

E-mail Update 1/6/06

In this issue:

1. Spring Lake Park passes stadium resolution;
2. Eminent Domain Hearing;
3. Duluth not afraid of referendum;
4. Coming soon to the web site;
5. Watchdog Hero of the week.

1. Spring Lake Park Passes Stadium Resolution.

This past Tuesday, the Spring Lake Park City Council unanimously passed a resolution supporting a voter referendum regarding a proposed sales tax increase to fund the Vikings stadium.

Spring Lake Park joins Centerville, Oak Grove, and Ham Lake in passing these resolutions. Lino Lakes defeated a similar resolution 3-2 but will poll its residents on the issue. So where does your city stand?

2. Eminent Domain Hearing.

Don't forget; the Minnesota House Civil Law Committee is holding a public hearing regarding eminent domain. The hearing will be held January 11 at 2:00 p.m. at Blaine City Hall.

Eminent domain is the process whereby government can forcibly take private property. Anoka County has not ruled out using eminent domain to seize land for the Vikings stadium.

3. Duluth Not Afraid of Referendum.

The Duluth City Council recently voted 8-0 to put a referendum on the ballot that would seek a .75% increase in the city's food and beverage tax. The increase, if successful, would be used to help pay for an upgrade to the Duluth Entertainment and Convention Center (DECC).

4. Coming Soon to the Web Site.

The web site will soon have updates and position papers on the following subjects: population density and transit use; the argument that roads are subsidized; stadium resolutions; the sales tax referendum for Duluth; Vikings stadium editorials.

5. Watch Hero.

Our third Watchdog Hero award goes to Ron Holch of Lino Lakes. Mr. Holch has spent countless hours defending the taxpayers' right to vote on the sales tax increase to pay for the proposed Vikings stadium. Holch's tireless grass roots efforts

are in the finest traditions of American democracy. He is living proof that one person can make a difference when it comes to fighting the government machine.

The Watchdog Staff

1/6/06 AnokaCountyWatchdog.com

E-mail Update 1/13/06

In this issue:

1. Dick Lang's Travels
2. Northstar Commuter Rail Poll
3. Visit this Website
4. Question of the Week
5. Coming Soon

1. Dick Lang's Travels.

Recent editions of the Watchdog have reported that Anoka County Commissioner Dick Lang (www.co.anoka.mn.us/officials/districts/district2.asp) claimed an eye-popping \$4,537 in mileage expenses during 2005 (through November 2005).

Let's do the math. The IRS mileage reimbursement from January 2005 through August of that year was 40.5 cents per mile through August of that year. From September through December, the rate was 48.5 cents per mile. If all claimed mileage occurred prior to September 1st, Lang would have logged over 11,202 miles. If all travel occurred after September 1st, Lang would have logged over 9,354 miles.

The upshot is that Dick Lang claimed reimbursable mileage somewhere between 9,000 and 11,000 plus miles in 2005.

The Watchdog calls on Commissioner Lang to explain his mileage in detail to the taxpayers. His claimed mileage has the appearance of excess.

2. Northstar Commuter Rail Poll.

The Northstar Corridor Development Authority recently released a poll that purports to show continued support for Northstar commuter rail across the state. While the press release was full of stats and figures, some important questions went unanswered.

First, how were the questions phrased? Did the questions discuss costs, especially for those who will pay for decades of operating subsidies through increased property taxes? Did the questions do anything beyond ask if the respondent supported commuter rail or whether they thought congestion was a problem? Worse, were the questions designed to lead to a favorable answer (popularly known as "push polling")? Not surprisingly, the press release doesn't address these issues.

Want an example? Recently, a Metro suburb polled its residents about a community center. The vast majority answered that they wanted a community center. A later poll asked residents how much they were willing to pay for it through increased property taxes. The amount of money that residents were willing to pony up wasn't enough to even start construction.

3. Visit this Website.

The staff has come across a wonderful web site that contains vast stores of excellent transportation data. www.publicpurpose.com is a web site hosted by Wendell Cox, a transportation policy expert. We highly recommend it!

4. Question of the Week.

Many faithful Watchdogs are eager to know how they can get in contact with their elected officials. There are a variety of resources available to the civic-minded taxpayer. First, on our home page, there is a “links of interest” button that contains links to government web sites. Second, visit the Secretary of State’s “precinct finder” at <http://pollfinder.sos.state.mn.us>. Third, you can open the “blue pages” of your phone book to find government listings. Finally, give the Watchdog a shout. We’re always happy to help.

In any case, you should always be in contact with your elected officials. They work for you. If you don’t take action, don’t expect them to take action. Don’t cop an attitude that your opinion doesn’t matter. Democracy is hard work!

5. Coming Soon.

Although the web site is constantly updated, we are instituting a couple of new features. First, we are going to publish a “greatest hits” document that captures some of our favorite quotes from the hundreds of people who contact us every week to share their opinions. Some are funny, some insightful, and some downright prophetic!

Second, we are going to start publishing “practice points” to help you maximize governmental accountability. For example, we’ll tell you how to use the Minnesota Governmental Data Practices Act. We’ll tell you how to write an effective letter or email. There is an art to being a Watchdog and we’ll help you learn.

The Watchdog Staff

1/13/06 AnokaCountyWatchdog.com

E-mail Update 1/20/06

In this issue:

1. Fridley to consider stadium resolution;
2. Practice Point;
3. Quote of the Week;
4. Watchdog Hero Award.
5. County Commissioner Update
6. New Stuff

1. Fridley to consider stadium resolution.

This Monday, January 23rd, the Fridley City Council (www.ci.fridley.mn.us/) will vote upon a resolution supporting a voter referendum regarding the Vikings stadium tax. This is the same resolution that has been passed by Centerville, Oak Grove, Spring Lake Park, and Ham Lake.

The meeting will start at 7:30 p.m. The Fridley City Hall is located at 6431 University Ave. NE, inside the Fridley Municipal Center. Call 763-572-3500 with questions.

2. Practice Tip.

The last email update announced that the Watchdog will periodically introduce “practice points” to help you, the taxpayer, make your government more responsible. This week’s tip concerns the Minnesota Governmental Data Practices Act (DPA). This law is similar to the federal Freedom of Information Act and is designed to give citizens the power to access governmental data. In short, taxpayers can use the DPA to request information from government (e.g. travel information, pay information, project cost information). This law provides fairly severe penalties if government fails to comply. If you request data from your government, be sure to note in your request that the information is requested pursuant to the Minnesota Data Practices Act! This statement puts the force of law behind your request.

Of course, the law is more complex than this but space does not permit more detail. Be sure to educate yourself before you use the DPA. To learn more, visit http://www.admin.state.mn.us/data_practices_i.html.

3. Quote of the Week.

“I think we’re all smart enough to be able to vote on this.”

- Former Spring Lake Councilmember Bob Nelson, speaking about the stadium referendum

Bob, please call Commissioner Scott LeDoux and let him know!

4. Watchdog Hero Award.

In the finest traditions of American democracy, yet another brave patriot has distinguished himself on behalf of his fellow citizens. Bruce Pomerantz has been instrumental in getting Fridley to consider the pro-referendum stadium resolution. He is proof that one guy can “move the pile” in a positive direction. We don’t know how the Fridley Council will vote, but at least they’re voting!

5. County Commissioner Update.

Given the way the media reports issues, there can be a perception that the entire Anoka County Board supports bypassing the state law that requires a voter referendum for a sales tax increase. Not true. Commissioners Rhonda Sivarajah (<http://www.co.anoka.mn.us/officials/districts/district6.asp>) and Jim Kordiak (<http://www.co.anoka.mn.us/officials/districts/district4.asp>) are both on record supporting the referendum.

6. New Stuff.

We don’t have to say it but we will: the web site is chock full of new stuff! Visit www.anokacountywatchdog.com and check it out!

Have a great weekend!

The Watchdog Staff

1/20/06 AnokaCountyWatchdog.com

E-mail Update 1/27/06

In this issue:

1. Fridley Rejects Referendum;
2. Fridley Conflict of Interest?;
3. Scott LeDoux Enjoys Arizona – on your dime;
4. Question of the Week;
5. Web Site Recommendation.

1. Fridley Rejects Referendum.

This past Monday, the Fridley City Council rejected a resolution supporting the taxpayers' right to vote on the proposed sales tax increase to fund the Vikings stadium.

The vote was 4-1, with councilmember Richard Wolfe as the only one to vote in favor of the referendum. Mayor Scott Lund and councilmembers Steve Billings, Robert Barnette, and Ann Bolkcom voted against the resolution.

How ironic that Fridley, a charter city with extensive referendum provisions, doesn't want to follow state law regarding this referendum. After all, this is the same city council that supported a referendum for the Springbrook Nature Center.

Given Fridley's history, this vote smacks of hypocrisy.

Several Watchdogs in attendance were of the opinion that councilmembers Billings and Bolkcom were particularly hostile and rude to referendum supporters.

2. Fridley Conflict of Interest?

Councilmember Steven Billings voted against the resolution and was reportedly hostile to stadium supporters. Now the Watchdog has learned that he has a personal relationship with Steve Novak, the County's chief lobbyist for the stadium plan!

State campaign finance documents show Billings listed as Novak's campaign chairman and treasurer. The Novak campaign is open and current, despite recent setbacks. Novak is a former state senator who was decisively rejected by DFL voters in a partisan primary when he attempted to reclaim the seat he abandoned in a failed attempt to get elected to Congress when Bruce Vento passed away.

To read the campaign document, visit:

www.cfboard.state.mn.us/campfin/rpdetail/rp11316.html

This close political relationship between a city councilmember and a registered lobbyist raises troubling questions and creates a perception of favoritism. Why didn't

Billings recuse himself from the vote? Why didn't he note this relationship publicly? What role did his relationship with Novak play in his vote? Who was Billings representing when he voted? His constituents? Steve Novak?

The Watchdog calls on Billings to address this issue immediately. Billings can be reached at 763-571-5457 or at stublins@msn.com with questions or concerns.

3. Scott LeDoux is Chillin' (at your expense).

As reported by the Watchdog on December 9th, Commissioner Scott LeDoux enjoyed a junket this week at the plush San Marcos resort, just a few months after sunning himself in Hawaii at taxpayer expense. As of this writing, the temperature in Chandler, Arizona is a pleasant 77 degrees.

LeDoux has ignored repeated requests to justify this travel. Interested citizens may contact him at 612-229-4269 or at Scott.Ledoux@co.anoka.mn.us with questions or concerns.

4. Question of the Week.

Is there a petition I can sign to support my right to vote on the sales tax increase?

Yes, there is! Visit www.ipetitions.com/campaigns/noanokastadiumtax/. This petition is sponsored by Taxpayers Against an Anoka County Vikings Stadium (www.noanokastadiumtax.com/). The Watchdog is not affiliated with this group but does have great respect for it.

5. Web Site Recommendation.

Visit www.reason.org. The Reason Foundation is another treasure trove of sound public policy data. In particular, the Reason Foundation absolutely obliterates the myth that light and commuter rail are good transit options.

E-mail Update 2/3/06

In this issue:

1. The Watchdog on TV!;
2. Another City to Consider Stadium Resolution?;
3. Fridley Stadium Resolution Vote – Un-Spinning the Spin;
4. Blaine City Council to Hear Vikings Proposal.

1. The Watchdog on TV!

The Watchdog, Harold Hamilton, was recently profiled on CTN News, cable channel 15 (www.ctnstudios.com/CTNNews/ctn_news_team.htm). Hamilton explained his motivation to create the Watchdog as well as his role in leading Micro Control Company. CTN News serves the Coon Rapids area. The program will air tonight at 5pm and 7pm. Tune in!

2. Another City to Consider Stadium Resolution?

The Watchdog has learned that yet another Anoka County city is close to bringing a stadium resolution up for a vote. Which city is it? Wouldn't the Anoka County Board and Steve Novak like to know! Stay tuned...

3. Fridley Stadium Resolution Vote – Un-Spinning the Spin.

There has been some confusion regarding exactly what went down with the Fridley stadium vote. There were actually two votes. The first vote killed the resolution in favor of a voter referendum. That vote was 4-1, with Councilmember Wolfe as the only one to vote in favor. A second resolution was offered by Councilmember Steve Billings that said nothing beyond encouraging citizens to contact government on issues of general concern. This resolution passed. This vote was nothing more than a fig leaf to cover some backsides and hide the fact that the council voted against following current law and recognize a citizen's legally protected right to vote. The Watchdog stands by its comments on this issue.

4. Blaine City Council to Hear Vikings Proposal.

Zygmunt Wilf's public relations juggernaut rolls into Blaine on February 16th. That evening, the city council will receive a briefing on the alleged benefits of a Vikings stadium. This meeting is open to the public. The meeting begins at 7:30 p.m. City Hall is located at 10801 Town Square Drive NE. Visit www.ci.blaine.mn.us/InsideCityHall/InsideCityHall_Home.htm for details.

2/3/06 AnokaCountyWatchdog.com

E-mail Update 2/10/06

In This Issue:

1. Northstar Commuter Rail Takes Another Step Backwards;
2. State Auditor Uncovers Northstar Irregularities;
3. Paranoia Will Destroy Ya;
4. Quote of the Week;
5. Don't Forget About Blaine;
6. Another Kudo for the Watchdog.

1. Northstar Commuter Rail Takes Another Step Backwards.

The Federal Transit Administration (FTA) released its latest evaluation of the Northstar commuter rail project this week and the results weren't pretty. Overall, Northstar received a mediocre "medium" rating. Even worse, Northstar's cost-effectiveness rating was "medium-low." The report also stated that a project needed at least a "medium" cost-effectiveness rating to be recommended for federal funding. AS OF TODAY, NORTHSTAR COMMUTER RAIL DOES NOT QUALIFY FOR FEDERAL FUNDING. Uh, what's plan "B" again? To see the FTA report, visit www.fta.dot.gov/18022_ENG_HTML.htm. The Watchdog will have detailed analysis of the report soon.

2. State Auditor Uncovers Northstar Irregularities.

The State Auditor released a report this week that found numerous disturbing irregularities with respect to Northstar "lobbying, legal, and communications" services. First, over \$4.3 MILLION has been spent to date on lobbyists, public relations and the like. That's your tax dollars, folks. The Auditor also discovered that one bureaucrat, Tim Yantos, charged nearly \$8,500 for meals to his government credit card on 222 separate occasions. Yantos is taking dinner reservations at tim.yantos@co.anoka.mn.us.

Yantos wasn't the only one abusing the system. An un-named division manager at the County charged \$320 for one lunch at the Oceanaire Seafood Room (www.theoceanaire.com/home.html) in Washington, D.C.

Don't you wish you could afford to live as well as Anoka County government?

Visit our web site to read the report and the Auditor's press release on this issue. Of course, the Watchdog will have detailed analysis of the Auditor's report soon.

3. Paranoia Will Destroy Ya.

The Anoka County Union ran an article this week in which Anoka County Commissioner Danford Erhart whined about the State Auditor doing her job in being

a watchdog for the taxpayers. He complained that the investigation was “politically motivated,” apparently by unnamed people and/or organizations. This, despite the fact that the Auditor’s office gave clear and convincing reasons for the investigation. Moreover, the results show that there was clearly a need for an investigation! Danford Erhart submitted not a shred of evidence to back up his claim. You can read the entire article by visiting our web site.

4. Quote of the Week.

"We have spent too much time dreaming about expensive rail projects that most Minnesotans will not use and will not improve congestion." – Tim Pawlenty (October 21, 2001).

