The city will spend \$5,596 in 2016 to hire a lobbyist to run around the Capitol in Saint Paul and get them things like, well, more LGA;
- \$10,059.26 for a "Kid's Day Carnival;"
- \$50,000 subsidy for the city swimming pool;
- \$37,500 subsidy to the civic center;
- \$44,000 to back GO bonds for the city owned golf course;
- City EDA made a bad loan to a private company that is now in default;
- Expenditures for the city police department.

Clearly, Benson has incurred expenses that are not ordinary for many cities and certainly aren't related to the core mission of city government.

If Benson wants to hire lobbyists or put on a carnival, that's not Miller's fault.

If Benson wants to be in the golf, swimming and recreation business, that's not Swedzinski's fault.

If Benson wants to act like a bank to local businesses, that's not Miller's decision.

If Benson, a city of 3,240, wants to have their own cops instead of contracting with the county, that's not Swedzinski's decision. It should also be noted that Benson is the county seat, meaning the sheriff's office is right there in town.

As one would expect, the talk of Benson city government being starved by Saint Paul is a crock of BS.

Reps. Miller and Swedzinski should have the gumption to call out both Marquart and the city on this spurious claim.

Our poor cities!

THE RELOVING DOOR

While taxpayers can become numb to the news, it was announced this week that yet another legislator has walked through the revolving door, instantaneously going from elected official to lobbyist.

Ann Lenczewski, a DFL state representative from Bloomington, resigned her seat to immediately take a job with the lobbying/law firm of Lockridge, Grindal, Nauen (LGN).

Regular readers of this column will remember the LGN firm as one of the firm's legal specialties is prosecuting lawsuits against Republican legislators.

The most recent example was LGN representing a complaint against state Rep. Bob Barrett (R- Chisago City) regarding his legal residency and eligibility to run for office.

The nuisance lawsuit was dismissed, but LGN was right there to attack a Republican office holder.

Now, LGN is back in the news regarding the Lenczewski hire.

Unlike some, the Watchdog doesn't take a hard line against legislators working as lobbyists.

Like it or not, people should be free to sell their labor with a minimum of

governmental restrictions.

Having said that, a "cooling off" period in which a legislator cannot work after leaving office is clearly needed in Minnesota.

In other words, the strong interest the state has in protecting the integrity of our legislative institutions outweighs the right of people to work as they see it, at least for a period of time.

The current situation raises important and troubling questions.

For example, when was the offer of employment made?

After all, it's quite likely LGN was lobbying Lenczewski or had business before her recently.

This raises the question of whether or not she was influenced by the offer of employment in her role as a legislator.

At the least, the very prospect of this situation undermines public faith in our democratic institutions.

To protect the integrity of the Minnesota House, Speaker Daudt should exercise his powers as Speaker to enforce House Rule 9.35, which bans House members from registering as lobbyists for one year after leaving the office.

While this rule doesn't have the force of law, the Speaker is obligated to enforce the rules and should do so to the extent of his authority.

Second, the state should formally pass a law providing for a one-year cooling off period between leaving the legislature and registering as a lobbyist.

Third, the state should raise legislator pay.

While this publication agrees that the legislature shouldn't be a career choice, neither should it demand a Hobbesian choice between public service or paying the mortgage.

While we don't know Lenczewski's motivation, many legislators leave public service and return to the Capitol in another capacity because the pay is far higher.

This isn't because lobbyists in Minnesota make handsome salaries. It's

because legislative service delivers a punishing financial blow to most who serve.

In an ideal world, the legislature would meet less often and government would do less, which would justify low salaries.

The simple reality is that the legislature will meet every year and legislative duties will eat up a legislator's time.

For conservatives, crowing over these low salaries in penny wise and pound foolish.

Over the years, this publication has spoken with dozens and dozens of good conservatives who pass on serving in the legislature because they can't afford to serve.

They are willing to take a pay cut, but they're not willing to lose their house or tell their kids they can't go to college.

An excellent example is the current special election race in Senate District 35 in Anoka County.

Sources familiar with the district's GOP politics have told the Watchdog that every name on their short list of well qualified candidates passed on the chance to run for the Senate. This in a district that will surely elect a Republican next February.

This publication is thankful for those good conservatives who serve despite the financial penalties for doing so.

We could have many more.

December 18, 2015

Public Policy Commentary

In This Issue:

Quote of the Week: RENT SEEKING: When a company, organization or individual uses their resources to obtain an economic gain from others without reciprocating any benefits back to society through wealth creation. An example of rent-seeking in a modern economy is spending money on lobbying for government subsidies in order to be given wealth that has already been created, or to impose regulations on competitors, in order to increase market share.

-Investopedia

THE RENT SEEKERS COME HOME TO ROOST

Almost two weeks ago, the president of the Minnesota Chamber of Commerce penned an [editorial](#) in the Star Tribune calling for the state to reduce business property taxes, specifically by lowering the business property tax, a state-wide levy paid by businesses that own property.

That's cool and a great place to start.

The OpEd said many of the things that needed to be said about the way government punishes they very people it needs to build a prosperous economy.

Business taxes are too high and are a barrier to expansion and re-location in Minnesota.

In particular, business property taxes in Minnesota are out of hand, especially compared to our peer states.

High taxes are passed on to consumers and make less revenues available for employee salaries and benefits.

Business leader rank taxes as the number one barrier to growth and expansion.

Unfortunately, the OpEd also devolved into the equivocation and platitudes regarding government that we've come to expect from many business organizations around the state.

It's almost as if these organizations are pulling punches for fear of offending politicians or for fear of being shut out of government largesse (more on that in a moment).

"The surplus offers the opportunity to provide sustained and strategic investments in...transit systems," writes the author.

Government doesn't make "strategic investments." First, there's nothing "strategic" about government spending decisions. Government distributes money based on political considerations and nothing else.

Second, government doesn't "invest." Instead, government diverts, on the threat of violence, money from the private economy and into the public economy for the aforementioned purposes of paying off political constituencies.

"We will never be a low-tax state."

We certainly will never be a low-tax with that kind of defeatist attitude. If job creators won't stand up for low taxes, who will?

"We must drop from the top of the 'top 10' tax lists if we are to sustain and build the economy."

Way to reach for the stars, Chamber of Commerce.

Moreover, what's really troubling about this OpEd is that it rings hollow and almost hypocritical.

Why? Because anyone who pays attention to the issues knows that business is often in bed (in "partnership") with government.

Thus, complaints about an overreaching and overly burdensome government seem to be situational.

Business likes government when it like government and complains about government when it doesn't.

In other words, the terms "pro-business" and "pro-capitalist" are no longer synonymous.

And that spells deep, deep trouble for our economy, our wealth creation, and

our prosperity.

While examples of Big Business rent seeking are abundant, here are just a few recent examples.

Health care insurance providers support ObamaCare in order to gain a captive market for health insurance purchasers. Remember that "individual mandate?"

John Deere, a famous brand name, pushes government to give tax breaks to farmers and others to purchase their combines and tractors, all to juice sales.

Energy producers, especially of natural gas, get in bed with environmental extremists to support greenhouse gas reductions.

Why? These regulations would stifle coal producers, a market place rival.

These days, it seems that just about every business has a lobbyist down at the Capitol looking for some sort of government-imposed benefit for themselves or barrier for their competition.

So why is this bad?

At core, these kinds of governmental actions interfere with the free market and visit "distortions" on the market place.

To better understand this, remember the economic law that all resources are limited. Whether labor, copper, paper clips, or pacemakers, all resources are limited.

Thus, economics is really all about how to allocate resources.

In capitalism, a simple yet ingenious system was devised to efficiently allocate resources and thus maximize wealth.

This device is called "price." In a capitalist economy, price acts as a signal, telling the economy to produce more or less widgets.

The place where the "supply" curve meets the "demand" curve is called the price equilibrium.

Overall, this concept is known as "allocative efficiency."

Government rent seeking, by definition, interferes with the operation of the

supply and demand curve, hence the market distorting effect.

Take John Deere as an example. The ag economy has slowed down, moving the demand curve and sending a price signal that Deere should produce fewer combines.

Deere doesn't want to do that, of course. They want to sell as many combines as possible.

Since the economy won't cooperate in that endeavor, Deere dispatches an army of lobbyists to Washington to give tax breaks for buying a combine, which subsidizes the cost of the combine in an attempt to distort the market and induce consumers to buy combines they otherwise wouldn't buy.

Because of the limited nature of resources, government has now "tricked" the market into building too many combines.

Now multiply this activity across nearly every sector of the economy.

The economy now starts to resemble the centralized planning of a socialist economy and not much like a free market economy.

Put another way, concepts of merit and efficiency are replaced by political muscle and influence peddling.