5. Don't Forget About Blaine.

As noted last week, the Minnesota Vikings will be making a presentation to the Blaine City Council on February 16th regarding their stadium plan. The meeting starts at 7:30 p.m. and is open to the public. Visit www.ci.blaine.mn.us for details.

6. Another Kudo for the Watchdog.

The widely read Politics in Minnesota newsletter recently recognized the Watchdog with a news item in their weekly update. Said the news item “A new website has caused a stir in the north suburbs. www.anokacountywatchdog.com takes a tough stand against the new sales tax for the Vikings, rails against insiders at the county courthouse and challenges some of the extensive travels and spending that Anoka County Commissioners have been taking part in. Watch for more "Watchdog" sites as more taxpayer groups use the Internet to anonymously weigh in on their government.”

The only mistake is that this is not an anonymous site. Harold Hamilton is the proud operator of the Watchdog.

In This Issue:

1. The Watchdog on TV – Again;
2. Recommended Reading;
3. Blaine Council Meeting Report;
4. Practice Point;
5. Anoka County Asked to Produce Documentation.

1. The Watchdog on TV – Again.

Harold Hamilton recently appeared on the cable tv program “Off the Record” hosted by Maplewood Mayor Diana Longrie. The program appears in the Ramsey County area and is likely unavailable to most readers. But don’t despair! The Watchdog will be posting all of Hamilton’s appearances, in full, on our web site!

2. Recommended Reading.

The Cato Institute has published an excellent piece regarding the folly of rail transit. Titled “A Desire Named Streetcar”, this essay is another must-read for serious watchdogs. See it at http://cato.org/pub_display.php?pub_id=5345.

3. Blaine City Council Report.

Last evening, the Vikings made their public relations pitch to a willing Blaine City Council. The presentation was long on alleged benefits and short on details. Watchdogs were there in full force even though they were not given an opportunity to speak.

4. Practice Point.

It’s time for another practice point, another installment in our occasional series of tips to make you a more effective Watchdog. Today’s tip concerns contacting your elected officials. When doing so by email, always insert your zip code in the subject line after you type in the subject you’re writing about. This lets the elected official know where you live. This is especially important if that elected official represents you. Moreover, always put your name and address at the bottom. It lets them know your email is legit and not spam.

5. Anoka County Asked to Produce Documents.

A group of concerned citizens led by Dan Dobbson has made a Data Practices Act request to Anoka County regarding the County’s dealings with the Minnesota Vikings. The County, by law, must comply with the request. It will be interesting to see what those documents reveal about the County. Hopefully, there won’t be any of shameful things that were uncovered in the Northstar investigation. We don’t know how many more \$8,500 meal charges the taxpayers can afford.

2/17/06 AnokaCountyWatchdog.com

E-mail Update 2/24/06

In This Issue:

1. Economist to Speak on Vikings Stadium;
2. Vikings Financing Lacks Substance;
3. Watch Your Wallet, the Legislature is Coming!;
4. Anoka Commissioner Claims to Opposition to Stadium.

1. Economist to Speak on Vikings Stadium.

Dr. Art Rolnick, respected Federal Reserve economist, will be speaking on the economics of the Vikings stadium plan. The address will be March 7th at the Mermaid Events Center in Mounds View. This event will start at 12 Noon and is open to the public! Lunch is included and the cost is \$10 per person. The National Federation of Independent Business is the sponsor. To RSVP, call the NFIB at 651-293-1283.

2. Vikings Stadium Plan Lacks Substance.

Vikings owner Zygi Wilf has been dropping sound bites lately about the sweet benefits of a Vikings stadium. Remember, no detailed financing plan or economic impact statement has been released to the public. Watchdogs are critical thinkers. Demand that Wilf show a detailed financing plan and an economic impact study to back his claims. Wilf would like you to believe his PR guy and not his accountant.

3. Legislature to Convene.

The Minnesota legislature will begin the 2006 session March 1st. Stay tuned to the Watchdog for the latest on Northstar rail, the Vikings stadium, and other issues of interest.

4. Commissioner Claims No Opposition.

Watchdogs have been reporting that Anoka County Commissioner Danford Erhart is publicly stating that there is little opposition to the County's stadium plan that he can see. If you wish to change his mind, he can be reached at 763-323-5700.

2/24/06 AnokaCountyWatchdog.com

E-mail Update 3/3/06

In This Issue:

1. Precinct Caucuses;
2. Jim Hafner Strikes Again;
3. Duluth Faces Referendum – and Lives;
4. Brooklyn Center Favors Referendum;
5. Art Rolnick Event;
6. Northstar Commuter Coach Shortchanged;
7. Question of the Week.

1. Precinct Caucuses.

Next Tuesday, March 7th, is precinct caucus night. Every Watchdog, regardless of party affiliation, should be out that night attending their caucus. If you're not out there getting involved in your democracy, you have no right to complain about things. Get information about precinct caucuses at:

<http://www.sos.state.mn.us/home/index.asp?page=445>.

2. Jim Hafner Strikes Again.

Watchdog Hero Jim Hafner has written yet another outstanding essay regarding Anoka County's stadium financing plan. Hafner combines his CPA background with sharp wit to create truly enjoyable and informative reading. Check him out at

<http://www.startribune.com/142/story/271789.html>.

3. Duluth Faces Referendum – and Lives.

The City of Duluth this week passed a sales tax referendum increasing the city's food and beverage tax to a whopping 9.75%. Agree or disagree with this tax increase, it puts the lie to Anoka County's claim that voters won't tax themselves or are too uneducated to vote. Here is yet one more jurisdiction that respected the referendum process. Read the article:

<http://www.duluthsuperior.com/mld/duluthsuperior/news/13987021.htm>.

4. Brooklyn Center Favors Referendum.

This week, the Brooklyn Center City Council passed a resolution supporting their constituent's right to vote on the proposed sales tax for the Minnesota Twins stadium. The vote was 4-1 and provides more evidence that there is little support for disenfranchising voters. Remember that "we the people" thing? The resolution itself will be posted soon on the web site for reader review.

5. Art Rolnick Event.

Dr. Art Rolnick, respected Federal Reserve economist, will be speaking on the economics of the Vikings stadium plan. The address will be March 7th at the Mermaid Events Center in Mounds View. This event will start at 12 Noon and is open to the public! Lunch is included and the cost is \$10 per person. The National

Federation of Independent Business is the sponsor. To RSVP, call the NFIB at 651-293-1283.

6. Northstar Commuter Coach Shortchanged.

Watchdog Harold Hamilton today attended a meeting where an Anoka County official touted the success of the Northstar Commuter Coach, an express bus service running the Highway 10 corridor from Elk River to Minneapolis. The official noted that the busses are packed to over capacity. When Hamilton asked why more busses weren't added, the official said "no money." Really? So there's \$4.3 million available for lobbyists and PR for Northstar rail but no money to lease a bus? So there's enough money to pay for \$8,500 in fancy meals but no money for another bus? This is yet another case of Anoka County demonstrating not a money problem but a priority problem. If the County got serious about the commuter coach, perhaps we wouldn't be spending millions to pitch a \$300 million train. Visit

<http://www.commutercoach.org/>

7. Question of the Week.

"I want get active in opposing a Vikings stadium? How?" The Watchdog's mission is to explore public policy and educate. If you're interested in getting involved in direct action activities regarding the Vikings stadium, visit

www.noanokastadiumtax.com.

3/3/06 AnokaCountyWatchdog.com

E-mail Update 3/10/06

In This Issue:

1. Federal Reserve Economist Debunks Stadium Myth;
2. 9,000 Jobs – Where's the Beef?
3. Northstar – Here We Go Again;
4. Northstar to get Hearing;
5. Your County Tax Dollars at Work;
6. Watchdog has the Facts, County Doesn't;

1. Federal Reserve Economist Debunks Stadium Myth.

This past Tuesday, Federal Reserve economist Art Rolnick delivered an address to a standing-room-only crowd regarding the economic value of taxpayer subsidized sports stadiums. In essence, Dr. Rolnick stated flatly that these stadiums produce "zero economic gain" for society. The Watchdog videotaped this address and will have Rolnick's remarks available on the web site very soon. Rolnick also noted his strong support for a voter referendum on the sales tax increase to fund the stadium.

2. 9,000 Jobs – Where's the Beef?

Lately, the Wilf Spin Machine has been touting "9,000 new jobs" as one benefit of his stadium plan. We ask, how do you figure? It's curious and troubling that Wilf has not released any methodology for this wild claim. Don't believe this number until you see some math. Moreover, how many of these are really "new" jobs and not just jobs moved from one area to another. Here's some food for thought: 9,000 jobs is the equivalent of 45 Wal-Mart stores, a huge number indeed.

3. Northstar – Here We Go Again.

Apparently, the Federal Transit Administration recently sent a letter to the state giving permission for Northstar to move into final design phase, a move that has been spun into unqualified good news about the project. The Watchdog has not seen the letter but has read the NCTA press release. First, final design phase means nothing for federal funding. A Full Funding Grant Agreement is what is needed and the FTA has not yet granted this agreement. Second, there is still no agreement with the railroad, a huge hurdle indeed. Third, Northstar must maintain its "medium" rating, something it may not be able to do. Check the web site for more information on Northstar.

4. Northstar to Get Hearing.

The House Transportation Finance Committee will hold a hearing on Northstar on March 16th at 12:30 pm in the Basement Hearing Room at the Capitol. Call 651-296-2146 for more information.

5. Your County Tax Dollars at Work.

Anoka County has a "Transportation Management Organization" office that funds a glossy, full-color newsletter that is full of feel-good articles about riding bikes to work and taking "commuter challenges." What's the budget for this newsletter? Just days after Anoka County sent threat letters to human service employees telling them that their jobs are at risk, we see this. Yet again, Anoka County demonstrates that it has one heck of a serious priorities problem. We may not be able to protect abused children, but at least we'll be able to take the commuter challenge!

http://www.co.anoka.mn.us/v2_dept/highways/tmo/pdf/TMONewsletterWinter06.pdf

6. Watchdog has the Facts, County Doesn't.

Anoka County officials have adopted the tactic of criticizing the Watchdog as being inaccurate. As you know, the Watchdog is fact-based, with supporting documentation posted. In response, Harold Hamilton sent County employee Steve Novak a letter over a month ago challenging the County to tell him exactly where the Watchdog doesn't have the facts. To date, no response. Check the web site for more on this subject.

3/10/06 AnokaCountyWatchdog.com

E-mail Update 3/17/06

In This Issue:

1. Federal Reserve Economist Art Rolnick on the Watchdog;
2. Philadelphia Study is Bunk;
3. Anoka Hennepin School District Gets PC;
4. Feds Give Northstar Tepid Approval;
5. Northstar Rail Hearing;
6. Catching the Legislature on the Web.

Happy St. Pat's Day, all!

1. Federal Reserve Economist Art Rolnick on the Watchdog!

Art Rolnick's remarks to the NFIB regarding the economics of sports stadiums are now on the web! Check out AnokaCountyWatchdog.com to see and hear Dr. Rolnick debunk, point by point, the argument that a heavily subsidized stadium is good for you. Unless, of course, your name is Zygi Wilf.

2. Philadelphia Study is Bunk.

Vikings stadium proponents have frequently pointed to a study by the Philadelphia Federal Reserve to support their claims of stadium benefits. This study is bunk, plain and simple. Even the study's own authors have admitted that their methodology was flawed. View Dr. Rolnick's comments on this study at AnokaCountyWatchdog.com.

3. Anoka Hennepin School District Gets PC.

The following email was distributed to teachers in the Anoka Hennepin school district last week by an administrator from the central office:

It was brought to my attention this morning that Weekly Reader Issue 21, Vol. 8 has some images that could be quite disturbing for our Elementary ESL Students. There is an article that speaks about illegal aliens within our country, and includes images of police preventing Mexican families from crossing over the border to the United States. I would like to recommend that this issue be skipped due to the imagery and activities (reading a graph to see how many illegal aliens are in Texas is but one example). Thank you for your attention to this matter. Have a great day everyone!

Good heavens! We wouldn't want our students to see law enforcement actually enforcing our laws. Moreover, who could fathom the thought of students reading and comprehending graphs! It's pap like this that undermines confidence in our public schools.

4. Feds Give Northstar Tepid Approval.

The Watchdog finally got its hands on the infamous Federal Transit Administration letter that gives Northstar permission to move to final design. It should come as no

surprise that the letter is not nearly as optimistic as the Northstar PR folks would have you believe.

First, the FTA noted that the federal share of capital funding will capped at a certain amount. Translation: Cost over runs will not be the federal government's problem. Will the state then pick up over runs? Who? Yet another critical, unanswered question about this hard luck project.

Second, the FTA, in bold face type, noted that the project would not be eligible for federal funding until three conditions are met:

1. Compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act;
2. A fully executed agreement with BNSF railway;
3. Meeting FTA cost effectiveness criteria.

None of these three criteria has been met to date. Watch the web site for a full analysis soon.

5. Northstar Rail Hearing.

The House Transportation Finance committee will analyze the latest Northstar rail data at a committee hearing next Tuesday. The hearing will start at 12:30 p.m. and be held in room 10 of the State Office Building. This meeting is open to the public. Visit www.house.mn or call 651-296-2146 for details.

6. Catch the Legislature on the Web.

Can't make it to Saint Paul for a hearing? Don't despair, Watchdog! You can see legislative hearings live on the Internet! Go to www.house.mn and look for the "Audio and Video" column on the left hand side of the page.

E-mail Update 3/23/06

In This Issue:

1. Northstar Hearing at Capitol;
2. Vikings Stadium Hearing at Capitol;
3. County Commissioners on the Road Again;
4. Art Rolnick Video Now Posted;
5. Watchdog Hero

1. Northstar Hearing at the Capitol.

Tuesday afternoon, the House Transportation Finance Committee took testimony regarding the \$60 million bonding request for Northstar commuter rail. First, State Auditor Pat Anderson took Anoka County and the NCDCA to task for shoddy accounting, a lack of accountability, and the sheer waste of spending \$4.3 million for lobbying and PR work. After Rep. Kathy Tingelstad and her allies recounted the all-too-familiar Northstar "talking points", our own Watchdog Harold Hamilton took the stand to present the committee with his observations regarding the folly of Northstar. Not one member of the committee challenged Hamilton's facts or observations. Next, the committee will assign a priority to Northstar funding which will serve as advice to the Capital Investments Committee, which will make the final call on the bonding request.

2. Vikings Stadium Hearing.

Last Friday, the House Governmental Operations Committee, chaired by Rep. Kathy Tingelstad, heard over two hours of testimony regarding the Vikings stadium plan. Proponents and opponents were both heard, including Watchdog Hero Jim Hafner. No action was taken on the bill. Stay tuned for updates on the progress of this bill at the Capitol.

3. County Commissioners on the Road Again.

They don't seem to care. Despite taxpayer outrage, County Commissioners continue to travel on your dime with no accountability. Commissioner Margaret Langfeld just returned from Washington, D.C. Why? We don't know. What value did taxpayers receive for this expenditure? We don't know. Indications are already that 2006 will be another large travel year for commissioners.

4. Art Rolnick Video Now Posted.

Federal Reserve economist Art Rolnick's excellent speech regarding the Vikings stadium and other public subsidies is now posted on the web site. If you didn't make the March 7th luncheon, do yourself a favor and watch this video. Let Rolnick take you to school on the economics of subsidies!