No longer are the best ideas the coin of the realm. Instead of the best product and the best price winning, it's the guy with the best lobbyist and the biggest political donors who win.

Ultimately, the result is a stultified economy where fewer goods and services are available, quality suffers, and prices are higher than they should be.

It's gangster government. It's corporate welfare. It's a big damn problem.

In a capitalist economy, businesses react to the desires of the market place, the freely chosen collective choices of millions of people acting on their own private behalf and in their personal self-interest.

The result is the product or service that the consumer demands at a price they're willing to pay.

In a centrally planned economy, businesses react to the political decisions of the bureaucracy.

Products and services are produced in response to governmental fiat, at a price government somehow deems to be "fair."

Allocative efficiency totally breaks down, and consumers no longer get the quality goods and services they demand. Instead, they get whatever government says should be produced, at a price they may or may not be willing to pay.

If you think this radical interference in the economy is no big deal, you're kidding yourself.

The recovery from the Great Recession has been weak and uneven, in large part because of this problem.

Let's also not forget that government played a large role in causing the Great Recession, interfering in housing markets, credit markets, and banking markets.

True business leaders are pro-capitalist. They don't come to government on bended knee seeking rent.

America thrives to the extent it is a meritocracy. When the country acts like a banana republic, we get all the compassion, justice, and prosperity of one.

Corporate welfare is a major threat to our collective prosperity.

December 25, 2015

Public Policy Commentary

In This Issue:

Editor's Note: As is our custom, the Watchdog pauses over Christmas to recognize this season of joy, good cheer, family, faith, and country.

We pause to give a word of thanks and offer prayers for those who are deployed abroad in the defense of our great nation.

The Watchdog will return next week with a full production, the first of 2016.

Merry Christmas, Watchdogs!

In the meantime, we offer a Christmas story - one of our favorites.

Twas the night before Christmas and Santa's a wreck...
How to live in a world that's politically correct?
His workers no longer would answer to "Elves",
"Vertically Challenged" they were calling themselves.
And labor conditions at the North Pole,
were alleged by the union, to stifle the soul.

Four reindeer had vanished without much propriety,
released to the wilds, by the Humane Society.
And equal employment had made it quite clear,
that Santa had better not use just reindeer.
So Dancer and Donner, Comet and Cupid,
were replaced with 4 pigs, and you know that looked stupid!

The runners had been removed from his beautiful sleigh,
because the ruts were deemed dangerous by the EPA,
And millions of people were calling the Cops,
when they heard sled noises upon their roof tops.
Second-hand smoke from his pipe, had his workers quite frightened,
and his fur trimmed red suit was called "unenlightened".

To show you the strangeness of today's ebbs and flows,
Rudolf was suing over unauthorized use of his nose.
He went to Geraldo, in front of the Nation,
demanding millions in over-due workers compensation.

So...half of the reindeer were gone, and his wife
who suddenly said she'd had enough of this life,
joined a self help group, packed and left in a whiz,
demanding from now on that her title was Ms.

And as for gifts...why, he'd never had the notion
that making a choice could cause such commotion.
Nothing of leather, nothing of fur...
Which meant nothing for him or nothing for her.
Nothing to aim, Nothing to shoot,
Nothing that clamored or made lots of noise.
Nothing for just girls and nothing for just boys.
Nothing that claimed to be gender specific,
Nothing that's warlike or non-pacifistic.

No candy or sweets...they were bad for the tooth.
Nothing that seemed to embellish upon the truth.
And fairy tales...while not yet forbidden,
were like Ken and Barbie, better off hidden,
for they raised the hackles of those psychological,
who claimed the only good gift was one ecological.

No baseball, no football...someone might get hurt,
besides - playing sports exposed kids to dirt.
Dolls were said to be sexist and should be passe.
and Nintendo would rot your entire brain away.

So Santa just stood there, disheveled and perplexed,
he just couldn't figure out what to do next?
He tried to be merry he tried to be gay,
but you must have to admit he was having a very bad day.
His sack was quite empty, it was flat on the ground,
nothing fully acceptable was anywhere to be found.

Something special was needed, a gift that he might,
give to us all, without angering the left or the right.
A gift that would satisfy - with no indecision,
each group of people in every religion.
Every race, every hue,
everyone, everywhere...even you!
So here is that gift, it's price beyond worth...

"MAY YOU AND YOUR LOVED ONES, ENJOY PEACE ON EARTH"