5. Watchdog Hero.

It's time for another Watchdog Hero award! Mr. Dan Rebek of Coon Rapids wrote an outstanding editorial in the March 21 edition of the Star Tribune. Dan, thank you

for your contribution to the public discourse on this issue! You can access the editorial by clicking [here](#).

3/23/06 AnokaCountyWatchdog.com

E-mail Update 3/31/06

In This Issue:

1. Art Rolnick Coming to a Cable Outlet Near You;
2. Vikings Bill Stalls Out;
3. How Much Was That Subsidy Again?;
4. Northstar Gets Tort Immunity;
5. Government as Landlord;

1. Art Rolnick Coming to a Cable Outlet Near You.

Federal Reserve economist Art Rolnick's speech on the Vikings stadium proposal is currently being distributed to Anoka County cable outlets. Columbia Heights has already put the speech on their program calendar. Look for the debut at 8 pm this coming Monday evening. If you don't see Rolnick's speech on your local Anoka County cable outlet, please let us know.

2. Vikings Bill Stalls Out.

The Vikings stadium bill is moving nowhere in the Minnesota legislature. In fact, no vote has been taken or is even scheduled in any committee. This lack of action is a sure sign that the proposal has little support among legislators and the public. The Watchdog has been hearing from reliable sources that the proposal will be re-tooled in order to try to jump-start the process. You can view the current legislation by visiting [this link](#).

3. How Much Was That Subsidy Again?

Watchdog Matt Heimdahl has recently reviewed Minnesota House research documents as well as Anoka County documents regarding the debt that is proposed to be issued for the Vikings stadium. Heimdahl's analysis shows that the total cost to the taxpayers is a whopping \$960 million over the life of the bond issue. Anoka County responds by saying that they will pay off the bonds early, thus saving money. Sorry if we're a bit skeptical about that promise!

4. Northstar Gets Tort Immunity.

Last week, a House committee approved a bill by Rep. Kathy Tingelstad (R-Andover) that would give the Burlington Northern Santa Fe (BNSF) railway sweeping lawsuit immunity while operating Northstar rail. Basically, BNSF would be immune from punitive damages in a lawsuit arising from accidents. Punitive damages are awarded in cases where it is shown that someone has shown a high degree of disregard for the safety of others. While the Watchdog supports lawsuit reform, this immunity is breathtaking and unprecedented. Never in Minnesota history has a private business engaged in a dangerous activity been given this type protection. Railroad accidents

are common and it is often the result of reckless behavior, such as engineers high on drugs. Read the bill [here](#).

5. Government as Landlord.

A bill authored by Rep. Andy Westerberg (R-Blaine) clears the way for the National Sports Center (NSC) in Blaine to start a development project on government land that includes a 400 room hotel, an IMAX theater, and other retail businesses. In supporting the bill, NSC officials stated that this type activity is “needed” in Blaine. If there were truly a market for this activity, the private sector would step up and make the investment. What expertise does the NSC have in land development? Moreover, there is no guarantee that this development won’t offer below market rates that undercut private markets. It is always troubling when government gets into competition with the private sector. Government has no margins, unlimited taxing resources, and no need to pay attention to market constraints. Read the bill [here](#).

E-mail Update 4/7/06

In This Issue:

1. Watchdog Influences Vikings Legislation;
2. Dan Erhart – Sore Loser;
3. Anoka County has a Priority Problem – Again!;
4. Northstar Funding Cut Sends a Message;
5. Tracking Legislation is Easier Than You Think.

1. Watchdog Influences Vikings Legislation.

Watchdog Hero Jim Hafner testified this week in opposition to the Vikings stadium plan. Hafner, the only stadium opponent to address Senators, spoke to a hearing of the Senate State and Local Government Operations Committee. During his expert testimony, Hafner suggested an amendment to the Vikings bill that would prevent local elected officials from serving on the stadium board of directors. The committee adopted this amendment! All Watchdogs should congratulate Jim Hafner on his selfless efforts on our behalf. He's truly the "David" to Zygi Wilf's "Goliath."

2. Dan Erhart – Sore Loser.

Career politician and County Commissioner Dan Erhart was in attendance at the committee hearing mentioned above. A fellow Watchdog reports that Jim Hafner approached Erhart before and after the hearing and offered his hand to Erhart. On both occasions, Erhart refused. Talk about anti-social! Erhart was apparently peeved about Hafner's successful amendment. With his surly attitude, Erhart is well suited for a second career at the IRS, airport security, or any HMO.

3. Anoka County has a Priority Problem – Again!

The Coon Rapids Herald reports in its April 7th edition that the County will be eliminating or cutting a number of human services programs. Watchdogs are quite familiar with the big spending ways of Anoka County with respect to junkets, commissioner pay and reimbursement, public relations teams, lobbyists, and meals at expensive restaurants. The Watchdog asks if the county commissioners will be reducing any of these expenditures to help restore program cuts.

4. Northstar Funding Cuts Send a Message.

Northstar lobbyists have been roaming the halls of the Capitol for weeks, shilling for a further \$60 million in bonding for the project. During committee testimony, these hired guns have said that anything less than the full \$60 million isn't good enough. This week, the House version of the bonding bill allocated \$10 million less than that to Northstar. Knowledgeable sources say that bonding Chairman Dan Dorman (R-Albert Lea) is growing impatient with Northstar and the excuse making regarding the lack of progress, especially negotiations with the BNSF

railroad. There seems to be an emerging consensus among legislators that if a deal cannot be reached with the railroad very soon, this scarce funding should go elsewhere where it can be used immediately. The Watchdog wonders why a deal wasn't worked out with the railroad BEFORE one dime of funding was committed.

5. Tracking Legislation is Easier Than You Think.

Many Watchdogs want to know how they can track legislation happening at the Capitol. The easiest way is to visit the House and Senate web sites, both of which have "bill tracker" features that allow one to follow the progress of bills. These web sites also have a number of other features like streaming video of committee and floor meetings, calendars, and sign up lists that send you an email regarding committee agendas. Visit www.house.mn and www.senate.leg.state.mn.us/.

4/7/06 AnokaCountyWatchdog.com

E-mail Update 4/13/06

In This Issue:

1. Legislature Ignores Reality, Throws \$50 million at Northstar;
2. Vikings Stadium Comatose;
3. Rolnick Speech Available to You – For Free!

1. Legislature Ignores Reality, Throws \$50 million at Northstar.

Yesterday, the Minnesota House approved another \$50 million in bonds for Northstar commuter rail. The Senate has already approved \$60 million this year. It is likely that the full \$60 million request will be granted, meaning that the state is into Northstar for \$97.5 million. It is important to note that all this money is debt that must be repaid, meaning that the total costs will be much higher when interest is factored in.

The Watchdog has previously analyzed the March 8, 2006 FTA letter that allowed the project to enter into final design. (Visit the web site to read this analysis.) During floor debate, legislators used that letter as a basis to question Northstar chief advocate, Rep. Kathy Tingelstad, about the merits of the project and the concerns of the federal government.

CONCERN #1. The FTA letter states not once but twice that the federal government will not be responsible for cost overruns. When asked who will absorb cost overruns and to what extent, Tingelstad admitted that there was no plan and engaged in a bit of fantasy by claiming “We don’t anticipate cost overruns.”

CONCERN #2. The FTA laid out three conditions for federal funding. The first was that all Northstar stations had to be ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) compliant. Today, the stations as designed are not ADA compliant. Moreover, no one has any idea how much these compliance measures will increase costs.

CONCERN #3. The FTA next demands that there must be a fully executed agreement with the BNSF railway to use their tracks before federal funding will be released. To date, negotiations have gone nowhere, despite many years at the bargaining table. Rep. MaryLiz Holberg offered a successful amendment that will redirect Northstar funds to other projects if final design is not complete by September 30 of this year.

CONCERN #4. Finally, the FTA has demanded that the project have a cost effectiveness rating of at least “medium” to advance. Tingelstad engaged in

some obfuscation on the House floor when she repeatedly referred to the project's overall rating of "medium" when questioned about the project's cost effectiveness rating of "medium low," which is insufficient to gain federal funding.

Despite Tingelstad's admissions that the project lacks any cost overrun protections and the admission that NONE of the federal conditions have been met, the House approved funding anyway. The whole sorry episode confirms the axiom that people should be suspicious when government funds something that no private investor would touch. Your tax dollars at work!

2. Vikings Stadium Comatose.

The Vikings and their California-based PR firm have been spending big dollars in an attempt to push their corporate welfare stadium plan through the legislature.

So far, the team has accomplished nothing beyond a pity hearing in an inconsequential Senate policy committee. Many legislators report that they have received little constituent contact in favor of the stadium plan. The Watchdog cautions, however, that the tides shift very fast at the Capitol and there is a lot of time left for the Vikings and their army of lobbyists to "persuade" legislators to subsidize their private, for profit venture.

3. Rolnick Speech Available to You – For Free!

The Watchdog has DVD copies of Doctor Art Rolnick's Vikings stadium speech available to you, free of charge. In this DVD, Rolnick thoroughly debunks the argument that taxpayer subsidized pro sports stadiums are an economic boon.

Send your name and address to Harold@anokacountywatchdog.com. Limit one per person.

E-mail Update 4/24/06

In This Issue:

1. Lino Lakes Wants Referendum (At Least the Taxpayers Do);
2. Northstar Cost Go Up (Again!);
3. Strategic Misrepresentation.

1. Lino Lakes Wants Referendum (At Least the Taxpayers Do).

Well, at least the citizens do! Watchdogs will recall that the Lino Lakes City Council, on a 3-2 vote, defeated a resolution in favor of a referendum regarding the sales tax increase for the Vikings stadium. As a part of that debate, the council agreed to poll the citizens regarding the referendum and the results are in!

The poll, conducted by Decision Resources Ltd., shows that 84% of Lino Lakes citizens favor a referendum before the sales tax increase could be implemented. 62% strongly support a referendum while 22% support the referendum. Only 14% of those polled oppose a referendum.

As time marches on, it becomes more and more apparent that Anoka County citizens strongly support their legal right to vote on this proposed sales tax increase. Will their elected county officials listen?

2. Northstar Cost Go Up (Again!).

Just as the sun rises every morning, the birds fly south for the winter, and the seasons change, the cost of the Northstar commuter rail project rise. The latest increase pushes the cost of the project to just over \$307 million, whopping \$42 million increase since last November. The projected cost of the project has increased twice in the past four months. Sadly, things have moved in exactly the wrong direction, as nearly all rail projects are apt to do. Remember the days when Northstar was an 82-mile project with a projected cost of \$265 million? Today, the route is 42-miles and the cost is \$307 million and rising.

The latest cost increase is \$18 million. The federal government and state government will not eat this cost increase. Instead, county taxpayers (primarily Anoka) will absorb the cost increase. County rail costs are collected through a property tax levy, and we wonder why property taxes are so high!

Moreover, the latest cost increase pushes the project's cost-effectiveness rating ever closer to the bottom tier ranking of "low." Right now, the project sits at a dismal rating of "medium low." Both cost effectiveness rankings are insufficient to obtain federal funding. Again, the project is moving in the wrong direction.

3. Strategic Misrepresentation.

In addition to the massive cost increase, there is the matter of concealing the cost increase from the legislature. State officials knew of the cost increase on April 6th yet failed to convey that information to Minnesota House members before they considered Northstar's \$60 million budget request days later. House bonding chairman Dan Dorman (R-Albert Lea) was quoted as saying there is no question that House members should have been informed. This type of behavior is typical when it comes to securing funding for rail projects. Academics who study the issue even have a term for it: "Strategic Misrepresentation." Most of us simply call it by another name.

4/24/06 AnokaCountyWatchdog.com

E-mail Update 4/28/06

In This Issue:

1. Government Lobbying Expenses Skyrocket;
2. Anoka County Lobbying Expenses;
3. Anoka-Hennepin Schools Spend for Lobbyists;
4. Vikings on the March;

1. Government Lobbying Expenses Skyrocket.

The Office of the State Auditor has released its annual report on lobbying expenditures by local units of government. Not surprisingly, the Auditor's findings raised a number of concerns.

First, local units of government spent \$7.8 million in 2005 lobbying other units of government, all to spend our hard-earned tax dollars. Moreover, this represents a 25% increase over the amount spent in 2004. "Expenditures skyrocketing 25% in one year is especially alarming," noted the Auditor. The Auditor also found reason to believe that lobbying expenses are underreported.

2. Anoka County Lobbying Expenses.

Of course, Anoka County was once again one of the biggest spenders. Among the lowlights for Anoka County taxpayers:

- a. Only nine local units of government spent more than \$100,000 in 2005 on lobbying. Anoka County accounted for not one but two of these nine (the County itself and its Housing and Redevelopment Authority).
- b. Anoka County actually has three units that pay for lobbyists (Anoka County, Anoka County HRA, and Anoka County Rail Authority). Of course, there is only one funding source, the Anoka County taxpayer.
- c. Anoka County has two employee lobbyists who earn a combined salary of over \$242,000 annually.
- d. Anoka County also hired contract lobbyists ("hired guns") who charged the County over \$275,000 in 2005.
- e. Anoka County spent over \$157,000 on membership dues in 2005 to organizations who hire their own lobbyists.

A full update on the Auditor's report will be available at www.anokacountywatchdog.com soon!!!

- 3. Anoka-Hennepin Schools Spend for Lobbyists.

The Anoka-Hennepin Schools paid \$75,000 in 2005 for contract lobbyists. The District also spent \$27,785 on membership dues to organizations that also lobby. How many teachers could be hired for \$100,000?

4. Vikings on the March.

The newspaper has been filled with talk of the Twins stadium bill. Watchdogs shouldn't lose sight of the fact that the Vikings and Anoka County are stalking the halls of the Capitol everyday, looking for ways to get a Vikings stadium passed. Rep. Andy Westerberg (R-Blaine) wanted desperately to attach his Vikings bill to the Twins bill that passed the House. Speaker Steve Sviggum and House Republicans would have none of it and forced Westerberg to back down. However, the Senate Tax Committee today is considering attaching a Vikings stadium to the Twins stadium bill. Stay involved and make your voice heard!

4/28/06 AnokaCountyWatchdog.com

E-mail Update 5/5/06

In This Issue:

1. Vikings Stadium Update;
2. Anoka County Cuts Health Programs, Keeps Perks;
3. How Much Does Your City/County/School District Spend?;
4. County Commissioner Getting Too Cozy with Lobbyist?

1. Vikings Stadium Update.

In the House: The bill sponsored by Rep. Andy Westerberg (HF 2294) passed the Governmental Operations and Veteran's Affairs Committee this past Wednesday on a 13-9 vote. An amendment to allow a voter referendum on the sales tax increase failed by one vote. The bill moves on in the committee process.

In the Senate: Senator Steve Kelly's bill (HF 2480) funds both a Twins and Vikings stadium with a .5% increase in the sales tax across the seven county Metro Area. After the stadiums are paid off, the increased tax would be used to fund mass transit. Using procedural motions, the bill was brought to the Senate floor where a vote is expected Monday.

2. Anoka County Cuts Health Programs, Keeps Perks.

The Coon Rapids Herald published an article today reporting that Anoka County will cut \$3 million from its social services and mental health program. These programs, among other things, protect abused and neglected children. As usual, the County refused to take any responsibility and blamed the cuts on Washington and Saint Paul. It's important to remember that the counties are charged with administering health and human services. In other words, a core function of county government is to provide these crucial programs.

The Watchdog recommends the following budget reductions (based on 2005 spending) to help cover the \$3 million shortfall and keep these needed programs fully funded:

TABLE FOLLOWS BELOW:

Activity	Amount
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Lobbying Related Expenses	\$687,544
County Commissioner Reimbursements	\$19,261
County Commissioner Travel	\$34,252
County "Mega Projects" Fund	\$500,000
Anoka County Dues to NCDA	\$7,526,754
Clip Tim Yantos' Government Credit Card*	\$8,428
TOTAL	\$8,776,239

(* This spending was over a period of four-plus years on food and beverage.)

As you can see, the County can cover the shortfall, almost times three, by simply eliminating non-essential spending. This exercise took approximately 6 minutes.

Anoka Board Chairwoman Margaret Langfeld can be reached at:

MLangfeld@co.anoka.mn.us

763-323-5700.

3. How Much Does Your City/County/School District Spend?

The Office of the State Auditor has a wonderful resource that allows you to see exactly how much your local units of government are spending and where that spending ranks. All Watchdogs should take advantage of this great resource:

1. County Spending: <http://www.osa.state.mn.us/Search/CountySearch.aspx>.
2. City Spending: <http://www.osa.state.mn.us/Search/CitySearch.aspx>.
3. School District Spending:
<http://www.osa.state.mn.us/DistrictSearch/Intro.aspx>.

4. County Commissioner Getting Too Cozy with Lobbyist?

Which Anoka County Commissioner has been getting cozy with a Vikings

lobbyist? Is this behavior ethical? Is it legal? Stay tuned. The Watchdog has

exclusive information forthcoming!

E-mail Update 5/12/06

In This Issue:

1. Northstar Rail: Increasing Costs, Shrinking Benefits;
2. Getting Away With Murder (Railroad Style);
3. Vikings Stadium Update;
4. Vikings Call an Audible?;
5. Tingelstad & Abeler See the Light!.

1. Northstar Rail: Increasing Costs, Shrinking Benefits.

This week, an announcement was made that an agreement has been reached between the government and BNSF Railway to allow Northstar rail to operate on BNSF tracks. The cost of the agreement is just over \$107 million. As part of the agreement, the government agreed to slash the number of daily trains by 33%, from 18 a day to just 12. First, the distance was cut from 80 miles to 40. Now, the number of trains is reduced by 1/3. Yet the costs continue to skyrocket. See www.anokacountywatchdog.com for a full report.

2. Getting Away With Murder (Railroad Style).

Also this week, the legislature passed a bill that would essentially immunize BNSF Railway from lawsuits if they injure or kill anyone while operating commuter rail trains. Instead, it is the taxpayers who would likely pick up the tab. Railroading is an inherently dangerous activity that has killed and injured many thousands of people. Letting the BNSF off scot free while sticking the taxpayers with the bill is simply a bad idea. See www.anokacountywatchdog.com for a full report.

3. Vikings Stadium Update.

A conference committee began meetings today to attempt to iron out differences between the Twins bill passed by the House and the Twins/Vikings/Busses/Trains bill passed by the Senate. The conference committee is comprised of 5 House members and 5 Senate members. All are thought to oppose the Vikings stadium being included with the Twins stadium with the exception of Sen. Don Betzold, chief author of the Vikings bill. Rep. Andy Westerberg (R-Blaine) was left off the conference committee and said he was "frustrated as hell" over it.

4. Vikings Call an Audible?

Rumor at the Capitol is that the Vikings are re-tooling their stadium proposal to mirror the Twins proposal that passed the House. Apparently, the Vikings want the County to scale back the sales tax increase to .5% from the current .75% proposal. Moreover, the \$115 million in state funding would be dropped. This would mean that the retractable roof would be dropped from the plan.

5. Tingelstad & Abeler See the Light!

Kudos to state Reps Kathy Tingelstad (R-Andover) and Jim Abeler (R-Anoka) who this week publicly announced that they now support a voter referendum for the proposed Vikings stadium sales tax increase. They are to be applauded for their commitment to follow the law. (We'll leave aside for a moment the inconsistency of opposing a referendum for the Twins stadium.)

5/12/06 AnokaCountyWatchdog.com

E-mail Update 5/22/06

LEGISLATIVE SESSION REVIEW (PART 1)

In This Issue:

1. Vikings Fail to Make the Cut;
2. Money Can't Buy You Love (Or a Stadium);
3. Why the Vikings Failed;
4. Stadium Future;
5. Special Thanks.

Editor's Note: This update is devoted exclusively to the Vikings stadium issue, an issue of extreme importance to taxpayers. The next email update will explore other issues from the recently completed 2006 session.

1. Vikings Fail to Make the Cut.

Although the legislature was in a stadium-funding mood, the Minnesota Vikings were the sole entrant in the stadium sweepstakes to fail. Both the University of Minnesota and the Minnesota Twins convinced the legislature to approve their stadium plans. The Vikings are left to try to convince the 2007 legislature to give them a subsidy.

2. Money Can't Buy You Love (Or a Stadium).

The Vikings stadium didn't fail for a lack of lobbyists, money, or access to the halls of power. A review of campaign finance documents reveals the extent of the Vikings' efforts to secure taxpayer funding for their private enterprise.

The Vikings report seven lobbyists in their employ (<http://www.cfboard.state.mn.us/lobby/assclobb.html#M>), not counting those who also lobbied the issue on behalf of Anoka County.

Since 2002, the Vikings have spent nearly \$1.75 million lobbying the legislature (http://www.cfboard.state.mn.us/lobby/LobPrincipalExpend_Current.html). This number does not include totals from the recently completed session.

3. Why the Vikings Failed.

Given the massive lobbying effort, it's a wonder that the Vikings walked away empty handed from a generous, stadium-happy legislature. Why was that?

First, the Vikings and Anoka County formed a shotgun marriage that fell apart at the altar. The public bickering and backbiting between the two sapped the stadium plan of energy better spent supporting the stadium. Sen. Leo Foley noted "They just weren't, and aren't prepared very well."

Second, the Vikings aggressive, negative public relations efforts turned off decision makers. In particular, the public comments of the Vikings' chief lobbyist, Lester

Bagley weren't well received. "Bagley really burned bridges and turned legislators against the project, observed one legislator. Bagley was the stadium opponent's best friend."

Third, there was a feeling that the Vikings just didn't wait their turn. Said another legislator, "There was a feeling that the Vikings hadn't been through the process; that they were trying to shove to the front of the line"

4. Stadium Future.

The future of a new, publicly subsidized football stadium is in serious doubt. Elections this fall in Anoka County may give the boot to stadium supporters, causing Blaine, Anoka County, or both to become less interested in another marriage with Zygi Wilf. Moreover, the 2007 legislature is likely to be in a less generous stadium-funding mood. Stadium sessions come along only about once every 20 years. Finally, memories of Lester Bagley's bridge burning will linger well beyond 2006. He will likely discover that bad mouthing the governor and the legislature isn't a good way to win friends.

5. Special Thanks.

The Watchdog extends a special thanks and recognition to Watchdog Hero Jim Hafner. Hafner spent many hours analyzing the various stadium proposals, testifying at the Capitol, and writing essays exposing the risk to taxpayers. He was one of many unpaid regular citizens who fought off the million-dollar effort to buy a stadium.

E-mail Update 6/5/06

In This Issue:

1. Langfeld Avoids Voters;
2. Session Wrap-Up: Northstar Rail;
3. Watchdog Makes Prediction;
4. Watchdog Hits Milestone.

1. Langfeld Avoids Voters.

Anoka County Commissioner and Board Chair Margaret Langfeld has announced that she will not seek re-election this fall. Langfeld becomes the second elected official involved in pushing the Vikings stadium to step down. State Representative Andy Westerberg (R-Blaine) has also announced he will not seek re-election in November.

Taxpayer funded stadium legislation appears to act as a sort of political kryptonite. In 2004, state Representative Doug Stang (R-Cold Spring) was chief author of the Twins stadium. He chose not to seek re-election that fall. Rumors are also circulating that state Representative Brad Finstad (R-New Ulm), who carried the successful Twins stadium bill this year, will not seek re-election.

To read a Pioneer Press article on Langfeld click [here](#).

2. Session Wrap-Up: Northstar Rail.

It has to be admitted that Northstar rail ran the table at the Capitol this session. The \$1 billion bonding bill contained \$60 million for Northstar, pushing the state nearly \$100 million into the kitty for the project. Moreover, the BNSF railway was given nearly blanket immunity from lawsuits should a Northstar train ever injure or kill anyone. It was the first time in Minnesota history that a private, for-profit business was given this kind of sweeping protection. What's even more troubling is the spotty safety record of the railroading industry. It's not as if commuter rail has been free of derailments or collisions.

The Watchdog has already reported on the lawsuit immunity issue. Visit the web site and visit the "Northstar Rail" section to read the analysis.

3. Watchdog Makes Prediction.

Reliable sources are already reporting that the Northstar commuter rail project will fail to meet the federal government's minimum cost effectiveness index (CEI) rating. Meeting the CEI rating is mandatory to receive federal funding, called a full funding grant agreement. Not meeting the rating is a clear and objective indication that the project is a failure.

Having said that, the Watchdog makes the following prediction: Northstar rail will apply to the feds for a waiver from the CEI criteria and ask for federal funding anyway. You heard it here first.

4. Watchdog Hits Milestone.

Over the Memorial Day weekend, the Watchdog web site surpassed 10,000 hits, a remarkable feat, considering the short amount of time the web site has been up and running. There is little doubt that there is a large segment of the public interested in hearing from someone other than government, special interests, and the mainstream media. We thank you for your support and patronage and look forward to continuing to serve you, the hardworking taxpayer.

6/5/06 AnokaCountyWatchdog.com

E-mail Update 6/12/06

In This Issue:

Watchdog Special Analysis! This position paper, first published almost three weeks ago, has received an overwhelming positive response. Numerous requests have been made to publish this paper as an email update.

1. Anoka County is a Poor Choice for a Vikings Stadium.

By Harold E. Hamilton

VIKINGS POSITION PAPER #10

ISSUE: ANOKA COUNTY IS NOT THE PLACE TO BUILD A STADIUM

Whether one thinks the Vikings deserve a taxpayer-financed stadium or not, it should be apparent that Anoka County is not a viable location for a professional football stadium. Anoka County simply does not have the population, retail base, or infrastructure to support such a stadium.

1. Sales Tax.

Anoka County relies upon a whopping .75% increase in the sales tax to finance the county's \$280 million share for a stadium. This proposed tax is five times greater than the tax imposed upon Hennepin County residents to pay for the Twins stadium. This tax is impractical and likely to fail for a number of reasons. A comparison with Hennepin County is instructive.

First, Anoka County only has a population of 319,000 (2004 census estimate). Hennepin County has a population of over 1.1 million (2004 census estimate), making Hennepin County nearly four times as large as Anoka County, thus spreading the tax over a larger base.

Second, Anoka County simply does not have the wealth to support this large sales tax. Since this is a sales tax proposal, a look at the retail sales base is helpful. Anoka County has a retail sales base of approximately \$2 million (1997 census) while Hennepin County has a retail sales base of over \$14 million (1997 census), seven times more than Anoka County. Again, a county like Hennepin has a larger base to support a sales tax increase that Anoka County simply cannot match.

Third, those who live in a particular county do not necessarily pay the local sales tax. People who come into a particular county to work, for example, can help locals defray the tax burden. In this respect, Anoka County is in an especially weak position. 81% of workers who live in Anoka County commute outside the County to work each day. Anoka County experiences an out-migration of workers each day, thereby pushing the sales tax burden onto locals. Hennepin County, conversely, experiences an in-migration of commuters who will no doubt defray the local burden by paying the sales tax while they are in the County during the work week.

2. Transportation Infrastructure.

The proposed stadium site in Blaine lacks any kind of transportation infrastructure to support the 70,000 plus people who would cram into the city on Sundays during the fall. First, the city has almost no mass transit whatsoever. It is interesting to observe that supporters of the Twins stadium frequently note that both the Northstar commuter rail and the Hiawatha light rail will be available to serve Twins fans. If mass transit is critical to moving fans, then Blaine is really behind the curve. Second, the road and bridge system around the stadium site is lacking as well. Anoka County has low-balled the projected I-35W improvement costs at \$115 million. State officials peg the cost closer to \$167 million. Moreover, no plans exist to accelerate Highway 65 improvements, a route that would no doubt be used by some football fans. This highway is crowded seven days a week now and could end up gridlocked if even a few thousand fans attempted to reach the stadium by that route.

Some may argue that all these problems can be fixed with taxpayer money. That's true, but all government funding comes at an expense that must first be identified and then coupled with a revenue source. Likely, other transportation projects would be cut or scaled back to accommodate this project. Does Anoka County have the political goodwill built up to convince other politicians to wait for their own projects? After this legislative session, that's doubtful, to say the least. Moreover, transportation projects can take years to move from drawing board to reality. It's a dangerous gamble to move forward with stadium plans while not having a comprehensive, pre-approved, fully funded transportation infrastructure plan.

Comparing this situation to Hennepin County is like night versus day. Hennepin County is served by all manner of mass transit as well as a highly developed freeway system and complimentary arterial roads.

3. Political Climate.

Republican, Democrat, or otherwise, Anoka County has always been home to a healthy, vibrant brand of populism. Folks in this county aren't real inclined to suffer a

large tax increase in order to make a billionaire and his millionaire employees even richer. Evidence of this populism is abundant, given recent polls and the resolutions passed by four cities in the county. Folks in Anoka County are more concerned with keeping taxes low and getting the best value possible from core governmental services. We just don't have time for "let's tax ourselves into prosperity" schemes that also deny our right to vote in a referendum.

Consistent with this populism, Anoka County is also home to people who want to live close to the city but don't want strip malls and high-rise developments on every street corner. We want some elbow room, complete with large lot sizes and a rural, not urban, feel. While Blaine is doing it's best to become the Woodbury of Anoka County, most folks just don't agree. Take a drive to Oak Grove, Ham Lake, East Bethel, Burns, Columbus, or Linwood and see what we mean. The prospect of 70,000 people jamming into Anoka County on a quiet Sunday just isn't very appealing to many citizens.

All in all, Anoka County is just about the worst place in the Metro area for a mega stadium built upon the backs of ordinary, everyday working people.

6/12/06 AnokaCountyWatchdog.com

E-mail Update 6/19/06

In This Issue:

1. Hey, Big Spender!
2. Watchdog Competition = Weak!
3. What's in Wilf's Wallet?

1. Hey, Big Spender!

The 2006 lobbying expense reports are in and the results aren't all that surprising. Many millions were expended at the Capitol this past session in the pursuit of your tax dollars. Below are some of the more ahem, notable, expenditures:

Education Minnesota:

Ah, our poor beleaguered teachers. Minnesota's teacher union managed to spend nearly \$950,000 on lobbying this year – and it's not even a budget year at the Capitol! Moreover, this union lists 55 lobbyists in their employ. How many teachers could be hired with \$950,000? Our kids would be better served with 55 more teachers than with 55 lobbyists. This is the same union that defended paying its president a six-figure salary, paid with dues from members who don't earn nearly that amount.

http://www.cfbreport.state.mn.us/pdfStorage/2006/Lobby/LD/P1/I_4725_9831.pdf

Minnesota Twins:

What's \$6 million between friends? That's the amount the Twins spent wringing a ballpark out of the Minnesota legislature (read taxpayers) over the past ten years. 2006 lobbying expenditures were in excess of \$96,000. Dave St. Peter of the Twins lamented that it was too bad that the legislature didn't roll over earlier because it forced the Twins to spend more money on hired guns. That's a little like a mob hit man lamenting that he had to shoot his victim multiple times because he wouldn't die earlier.

<http://www.twincities.com/mld/twincities/news/local/14839345.htm>

<http://www.cfbreport.state.mn.us/rptViewer/Main.php?do=resultAction>

Minnesota Vikings:

Incomplete. Lobbyist Lester Bagley has not yet submitted his report.

<http://www.cfbreport.state.mn.us/rptViewer/Main.php?do=resultAction>

Anoka County:

<http://www.cfbreport.state.mn.us/rptViewer/Main.php?do=resultAction>

Anoka County Board of Commissioners:

<http://www.cfbreport.state.mn.us/rptViewer/Main.php?do=resultAction>

Anoka County Housing and Redevelopment Authority:

<http://www.cfbreport.state.mn.us/rptViewer/Main.php?do=resultAction>

Anoka County Regional Rail Authority:

<http://www.cfbreport.state.mn.us/rptViewer/Main.php?do=resultAction>

It should be asked why Anoka County needs four different lobbying funding sources when it all comes out of the pocket of the taxpayer. Multiple sources of funding for lobbying does nothing but obscure public expenditures and make it harder for taxpayers to hold their elected officials accountable.

Northstar Corridor Development Authority:

http://www.cfbreport.state.mn.us/pdfStorage/2006/Lobby/LD/P1/I_4977_6221.pdf

2. Watchdog Competition = Weak!

Yes, even the Anoka County Watchdog has a heart and takes pity on those who despise him. Over a month ago, a group called “Anoka County United” launched a web site to counter the Watchdog by promoting the wonder of a taxpayer funded football stadium in Blaine. Apparently, the site is funded by business interests who, presumably, would benefit from a stadium. The site is weak, to say the least. First, there are a grand total of 8 news items posted since May 12. The “recent comments” section has no comments – no one cares, apparently. The different “categories” buttons all go back to the same news item. Well, you get the boring and very stale picture. The Watchdog fears no competition, so visit www.anokacountyunited.org and let them know what you think. They look very lonely over there, like Jerry Burns all dressed up in a Maytag repair uniform.

3. What’s in Wilf’s Wallet?

Anoka County has based the entire stadium argument on the bold assertion that Zygi Wilf is going to pour over \$1 billion into the stadium project. Yet no one has asked to either Wilf or Anoka County to back up that claim with any due diligence or financial bona fides. The Watchdog asks this simple question: Does Wilf have the financial means to make this promise a reality? It appears the media and the legislature have failed to pursue this very legitimate issue.

After all, we’ve been suckered by these financial mirages in the past. Remember when noted author Tom Clancy was going to buy the team until it was discovered he didn’t have the cash? Remember when fans went gaga over Reggie Fowler’s ownership aspirations? It was not only discovered that he didn’t have the cash, he didn’t own his resume either. These sorry episodes should be a firm reminder to show us the money.

E-mail Update 6/26/06

In This Issue:

1. The Watchdog Takes on Joel Kramer;
2. The Bad Old Days;
3. Anoka County Abuses the Privilege (Again!);
4. Quote of the Week.

1. The Watchdog Takes on Joel Kramer.

Harold Hamilton appeared on the television program "Almanac" this past Friday to debate Joel Kramer, head of Growth & Justice. Growth and Justice is the group that sponsored the recent newspaper ad advocating higher taxes and bigger government in Minnesota. Don't we already have that? Hamilton, as usual, was an able advocate for the proven route to economic prosperity: free enterprise and limited government. Watch a video of the debate at www.anokacountywatchdog.com.

2. The Bad Old Days.

Feeling bad about your economic situation? Think that today's economy is on the wrong track? The federal government is here to help (really!). According to a study by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the American family has never been as prosperous as it is today. The study, looking all the way back to 1901, finds that there has been an incredible multiplication of wealth in America. In 1901, the average family earned \$750. Today, that amount is \$50,302. What is really telling is that restated in 2003 dollars, that \$750 would only be \$2,282. That factoid alone speaks to the incredible wonder of that thing we call America – if we don't wreck it, Mr. Kramer. Read an article about the study at www.anokacountywatchdog.com.

3. Anoka County Abuses the Privilege (Again!).

Anoka County residents this past week received their regular dose of taxpayer-financed propaganda from the County in the form of the "Anoka County News." Among the "objective" items was a piece about the County's dogged commitment to push a tax increase on residents for a football stadium (no, you won't be allowed to vote!). According to the article, there has been an increase in the number of businesses interested in coming to Anoka County ever since the County unveiled their scheme. Somewhere, there's a lesson in here about logical fallacies.

Since this newsletter is financed by the taxpayers, many of whom oppose the stadium, the Watchdog calls upon the County to offer space in the next newsletter to Jim Hafner, who will explore the downside to this proposal. It's called equal time. Read the newsletter at http://www.co.anoka.mn.us/v1_departments/div-governmental-services/dept-public-information/newsletter/index.asp.

4. Quote of the Week.

“We just can’t keep up right now.”

- Anoka County Commissioner Dennis Berg, speaking to the County’s abysmal road improvement record and the reasoning behind the County’s latest tax increase, the wheelage tax.

The Watchdog Says: It’s little wonder you can’t fix the roads when you’ve spent nearly \$1 million trying to land a football stadium and another \$4.3 million on lobbyists and consultants for Northstar rail. Try cutting back on the lobbyists, Commissioner Berg, before you pry open the taxpayer wallet yet again.

To read an article on the newest tax, click here

<http://www.abcnewspapers.com/2006/June/22ankwheelage.html>.

6/19/06 AnokaCountyWatchdog.com

E-mail Update 7/10/06

In This Issue:

1. Another Northstar Problem;
2. County Charters Private Plane;
3. Travel Update;
4. All Aboard for Seattle;
5. Job Opening, Great Pay and Benefits!

1. Another Northstar Problem.

We know, you're not surprised that this white elephant has hit yet another roadblock. The Fridley station has now been delayed, adding more cost and uncertainty to the project. But don't worry, the crack Anoka County rail staff "hopes" everything will work out. No word on when the station might open. Visit www.anokacountywatchdog.com for details.

2. County Charters Private Plane.

Globetrotting County commissioners Dan Erhart and Scott LeDoux recently chartered a private plane to fly them out to Marshall, Minnesota and Madison, Wisconsin to look at airport operations there. Anoka County already has a mode of transportation to get to places like this – a taxpayer financed car reserved specifically for travel. No word on whether LeDoux left a day early to avoid jet lag. The Watchdog will have a full report soon.

3. Travel Update.

Just like millions of school kids and families, it seems that Anoka County government goes on vacation every summer. While the Watchdog will have a full update posted soon, we were intrigued by the commuter rail conference in New York City last month, attended by County staff. New York City in June almost beats Arizona in February. We wonder if Tim Yantos attended. If so, did he bring his government credit card? Readers will remember that the state Auditor took Yantos to task after it was revealed he charged nearly \$8,500 on his government-issued credit card for meals.

4. All Aboard for Seattle.

Hey, we said it was summer! The Watchdog has learned that County officials will undertake a junket this month to Seattle to look at that region's failing commuter rail system. You know, the one that is 100% over budget, costing \$1.3 billion after taxpayers were promised that costs wouldn't exceed \$650 million. Northstar bureaucrat Tim Yantos sickened County taxpayers by declaring that Seattle's commuter rail was "successful." Talk about low standards. Visit www.anokacountywatchdog.com for details.

5. Job Opening, Great Pay & Benefits!

Even though unemployment is near a record low in Minnesota, we challenge you to top this job benefit package: part-time work, \$56,000 plus per year, Cadillac health care benefits, a generous defined-benefit retirement package, unlimited travel budget, indoor work, no heavy lifting, and absolutely no prerequisites with respect to education, experience, interpersonal skills, or work ethic. Applications will be taken through July 18. Successful applicants will be notified November 7th. Job starts in early January 2007. Apply in person at the Anoka County Board of Commissioners, 2100 3rd St. Anoka, MN 55303.

(Editor's Note: We acknowledge Jim Hafner's excellent essay on this subject, which can be read [here](#).)

7/10/06 AnokaCountyWatchdog.com

E-mail Update 7/17/06

In This Issue:

1. Anoka County Commissioner Campaign Update.

With the candidate filing period closing tomorrow, many Watchdogs have emailed looking for information on the County commissioner campaigns. Here's the low down:

District 1: Dennis Berg is the incumbent in this district that covers the northwest portion of the county. Berg, who voted against a voter referendum for the Vikings stadium, has drawn six opponents:

- Terri Cleveland of Ramsey;
- Pat Gruber of Ramsey;
- Kim Hamilton of Burns;
- Gary Lenzmeier of Andover;
- Rosella Sonstebly of Andover;
- David Soltis of Saint Francis.

District 2: Anti-referendum incumbent Dick Lang holds this seat which covers the north-central portion of the County. Lang has also drawn six opponents thus far:

- Janelle Kirkeide of Ham Lake;
- Larry Peterson of Cedar;
- Phil Picton of Ham Lake;
- Dan Seman of Ham Lake;
- Mark Welter of Ham Lake;
- Andy Westerberg of Blaine.

District 3: Incumbent and Board Chairwoman Margaret Langfeld is retiring, making this an open seat. This district is covers most of Blaine and parts of Fridley and Spring Lake Park. Candidates for this seat are:

- Jim Anderson of Blaine;
- Damian Burkhalter of Blaine;
- Robyn West of Blaine;
- Dick Swanson of Blaine.

District 4: Incumbent Jim Kordiak is the only commissioner standing for re-election who supported a stadium referendum (Commissioner Sivarajah also supported the referendum but is not up for re-election until 2008). Thus far, he is unopposed in his effort to once again represent the very southern tip of the County.

The Watchdog will have more information regarding these races as the election season progresses. Although the Watchdog is non-partisan and does not endorse candidates, we will make every effort to help educate Anoka County taxpayers regarding where these candidates stand on the issues of the day.

7/17/06 AnokaCountyWatchdog.com

E-mail Update 7/24/06

In This Issue:

1. Vikings and Anoka County Hold Newsless Press Conference;
2. Wetlands Pose Major Obstacle to Stadium Site;
3. Sleepless Because of Seattle;
4. County Board Filings Close.

1. Vikings and Anoka County Hold Newsless Press Conference.

This past Thursday, the Vikings and Anoka County held a press conference to announce nothing more than the fact that they're still talking to each other. It says much about the strained relationship between the two parties that they had to have a press conference to simply announce that they're still working together.

Moreover, the press conference attempted to portray a strong and smooth relationship that simply isn't true, according to Watchdog sources within the County. According to these sources, the relationship remains rocky. In fact, a meeting held between the team and the County prior to the press conference was reportedly quite tense.

2. Wetlands Pose Major Obstacle to Stadium Site.

The Star Tribune reported last week that the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has refused to approve development plans for much of the Blaine stadium site. According to the Corps, much of the 740 acres proposed for development is designated as wetlands.

The issue raises serious issues about the County's handling of the situation. Why didn't the County know about this issue prior to pushing it so hard at the legislature? According to the Star Tribune article, the wetlands on this property have been an issue of contention for nearly 20 years. In fact, it is hard to believe that the County was unaware of the problem. If County officials were caught unaware, they are guilty of gross incompetence.

In the alternative, perhaps the County was aware of the issue but chose to conceal it from the legislature and the taxpayers. If this is the case, Anoka County is even less trustworthy than we thought. The Watchdog calls upon Anoka County to fully explain exactly what happened with respect to this issue. Failure to do so can only damage the County's already shaky credibility.

Furthermore, Zygi Wilf could not be more mistaken in labeling the wetlands issue a "technicality," as reported by the media. Wetlands loss is a serious environmental issue and there is no doubt the Corps will take appropriate steps to fulfill its obligation to protect our natural resources.

3. Sleepless Because of Seattle.

As reported by the Watchdog, County officials took a junket to Seattle recently to view the failed Seattle Sounder commuter rail project. Commissioners Dan Erhart, Scott LeDoux, Margaret Langfeld, and Rhonda Sivarajah were accompanied by bureaucrats Tim Yantos and Steve Novak on the trip. Scott LeDoux apparently did not arrive early to combat the negative effects of the two hour time difference between Seattle and the Twin Cities.

It is interesting to note that the three commissioners standing for re-election this November didn't partake of the junket.

The Watchdog calls upon the County to reveal the total cost of the trip. Moreover, the commissioners who took the trip should give some type of accounting of what they learned while traveling on taxpayer money.

4. County Board Filings Close.

It's official. Filings to run for County commissioner have closed. The Watchdog reported on this issue last week so what follows is an update:

DISTRICT 1: Two more candidates have filed since our last update. These candidates are Jean Bouley (Ramsey) and Bryan Kost (Oak Grove). The Watchdog, therefore, must confess to being wrong in one respect. We predicted 5-7 opponents would file against Berg. Actually, there are now 8 vying to unseat him.

DISTRICT 2: Two more candidates filed after our last update in this race as well. Ed Fiore (East Bethel) and Sandy Grams (Cedar) have joined the race. Mark Welter (Ham Lake) and Phil Picton (Ham Lake) have withdrawn. This makes six opponents for incumbent Dick Lang.

DISTRICT 3: There is no change to this race to succeed retiring commissioner Margaret Langfeld. The Anoka County Union reports, however, that candidate Dick Swanson does not live in the district. According to the report, an Anoka County elections official stated that Swanson intends to move into the district in time to meet residence requirements.

DISTRICT 4: Incumbent Jim Kordiak failed to draw an opponent. Kordiak was the only commissioner standing for re-election who supported the stadium referendum.

E-mail Update 7/31/06

In This Issue:

1. Worth \$56,000 Per Year?
2. The Incredible Shrinking Train, the Incredible Growing Cost;
3. Purple Pigskin Pork Award;
4. Primary Voting (What it's all about).

1. Worth \$56,000 Per Year?

That's the annual salary for an Anoka County commissioner. For years, commissioners have justified this extravagant salary by claiming that it's a full-time job, packed with onerous working hours, endless meetings, and constituent services.

These claims simply don't square with the reality of Commissioner Scott LeDoux's life. Just this week, LeDoux was appointed as the executive director of the reconstituted Minnesota Boxing Commission. He also sits on the Minnesota Racing Commission. This makes for a triple-dip of government checks for LeDoux. He is also a real estate agent. This reality sets the lie to the "full-time commissioner" argument in a big way.

There are few jobs in life that pay \$56,000 (plus generous fringe benefits) for part-time work. No wonder 21 people are running for the job.

Related links:

<http://www.co.anoka.mn.us/officials/districts/district5.asp>

<http://www.mnrace.commission.state.mn.us/agency.htm>

[7/29/06 Pioneer Press, LeDoux will fight for local cards](#)

2. The Incredible Shrinking Train, the Incredible Growing Cost.

Here we go again. This past week, Anoka County revealed that the cost to build the Northstar commuter rail line has grown to an eye-popping \$317 million. Moreover, the Fridley station has been delayed indefinitely. The station needs another \$9.5 million to move forward and local government has no idea where to get it, with some hoping that the federal government will come through. Northstar continues to be a mega-project with growing costs and shrinking benefits.

[7/25/06 Star Tribune, Fridley rail station delayed](#)

3. Purple Pigskin Pork Award.

Congratulations to Anoka County Commissioner Dan Erhart on being named the winner of the first annual Purple Pigskin Pork Award. The award is given to the

public official who demonstrates the least interest in protecting the taxpayers of Anoka County from the stadium boondoggle. Finalists included Rep. Andy Westerberg, Rep. Kathy Tingelstad, Rep. Melissa Hortman, and Sen. Don Betzold. The judges, led by Watchdog Jim Hafner, had a tough choice given the bevy of qualified finalists.

[7/25/06 Star Tribune, And the award for stadium pork goes to...](#)

4. Primary Voting (What it's all about).

Many people have contacted the Watchdog wondering exactly how primary voting works, especially regarding the Anoka County commissioner races.

Good question. On September 12, voters will go to the polls to vote for a candidate for county commissioner (and other races). In those races where there are more than two candidates for commissioner, the primary will narrow the field to two candidates, who will face off in the November 7 general election. The two candidates who get the most votes on September 12 are the ones who will move on to the general election. Those who do not finish among the top two on September 12 will be eliminated and will not move on to the general election on November 7.

Get details regarding the primary election at www.anokacountywatchdog.com.

7/31/06 AnokaCountyWatchdog.com

E-mail Update 8/7/06

In This Issue:

1. Watchdog T-shirts!!!!;
2. Where Do the Candidates Stand on the Vikings Referendum?;
3. Speaking of Legislators...;
4. Speaking of Legislators II...;
5. Is High School too Easy?

1. Watchdog T-shirts!

That's right! Watchdog t-shirts are now available. Get yours by sending an email to freetshirt@AnokaCountyWatchdog.com. Be sure to include your size. Price, you ask? FREE. It's about the only free lunch available outside of government.

2. Where Do the Candidates Stand on the Vikings Referendum?

The most popular question we get here at the Watchdog is where candidates stand on the Vikings referendum. You ask, we deliver. We surveyed legislative candidates and have posted their responses at www.anokacountywatchdog.com. We will be posting Anoka County commissioner candidate responses in the near future as well. Get informed and vote!

3. Speaking of Legislators...

It's been pretty amazing to watch the legislator responses roll in. It seems that no one wants to oppose the referendum these days. Even Senator Don Betzold (DFL-Fridley) says he "generally" favors a referendum. Watchdogs know well that he was the chief author of the Vikings bill that passed the state Senate, the one WITHOUT a referendum attached.

In any case, it has been very interesting to track legislators who have been on both sides of the issue. One such legislator is Rep. Kathy Tingelstad (R-Andover). Just last fall, she virtually dared voters to throw her out of office over her opposition to the Vikings referendum (see http://news.minnesota.publicradio.org/features/2005/09/26_scheckt_wilf/).

A committee she chairs in the Minnesota House passed the Vikings bill with no referendum. However, Tingelstad has been quite public and vocal in her support of a referendum lately. Is this change of heart legitimate? Is it an election year head fake? That's a question voters in her district will have to decide for themselves.

4. Speaking of Legislators II...

A similar situation has arisen with state Rep. Melissa Hortman (DFL-Brooklyn Park). She has stated publicly at town hall meetings that she opposes a referendum and believes the sales tax increase decision should be left in the hands of the Anoka County commissioners. However, she responded to the

Watchdog survey by stating that she favors a referendum. On top of that, she has responded to recent constituent inquiries on the matter by avoiding the question entirely.

Regarding the Twins stadium, she voted in favor of an amendment to allow a referendum but then voted in favor of the final bill even though it contained no referendum. Voters in her district have their work cut out for them trying to figure out this one.

The bottom line is that voters must educate themselves and pay close attention not only to a candidate's words but also their actions. Take your vote seriously and cast it wisely for the candidate of your choice.

5. Is High School Too Easy?

The August 6th edition of the Pioneer Press had an interesting article regarding the alarmingly high number of high school students who require remedial classes once they get to college.

While these numbers are troubling by themselves, they are all the more disturbing when one considers the types of students who need remedial high school work.

Many students who received "A"s or "B"s in classes like English and math in high school are testing into remedial classes.

At Fergus Falls Community College, 40% of students who tested into remedial writing received an "A" or "B" in their last high school English class.

It is clear that our schools are giving free passes to many students and failing to hold them to minimal standards. This lazy attitude on the part of many teachers cheats students and the taxpayers who support them. This is no way to spend billions of taxpayer dollars.

To read the article, click [here](#).

E-mail Update 8/16/06

In This Issue:

1. T-shirt Mania!;
2. Andy Westerberg Forgets;
3. Northstar Rail "Benefit.";
4. Scott LeDoux Calls Out the Watchdog;

1. T-shirt Mania!

The Watchdog t-shirts have been a hit, to say the least. Filling the hundreds of requests that have poured in has drained our stock. But never fear, loyal Watchdogs. We have already placed a back order that should be filled next week. Keep those requests coming. Like that popular snack food, we can make more!!!

2. Andy Westerberg Forgets.

This past week, state Rep. Andy Westerberg had an opinion piece in the Star Tribune defending the Vikings stadium (you know, the one where your right to vote gets demolished) and taking on Jim Hafner, a vocal and articulate stadium critic. Among the more ridiculous claims, Westerberg writes that Hafner was the only citizen in the entire state to show up in opposition to the Vikings bill when it had a hearing in one legislative committee. Maybe that's because the hearing was held during the workday, Rep. Westerberg! Most taxpayers work for a living and don't have time to take off work and trundle down to the Capitol to keep track of wayward politicians. Westerberg also conveniently failed to mention that an evening hearing of the House Taxes Committee in Ham Lake was so packed that people were turned away at the door. Rest assured, Rep. Westerberg, Anoka County taxpayers are watching this issue with great interest.

To read Westerberg's column, click here:

(<http://www.startribune.com/142/story/598442.html>)

For a refresher article on the Ham Lake hearing, click here:

(http://news.minnesota.publicradio.org/features/2005/10/12_scheckt_vikingshearing/)

3. Northstar Rail "Benefit."

The Coon Rapids Herald reported that past Friday that a meeting was recently held at the Anoka County Government Center to discuss "Transit Oriented Development" along the Northstar commuter rail line. One of the topics at the meeting was the need for low-income housing along the line. Two people from a group called the Center for Transit Oriented Development, based in California, spoke at the meeting and talked of the need for low-income housing. The Herald article quoted the two as saying "It can be expected, as in the case of other commuter rail lines throughout the country, that lower-income earners will be

attracted to live along the line.” This is hardly what most taxpayers had in mind when the Anoka County commissioners promised economic development along the line. In fact, Anoka County already has a good amount of low-income housing. What we need is more industry and other activities that increase the tax base, not housing that requires a great deal of governmental services.

The other featured speaker, according to the article, was a person from the Minneapolis Department of Community Planning and Economic Development.

To read the article, click here:

(<http://www.abcnewspapers.com/2006/August/10railine.html>)

Click here to access the Center for Transit Oriented Development web site:

(<http://www.reconnectingamerica.org/html/TOD/>)

Click here to access the Minneapolis Planning office:

(<http://www.ci.minneapolis.mn.us/cped/>)

4. Scott LeDoux Calls out the Watchdog.

Watchdog founder Harold Hamilton recently had a conversation with Anoka County commissioner Scott LeDoux. An agitated LeDoux called the Watchdog web site “a pack of lies.” Funny, LeDoux has never contacted Harold Hamilton to point out the perceived lies. The Watchdog has always been premised upon a commitment to fact-based news and views. That’s why we’ve become a leading news and information source in Anoka County. We have had a standing invitation to the public to correct us when we get our facts wrong. In fact, our invitation is displayed right on the home page. So far, no one has stepped forward. Commissioner LeDoux, you’ve made a bold statement. The Watchdogs calls on you to back it up.

E-mail Update 8/21/06

In This Issue:

1. Who's Next to Consider a Referendum Resolution?;
2. How Much Did We Pay?;
3. Wheelage Tax Wackiness;
4. The Watchdog's Elephant-Like Memory;
5. Blast From the Past.

1. Who's Next to Consider a Referendum Resolution?

Don't think for a moment that there aren't other cities out there considering a resolution to support a stadium referendum. The Watchdog has it on good authority that another Anoka County city will take up the resolution soon. Spring Lake Park, Ham Lake, Oak Grove, and Centerville have all passed the pro-referendum resolution while Fridley voted it down.

2. How Much Did We Pay?

Once again, Anoka County is having some trouble getting its story straight on an important issue – spending taxpayer dollars. Recently, Anoka County lobbyist Steve Novak stated that the County has spent close to \$1 million trying to lure the Vikings to Anoka County. Just this week, Anoka County Public Information Manager Julie Shortridge reported that the County has spent \$715,000. Hey, what's \$285,000 between friends? How ironic that this information comes to light the same week the County Board considered cuts to child protection services in the proposed 2007 County budget.

3. Wheelage Tax Wackiness.

The Coon Rapids Herald reported this week that Anoka County will spend over \$64,000 out of the road budget to implement the new wheelage tax on vehicles. As the Watchdog has reported, this move is pretty silly considering that the County must cut property taxes by an identical amount, meaning that this tax will add no new dollars. In fact, it may lose money considering the administrative costs involved. It would be wise to consider the words of Washington County Board Chairman Bill Pulkrabek, who voted against a wheelage tax for his county. Said Pulkrabek, "A wheelage tax is nothing more than a shift in taxes with an administrative cost tacked on."

4. The Watchdog's Elephant-Like Memory.

The Watchdog has reported recently about the strange phenomenon regarding the Vikings' stadium referendum. It seems that every candidate for office in Anoka County is pro-referendum, including those who have spoken out against the referendum or have even voted for legislation that prevents a referendum. Too bad for those candidates that the Watchdog is indeed always on the watch. While these candidates will try to paper over their anti-referendum credentials, we will be there to shine the light of truth on this important issue. We have

already explored the verbal gymnastics of Rep. Melissa Hortman, Sen. Don Betzold, and Rep. Kathy Tingelstad. We also know of county commissioner candidates with a similar history, which will be explored in the near future.

5. Blast From the Past.

"We believe that the taxpayers are willing to address the issue of cost, and will be willing to sacrifice a little bit more to get this project running"

Anoka County Commissioner Dan Erhart, January 13, 2004.

This statement was made back when the Northstar Rail project jumped in cost to \$265 million. Today's estimate sits at \$317 million and climbing.

8/21/06 AnokaCountyWatchdog.com

E-mail Update 8/28/06

In This Issue:

1. County Commissioner Candidates Surveys Now Available!;
2. County Commissioner Debate Upcoming;
3. T Shirts On The Way.

1. County Commissioner Candidates Surveys Now Available!

By far, the most common question we receive is this: "Where do these county commissioner candidates stand on the issues?" You asked, we responded! The Watchdog mailed questionnaires to every candidate, covering important topics like the Vikings stadium and property taxes. Visit our web site and click the banner at the top of the page to access each questionnaire. This is the most important county election in 50 years. Get informed so you can make the best possible choice at the ballot box! It's your democracy – PARTICIPATE!

2. County Commissioner Debate Upcoming.

The candidates for Anoka County Commissioner will appear this week in what is likely the ONLY debate prior to the September 12 primary.

When: August 31 (Thursday).

Time: 6:30 p.m.

Place: Anoka County Government Center (Room 705).

Come out and hear for yourself what these candidates have to say about issues important to you. Oh yeah, wear your t-shirt!

3. T-Shirts On The Way.

Speaking of t-shirts, the back order has arrived and the next wave will be in the mail this week. Be sure to email us with your address and your size. If you're waiting for a back order, no need to resend a request.

8/28/06 AnokaCountyWatchdog.com

E-mail Update 9/6/06

In This Issue:

1. Happy Birthday!
2. Vote!
3. Candidates on the Stadium.
4. Houston, We Have a Problem.
5. Anoka County Buys Twins Tickets...At Your Expense.

1. Happy Birthday!

The Anoka County Watchdog celebrates its first birthday tomorrow. In one short year, the Watchdog has become a trusted source of news and information for thousands of Anoka County taxpayers. We report what the mainstream media too often ignores. We shine the light of truth on government dealings that are done behind closed doors. We plan to be here as long as there are elected officials who say one thing and do another.

2. Vote!

This will be the last email update before the September 12th primary election. GET OUT AND VOTE FOR THE CANDIDATE OF YOUR CHOICE! The Watchdog has given you all the information you need to cast an effective and informed vote. The rest is up to you. Don't think your vote matters? In 2004, there was a primary election for one of the Anoka County Commissioner seats. A TOTAL of 1,340 votes were cast. The second place candidate made it into the general election with only 218 votes. Your vote matters! Visit the web site for all voting information.

3. Candidates on the Stadium.

The Watchdog was the only organization to offer a candidate survey regarding the Anoka County commissioner races. Many candidates responded while some refused. Many of you have asked where the non-responders stand on the stadium referendum. Here's what the Watchdog knows:

DISTRICT 1:

Dennis Berg

Status: Anti-referendum

Evidence: Voted for County resolution that denied a referendum vote.

Rosella Sonsteby

Status: Pro-referendum

Evidence: Stated support for referendum at candidate debate.

Bryan Kost
Status: Unknown

DISTRICT 2:

Dick Lang
Status: Anti-referendum
Evidence: Voted for County resolution that denied a referendum vote.

Andy Westerberg
Status: Anti-referendum
Evidence: Chief legislative author of Vikings bill that denied a referendum.

Larry Peterson
Status: All over the map.
Evidence: Testified in front of the legislature not once but twice in favor of the County stadium plan, which denied a referendum. Just last week his web site declared that he would listen to voters regarding the referendum and take that message back to the board. Today, his web site says he favors a referendum. He also stated at the debate that he favors a referendum. Voters will have to decide how sincere his pro-referendum position really is.

DISTRICT 3:

Dick Swanson
Status: Pro-referendum.
Evidence: Stated so at the candidate debate. Some are skeptical of this position since he serves on the Blaine City Council, a body that has shown support for the stadium plan.

4. Houston, We Have a Problem.

Sources at Anoka County report that county commissioners Dan Erhart and Margaret Langfeld were in Houston this past week touring sports stadiums. It is interesting that none of the commissioners standing for re-election traveled. How ironic that the trip happened the same week that Commissioner Dennis Berg decried funding cuts for human services. Perhaps fewer trips to Houston, Seattle, Honolulu, Phoenix, Los Angeles, New Orleans, and Washington would free up dollars for core services like child protection.

5. Anoka County Buys Twins Tickets...At Your Expense.

Government is promoting a "Northstar Commuter Night" at the Twins game September 9th. Anoka County Government sources tell the Watchdog that a number of tickets were purchased with tax dollars and then offered to elected

officials and certain government employees free of charge. Your tax dollars at work.

9/6/06 AnokaCountyWatchdog.com

E-mail Update 9/13/06

In This Issue:

1. Star Tribune's Coverage Sloppy;
2. District 1 Analysis;
3. District 2 Analysis;
4. District 3 Analysis;
5. What it Means for November.

1. Star Tribune's Coverage Sloppy and Weak.

Today's article from the Star Tribune regarding last night's results was some of the weakest reporting the Watchdog has seen from reporters Mike Kaszuba and Paul Levy. The headline "Voters not too angry after all over stadiums" isn't supported in the least by the results. Second, the article generously quoted anti-referendum candidates and Vikings' lobbyist Lester Bagley without bothering to publish a comment from the pro-referendum candidates who won. In any case, that's why the Watchdog exists. Read below as we lay out our view of last night's results and point out what the Star Tribune should have.

To read the Star Tribune article, click here
(<http://www.startribune.com/587/story/673190.html>).

2. District 1 Analysis.

In this district, anti-referendum and long-time incumbent Dennis Berg garnered the most votes while strong pro-referendum candidate Terri Cleveland advanced. It shouldn't be a real surprise that a long-time incumbent with high name recognition should do well. Moreover, the anti-referendum vote had only one place to go, in Berg's camp. On the other hand, the pro-referendum vote was split eight different ways between candidates who didn't do much to distinguish themselves from each other. Berg certainly shouldn't take too much comfort in his margin of victory. He garnered 1,385 votes. If one totals the pro-referendum votes cast, the number comes to 1,528. That's a 52.5% to 47.5% victory for the pro-referendum position. It is more than reasonable to presume that the majority of votes cast for the losing candidates last night will migrate to Ms. Cleveland.

3. District 2 Analysis.

For pro-referendum voters, this was admittedly a disappointing outcome. Anti-referendum incumbent Dick Lang took first while Larry Peterson, who may or may not support a referendum, took second. The strong pro-referendum candidates came up short. On the other hand, anti-referendum poster boy Andy Westerberg was sent home as well. And the same for Dan Seman, who strongly opposed the referendum and bragged during the campaign about his business

contracts with the Vikings. The bottom line is that it appears that pro-referendum voters will have no voice in this race on November 7th.

So what gives? How did two candidates who are hostile or indifferent to a referendum win? The answer is really not complex. First, Dick Lang, like Dennis Berg, is a long-time politically savvy incumbent. Moreover, both are full-time politicians who spend hours working on their campaigns, whereas most challengers campaign while holding down regular jobs. Incumbents enjoy advantages like name recognition, fundraising abilities, and sheer campaign know-how that is often unavailable to a challenger. Second, let's also face a reality and give credit where it is due. In politics, as in life, hard work breeds success. Lang and Peterson were widely acknowledged as the two candidates who worked the hardest during the primary season. They were visible and active, with a wide distribution of lawn signs and literature. No matter how powerful an issue may be, a challenger has to get their message out if they want to unseat an entrenched incumbent.

4. District 3 Analysis.

The Star Tribune didn't even bother to cover this race, which was probably the most interesting of the three, with the district based in Blaine and no incumbent on the ballot. First-time candidate and strong pro-referendum candidate Robyn West posted an impressive vote total in cruising to a first-place finish. Her hard work throughout the summer paid off. Finishing second was current Blaine council member Dick Swanson, who is also pro-referendum. West's victory over a sitting city council member surprised many observers.

The Star Tribune also failed to mention that Jim Anderson, retiring Board Chair Margaret Langfeld's handpicked successor, came in a distant third.

5. What it Means for November.

So what can we take away from last night? What does it mean for Election Day in November?

Readers, and candidates, should take away two lessons from last night. First, incumbency is a very powerful advantage, even for politicians who ignore the wishes of their constituents. Any hopeful who seeks to oust an incumbent has to run an aggressive campaign that outworks the incumbent and reaches every voter in the district. Challengers need to run an "A" level campaign. Anything less will likely result in defeat.

Second, on a related note, there is no substitute for effort. Especially in local elections like these, there is an extremely high correlation between effort and success. The candidate who puts up the most lawn signs, distributes the most literature, raises the most money, and knocks the most doors will probably win.

Finally, most importantly, let's do the math as we look toward November 7th. The Anoka County Board has seven seats. Dan Erhart and Scott LeDoux are solidly anti-referendum. Rhonda Sivarajah and Jim Kordiak (no opponent) are pro-referendum. That's a 2-2 tie. District 2 will likely produce an anti-referendum winner while District 3 will produce a pro-referendum commissioner. That's makes a 3-3 tie. Thus, the critical race this fall becomes District 1, where Dennis Berg faces Terri Cleveland. If Berg wins, the stadium plan survives 4-3. If Cleveland wins, the stadium plan dies by an identical margin. Indeed, the voters of District 1 hold the fate of the entire stadium issue in their hands.

9/13/06 AnokaCountyWatchdog.com

E-mail Update 9/20/06

In This Issue:

1. Tinklenberg's Parting Gift;
2. Houston, We Have a Problem – Part II;
3. Hortman Finally Comes Clean;
4. District 2 Commissioner Race Update;
5. District 1 Commissioner Race Update;
6. Smart Quote of the Month;
7. Not So Smart Quote of the Month.

1. Tinklenberg's Parting Gift.

Ah, the life of a political insider. To be a Good Ol' Boy is well, good. After being trounced by Patty Wetterling for the DFL endorsement for Congress, Mr. Elwyn Tinklenberg has landed squarely on his feet thanks to Anoka County. Specifically, Tinklenberg has been awarded a "consulting" contract for \$115,000. Not bad for just over a year's work.

County Commissioners like Dick Lang must think voters are really stupid when he bemoans the County's lack of money for roads and bridges while paying huge sums for lobbyists and the like. A full report will be available on the web site soon.

2. Houston, We Have a Problem – Part II.

The Watchdog reported last week that Anoka County took another junket. This one to Houston to tour Reliant Stadium (home of the NFL's Texans) to "see and learn more about a retractable roof stadium." The trip, funded by taxpayers, cost \$817 for each attendee. Commissioners Dan Erhart and Margaret Langfeld traveled along with County employees Steve Novak and Terry Johnson.

Ridiculous wastes of taxpayer money like this are almost beyond comment. The Watchdog can only think back to Dennis Berg's hysterical comments during the candidate debate about how immoral it is to cut back human services.

The Watchdog eagerly awaits Anoka County's decision to suspend junkets until human services and roads are completely funded.

The web site will have a full report soon.

3. Hortman Finally Comes Clean.

You can run but you can't hide. After tap dancing around the issue for months, state Rep. Melissa Hortman (Brooklyn Park and Coon Rapids) was finally pinned down regarding her position on a Vikings stadium referendum.

Monday evening, Hortman announced at a candidate debate that she does not support following the law that requires a voter referendum before a sales tax can be raised. Too bad she couldn't have been honest about it from the start.

4. District 2 Commissioner Race Update.

Anoka County District 2 commissioner candidate Larry Peterson has responded to a Watchdog inquiry regarding his position on the stadium referendum. Peterson indicated that he wanted to first hear from citizens about the referendum. He must have received a loud "yes!" because he writes that he is now fully supportive of a referendum. His opponent, Dick Lang, remains opposed.

5. District 1 Commissioner Race Update.

Anoka County District 1 commissioner candidate Terri Cleveland has submitted a more detailed response regarding the use of contract lobbyists. Her updated statement will be posted soon on the web site under the candidate survey section.

6. Smart Quote of the Month.

"I cannot vote for a plan that would call for the three-quarters of a percent tax to support the stadium."

- Anoka County Commissioner Jim Kordiak

7. Not So Smart Quote of the Month.

Harold, "Your a Communist."

- Tom Budzynski of Blaine

E-mail Update 9/27/06

In This Issue:

1. Blaine to Consider Referendum Resolution;
2. Steel City Stealin’;
3. No Love for the Bus;
4. Promises, Promises.

1. Blaine to Consider Referendum Resolution.

Blaine city councilman Dick Swanson has introduced a resolution supporting a citizen referendum on the Vikings stadium. The resolution will be considered by the council at its next regular meeting on October 5th (circle your calendar, Watchdogs!).

If Blaine indeed adopts the resolution, it would be a huge victory for those who have supported a referendum. While Centerville, Oak Grove, Ham Lake, and Spring Lake Park deserve much credit for showing courage early and often, Blaine is different. In addition to being the proposed home of the stadium, the city has had a reputation for being, er, “cooperative” with the Anoka County Board.

Passage of the resolution would be a major development in the stadium debate. In fact, it wouldn’t be too far-fetched to see the Anoka County Board finally come to their senses and adopt a similar resolution. While commissioners LeDoux, Erhart, and Langfeld would likely remain opposed (none is on the ballot this year), the other four may. Commissioners Sivarajah and Kordiak already favor a referendum. Would Commissioners Lang and Berg (up for re-election) want to be left holding the bag after all the others have bailed out of the burning plane? Not if they want to be re-elected.

2. Steel City Stealin’.

The plane had barely touched down from Houston when the Anoka County crew was planning yet another football adventure. The Watchdog has learned from County sources that there will be a junket to Pittsburgh in mid-October to view the Steeler’s stadium. Attendees include Commissioner Dan Erhart, Commissioner Margaret Langfeld, County lobbyist Steve Novak, County administrator Jay McLinden, and County finance director Terry Johnson. Maybe the County should save some money and buy the Madden Cruiser.

3. No Love for the Bus.

In light of the continued problems for Northstar rail, the Watchdog can't help but wonder why Anoka County shows so little support for the Northstar commuter bus service.

Here are some facts supporting Northstar bus service:

- The busses are at 83% capacity;
- Ridership is up 48% between 2002 and 2005;
- The public subsidy per trip per rider fell from \$2.98 to a mere \$.43 between 2001 and 2006.
- The total public subsidy from the County will total just over \$50,000 in 2007. In 2006, the subsidy was only \$137,000.

It's too bad that the County won't offer more money to expand the bus service.

Busses are less expensive than rail and far more flexible. For example, Target Corporation is building a campus in Brooklyn Park that will employ thousands. Moreover, trends show that more and more commuters are traveling to other suburbs. Northstar rail, a hugely expensive project, will do nothing to help these commuters.

Why not support the bus? Perhaps the County considers Northstar rail a "legacy" issue. Perhaps the County has already spent so much pursuing the train they're afraid to admit the train's shortcomings (in poker, that's called being "pot committed"). Taxpayers should take a serious look at the commuter bus option. It's a success story that has been all but ignored.

4. Promises, Promises.

County commissioner Scott LeDoux promised as a candidate to be accessible, saying that he would offer a web site and a 1-800 number where his constituents could get up-to-the-minute updates regarding county government. After nearly two years in office, we can't seem to find either the web site or the 800 number. Visit www.scottledoux.com to read the promises.

E-mail Update 10/4/06

In This Issue:

1. Blaine Referendum Vote Tomorrow!;
2. Anti-Referendum Crowd Shrinks;
3. Rikki Don't Lose That Number;
4. T-Shirts, Get Your T-shirts!;
5. Quote of the Week.

1. Blaine Referendum Vote Tomorrow!

Tomorrow evening, the Blaine city council will vote on a resolution supporting a voter referendum for the Vikings stadium. Needless to say, this is an important moment in the stadium debate. If you care about this issue, turn off the TV, get off the couch and show up! Democracy belongs to those who show up. Rest assured, the County will be there with lobbyists in tow.

Date: Thursday, October 5th

Time: 7:30 pm.

Address: 10801 Town Square Dr. NE

To read the agenda, click [here](#).

2. Anti-Referendum Crowd Shrinks.

While the battle is far from over, the Watchdog has been heartened by the vast number of candidates on the ballot this fall who support a voter referendum, however sincere their position may be. In fact, the anti-referendum crowd has become so small they could start meeting in a broom closet. There are really only three candidates out there who are public with their anti-referendum platform: state Representative Melissa Hortman (Coon Rapids), County Commissioner Dennis Berg (District 1), and County Commissioner Dick Lang (District 2).

3. Rikki Don't Lose That Number.

Last week, the Watchdog reported on Commissioner Scott LeDoux's lack of follow-through with promises to constituents. The Watchdog was surprised by the number of LeDoux's constituents who expressed their frustration regarding his lack of responsiveness. He can be reached at 612-229-4269.

4. T-Shirts, Get Your T-shirts!

Display your sartorial good taste by wearing one our high quality, stylish, t-shirts. Oh yeah, this price is quite reasonable: FREE! Hundreds have gone out the door here at Watchdog HQ but we have hundreds more. Get yours today at

freetshirt@anokacountywatchdog.com. Rumor has it that Commissioner Dick Lang was wearing his around the County courthouse last week.

5. Quote of the Week.

“No, it is not fatal to the project.”

- Anoka County lobbyists Steve Novak acknowledging that the Blaine council will likely approve a resolution supporting a voter referendum.

- Watchdog Analysis: Wonderful! Then the Anoka County Board should have no opposition to passing their own resolution supporting a stadium referendum.

10/4/06 AnokaCountyWatchdog.com

E-mail Update 10/11/06

In This Issue:

1. The Watchdog in the News;
2. Blaine Supports Referendum;
3. Blaine Mayor Silent on Change of Heart;
4. Doin' the Snell.

1. The Watchdog in the News.

Watchdog founder Harold Hamilton was the guest columnist in the Star Tribune's weekly "My View" feature for this week. The topic? The Vikings' stadium, of course! Hamilton, with surgical precision, debunks the pro-stadium arguments offered by Commissioner Margaret Langfeld in her September 26 "My View" column. To read the column, click here:

<http://www.startribune.com/142/story/729425.html>.

2. Blaine Supports Referendum.

A bit of stadium history was made last week when the Blaine City Council went officially on record supporting a referendum on the stadium sales tax. The vote passed by a 5-2 margin and was not without some controversy. Councilman Dick Swanson, who is currently a candidate to replace Margaret Langfeld on the county board, offered the resolution. Some fellow council members accused him of offering the resolution as a political stunt to enhance his election prospects.

Nonetheless, Blaine is now on record favoring a referendum. Regardless of motivation, the proposed home of the Vikings in Anoka County officially favors a vote of the people. This is a huge victory for pro-referendum citizens and a big defeat for anti-referendum officials like Dan Erhart, Scott LeDoux, Dennis Berg, and Margaret Langfeld, among others.

Blaine joins Ham Lake, Centerville, Oak Grove, and Spring Lake Park as cities on record favoring a referendum.

3. Blaine Mayor Silent on Flip-Flop.

One of the two who voted against the resolution was Blaine Mayor Tom Ryan. This is curious since Mayor Ryan told both the Pioneer Press and the Blaine Banner just days before the council meeting that he would be supporting the resolution. While everyone is entitled to change their mind, Ryan does owe the people of Blaine an explanation regarding his actions. A sudden change of heart on major issues within such a short time is just a little too curious.

4. Doin' the Snell.

One of the more lighthearted moments during the Blaine Council meeting was the antics of Tom Snell, the Executive Director of the MetroNorth Chamber of Commerce. Watchdogs in attendance report that Snell became quite animated during the resolution vote, wildly gesturing in an attempt, apparently, to get council members to vote in the negative. Snell's gesturing was described as everything from "ants in the pants" to "bad disco" to "the Elaine Benes dance from Seinfeld." Could this be the reason for Mayor Ryan's changed vote??? Rock on, Tom Snell!

10/11/06 AnokaCountyWatchdog.com

E-mail Update 10/18/06

In This Issue:

1. Letters to the Editor Part 1;
2. Letters to the Editor Part 2;
3. Letters to the Editor Part 3;
4. Renowned Speaker Disses the Stadium;
5. Ramsey Invests in Bus Service.

1. Letters to the Editor Part 1.

Deep into the campaign season, we're starting to see some letters to the editor that are of interest. The first comes from the Watchdog himself, Harold Hamilton. His letter to the Coon Rapids Herald was recently published. The letter concerns the many conflicting positions Rep. Melissa Hortman has taken on the Vikings stadium referendum. Her tap dancing on this vital issue is precisely why the Watchdog exists. Read the letter below. To read the e-mail sent to Harold Hamilton from Rep. Melissa Hortman, click [here](#).

Hortman and referendum

To The Editor:

I attended the Sept. 18 legislative debate between the candidates in District 47. While attendance was low, the debate was interesting and filled with surprises.

The greatest surprise, perhaps, was State Rep. Melissa Hortman's forceful opposition to a referendum on the sales tax increase for the Vikings stadium. Hortman's comments even included a reference to our Founding Fathers, noting that they didn't have time for referendums before they dumped tea into Boston Harbor.

While I admit that I disagree with Rep. Hortman on the referendum issue, her opposition is not what compelled me to write this letter.

I write this letter because I believe that Rep. Hortman has misrepresented her position on this issue several times. In short, she has repeatedly flip-flopped. At several of her monthly town hall meetings earlier this year, she gave us all the reasons a referendum was unnecessary. I know because I attended nearly all of them.

After that, she sent e-mail to constituents, myself included, stating that she supported a referendum. Specifically, she wrote to me on Aug. 1 of this year that she supported a referendum. You can imagine how surprised I was when she opposed the referendum at the debate.

I have kept a copy of the Aug. 1 email, which will be posted on my Web site, www.anokacountywatchdog.com.

As a constituent of Rep. Hortman, I am deeply disappointed that she has misled the very people she is charged to represent on this important issue. The people of District 47B deserve better than that.

Sincerely,
Harold E. Hamilton
Coon Rapids

2. Letters to the Editor Part 2.

Anoka County commissioner Dan Erhart had a rather laughable letter to the editor in the Coon Rapids Herald as well. The subject was Erhart's "indignation" over some campaign materials that were mailed in a north Metro legislative race. Erhart proclaims that voters deserve fact-based information. Funny. Dan Erhart lecturing on campaign ethics is like Elizabeth Taylor lecturing on the sanctity of marriage. Perhaps Commissioner Erhart could inject some truthfulness into the public policy discussion by leveling with the taxpayers on County expenses, starting with his own travel expenses and reimbursements. Read the letter below.

Appalled by materials

To The Editor:

I am writing in support of the re-election bid of Rep. Denise Dittrich in District 47A. Rep. Dittrich is one of the finest young legislators I've had the pleasure of working with over the past many years in my role as Anoka County Commissioner. She is a dedicated and knowledgeable supporter of key projects and issues important to Anoka County residents.

Rep. Dittrich has a high degree of integrity and is extremely effective in getting the job done for her constituents.

I have been appalled by recent campaign materials put out by the Republican Party of Minnesota that contain misleading information and outright lies about Rep. Dittrich.

The voting public deserves to be presented with factual data so they can make effective decisions about the people they want to represent them.

The kind of slanted information about Rep. Dittrich that I've seen recently is a disservice to voters in her district. It is unfortunate that the Republican Party has chosen to stoop to such a level in their effort to sway an election.

Again, I urge you to vote for Denise Dittrich, an honest legislator who has done an exemplary job representing her constituents in the last two years.

Sincerely,
Dan Erhart
Anoka County Commissioner

3. Letters to the Editor Part 3.

The Coon Rapids Herald published a third letter of interest regarding the race in Anoka County District 1, where Terri Cleveland is attempting to unseat anti-referendum incumbent Dennis Berg. The letter made a very important point in showing that Dennis Berg has been publishing an endorsement of his candidacy by his pastor. Recent events have clearly demonstrated that clergy should not be endorsing candidates for office, regardless of the office or the party affiliation of the candidate. These endorsements violate the law and imply that the entire congregation of the particular church endorses that candidate. Dennis Berg should pull this endorsement immediately. Read the letter below. The endorsement on Dennis Berg's web site stated under the endorsement section, "Blair Anderson, senior pastor, Lord of Life Church". On the Star Tribune website the endorsement is listed as, "Blair Anderson, pastor, Lord of Life Church."

Sonstebly backs Cleveland

To The Editor:

I support Ms. Terri Cleveland for Anoka County Commissioner District 1. As a former candidate for this position, I know we need an elected official who will actually listen to the taxpayers of District 1.

Ms. Cleveland talked with me the day after the primary. I have been trying to talk with the four-term incumbent Dennis Berg for over 15 years.

Berg is running scared. For the first time in his political career he is facing hard-driving, qualified challenger.

Berg is so desperate he has asked for divine intervention. Even though IRS Code 501(c)(3) specifically prohibits churches and religious organizations from participating in political campaigns in support of a particular candidate, Berg lists his church pastor as a prominent campaign endorsement.

Apparently Berg feels his campaign is more important than the tax exempt status of his church. Ms. Cleveland is not seeking endorsements.

The residents of Ramsey, St. Francis, Bethel and parts of Oak Grove, Andover and Anoka deserve someone who will work for the district. While Berg is interested in building a stadium in Blaine with my money, Ms. Terri Cleveland will be working to improve the roads and other things county commissioners should be doing.

I'm a politically independent landowner that could care less about Berg and the current make-up of the Anoka County Board.

The current county board has flushed our constitutional rights down the toilet. We need Ms. Terri Cleveland to give them back!

Rosella Sonstebly
Andover

4. Renowned Speaker Disses the Stadium.

Renowned futurist and business consultant Edward Barlow recently addressed the MetroNorth Chamber of Commerce regarding Anoka County's business climate and future challenges in staying competitive in the global economy. Barlow made two key points. First, he stressed that the County should be seeking to diversify its economic base by pursuing cutting edge industries like bio-tech. Second, Barlow dismissed the value of pursuing a taxpayer-subsidized football stadium. Of pursuing biotech, Barlow said, "I would be all over that instead trying to get a stadium." Unfortunately, the article is unavailable on-line.

5. Ramsey Invests in Bus Service.

The City of Ramsey will soon offer bus service from their garage located at the Town Center. The evidence clearly indicates that busses are less expensive, more efficient, and more flexible than rail transit. Ramsey not getting a commuter rail stop will prove to be a blessing in disguise for the good people of Ramsey. Read the article [here](#).

E-mail Update 10/25/06

In This Issue:

1. Public Employment: A Pretty Good Deal;
2. Dennis Berg: Icon?;
3. Berg Goes Soft on Stadium Referendum;
4. Lies, Damn Lies, and Statistics.

1. Public Employment: A Pretty Good Deal.

The state recently passed a law requiring counties and cities to disclose the salaries of their three most highly compensated employees. The legislature had grown alarmed that many of these salary packages were getting out of hand, even exceeding the governor's salary of \$120,303. Anoka County has complied with the letter, although not the spirit, of this law by squishing the information down at the bottom of its home page. In the public interest, the Watchdog has posted these numbers for you, the taxpayer who foots the bill.

- County Administrator: \$142,440;
- County Attorney: \$141,016;
- Chief Deputy County Attorney: \$138,018.

Visit www.co.anoka.mn.us to see for yourself. Bring a magnifying glass and look at the bottom of the home page!

2. Dennis Berg: Icon?

As noted last week, political letters to the editor provide some good comic relief. Last week's Anoka County Union had another gem regarding anti-referendum county commissioner Dennis Berg. Ellen Ward of Anoka is apparently a huge fan of Mr. Berg's, going so far as to describe him as an "icon."

ICON: a representation of some sacred personage, as Christ or a saint or angel, painted usually on a wood surface and venerated itself as sacred.

Pardon the Watchdog while we find our chest waders. The BS is getting pretty deep our here!

Read the letter here:

Gem of a commissioner

To the Editor:

Anoka County has a gem in County Commissioner Dennis Berg and many outside his district don't really know it.

The reason he is such a gem is because Berg carries plenty of water for the residents of his district and the county as a whole.

Berg is a member of the Metropolitan Area Water Supply Advisory Committee, he is vice chairman of the seven-member county board, chairs the Public Works Committee, chairs the Intergovernmental and Community Relations Committee and sits on Finance and Capital Improvements, Management, Benefits, Web Oversight and Wetlands Review, the East Central Regional Juvenile Center Advisory Board, the Joint Law Enforcement Council and the Law Library Board of Trustees.

Berg also serves on a number of crucial advisory boards and authorities that are important to the county and the state as well.

Most importantly, Berg's participation on the Metropolitan Council's Transportation Advisory Board (TAB) has made him an icon among his fellow colleagues.

There are few in the state that possess the kind understanding on transportation matters that Berg does and just one visit to a TAB meeting will tell you why he is respected by its members.

This year he was especially effective in garnering more than the county's fair share of the much-needed financial resources for our transportation needs through the TAB.

Finally, last year Dennis Berg received the Citizens Service Award from the Minnesota County Engineers Association and this year he was the recipient of the Presidential Award (number one county commissioner) by the Association of Minnesota of Counties (AMC).

In short, I urge District 1 voters Nov. 7 to put a check by Dennis Berg's name.

Ellen Ward
Anoka

3. Berg Goes Soft on Stadium Referendum.

Well, well, well! It appears that the number of elected officials who oppose the taxpayer right to vote on the stadium referendum gets smaller each day. Just this week Dennis "the icon" Berg expressed his, well, "non-opposition" to a referendum. Quoted by WCCO, Berg was described as "amenable" to a referendum.

Voters will have to decide for themselves how legitimate Berg's "amenability" really is. But who are we to question an icon?

Read the article [here](#).

4. Lies, Damn Lies, and Statistics.

Speaking of funny letters, the Anoka County Union had a few regarding all the wonderful economic benefits tied to a Vikings stadium. That's strange, Anoka County and the Vikings don't have any firm numbers. The Watchdog wonders where these citizens obtained this detailed economic data. Sadly, they've no doubt been duped into lending their names to propaganda letters. The Watchdog exposed these bogus numbers in a Star Tribune column just last week.

Watchdogs, if you get a friend or neighbor who tries to snow with these numbers, just ask to see the economic impact study. Guaranteed, you won't see it. Bet on it and get yourself a free dinner!

See the letters here:

Stadium: It's about time

To The Editor:

A Vikings stadium in Blaine? You bet! And it's about time! It's about time the north metro has the chance to achieve the growth and economic prosperity that the Mall of America has brought to Bloomington and the Excel Center has brought to St. Paul.

It's about time the northern Twin Cities have the chance to become known as a regional sports entertainment destination just as the Mall of America has put Bloomington on the map as the region's shopping center and the Excel has helped make St. Paul the capitol of the "state of hockey."

Why not Blaine? There's plenty of developable land available with good access to I-35W. In addition to the stadium and team headquarters., Zygi Wilf plans to invest millions of his own money to build offices, hotels, a medical center and retail stores.

It's a once in a lifetime opportunity to create jobs, stimulate economic growth and give the north metro a major development that far too often has gone to downtown Minneapolis or St. Paul or the south or west metro.

I fully support Anoka County officials in their bid to acquire the Vikings stadium in Blaine. The three-quarters of one percent sales tax they are proposing to pay for the

county's share of the project is a fair investment in the future of my community. It's about time!

Regards,
Brian K. Fitzgerald
Coon Rapids

Get behind stadium push

To the Editor:

Let's get behind the stadium push. I find it hard to believe some people do not support the Northern Lights project in Anoka County.

Why would someone not want \$1.5 billion invested in their community? Because it is absent of a referendum? Most of the successful large projects in the state did not have a vote despite opposition.

Can you imagine our economy with no Xcel Center, Target Center, Guthrie, Mall of America, Metrodome or Minneapolis Convention Center.....etc.

These projects did not have a referendum. Why is the Vikings project that different? Or maybe it is the cost of \$45 per person? This project will bring an annual payroll estimated at \$215.3 million and 6,900 jobs! It will pay almost \$16 million in property taxes, \$4 million to local school districts.

A Federal Reserve study shows Anoka County residents would benefit at a rate of \$288 per person/year. I will take this kind of return any day. Please support the Northern Lights project.

Peter Dahl
Andover

About face in Blaine

To the Editor:

Blaine has worked hard on the plans and promotion of a stadium in the city without ever asking its citizens to weigh in on the merits of a stadium.

Now, after nearly three years of promoting the project, the Blaine City Council has finally taken up a resolution in support of an Anoka County referendum on the sales tax funding for a stadium in Blaine.

Why the sudden change of heart by the Blaine City Council members? Could it be that Blaine City Council member Dick Swanson is worried about winning the Anoka County Commissioner seat he is running for?

He did receive fewer votes than his opponent in the primary last month.

Now, less than two months before an election, why does the city of Blaine want to give the voters something they have wanted for two and a half years?

Could it be that Councilmember Dick Swanson is more worried about his own political career than he is about the taxpayers he represents?

One can read the editorial pages of almost any local newspaper these days to see that stadium proponents are still very busy making plans for your tax money.

What will the Blaine City Council do after Nov. 7?

Ron Holch
Organizer, Taxpayers for an Anoka County Stadium Referendum

Stadium facts misrepresented

To the Editor:

Some stadium opponents do a disservice to the citizens of Anoka County by continuously misrepresenting basic facts about the project.

The county board has always held the position that we will do whatever the state requires regarding holding a voter referendum on the proposed local option sales tax. Some stadium opponents say that state law requires a voter referendum and that the county board is trying to take away the right of the citizens to vote.

Many readers may be surprised to learn that current law actually states the very opposite. It's up to the state Legislature to decide if and when there will be a referendum on a local option sales tax and in 2006, it passed a law saying that a referendum would not be required for either the Hennepin County sales tax related to the Twins ballpark or the Anoka County sales tax related to a potential Vikings stadium. The Legislature would still need to approve a financing and development plan for the project before the sales tax could be implemented, but current law is that there would be no referendum.

And here's another example - some stadium opponents like to say the proposed .75 of a cent sales tax is huge, exorbitant and unreasonable. They like to imply that Anoka County residents will pay "five times more" than Hennepin County residents for purchases.

The fact is 14 communities already have local option sales taxes, among them St. Cloud, Mankato, Duluth, New Ulm, Rochester, St. Paul and Minneapolis, to name a few. Anoka County's proposed local option sales tax of .75 of a cent is right in the middle of that range. It's not huge, exorbitant or unreasonable. And Anoka County residents will reap great rewards for investing in the stadium development.

Which leads to my third example of false information being perpetuated out there. Some stadium opponents like to say that the stadium development project will benefit only a few people. But 4,300 construction jobs, 6,900 permanent jobs, \$115 million in accelerated road improvements, \$100 million in economic and fiscal impact and immediate tax revenues generated for the entire county can hardly be characterized as "benefiting only a few!"

This proposal includes approximately \$750 million in private investment as taxable commercial-industrial development. The entire market value of commercial-industrial property in Anoka County currently is less than \$4 billion.

We're talking about a major economic development opportunity! Commercial-industrial property pays taxes at about twice the rate of residential property. That means the more commercial-industrial property that is attracted to Anoka County, the less the tax burden on home owners. That means a stronger tax base to help pay for our schools, our roads, our parks, our libraries and other government functions and services from which we all benefit.

This proposal is one of the biggest economic development opportunities Anoka County has ever seen. It will help bring balance to the metro area so that the northern suburbs can build on the momentum already gained from the National Sports Center and the PGA Tournament Players Club.

Don't believe the negative rhetoric. It would benefit Anoka County residents to keep in mind the extraordinary opportunity facing this county right now and to vote in November for those candidates who have the vision and leadership to continue moving this county forward with positive growth and development to benefit our citizens and strengthen our community.

We need positive, forward-thinking political leaders who understand you can't take progress for granted. Otherwise, development and economic opportunities will go south and west of here, and our emerging economy in the northern suburbs will languish.

Margaret Langfeld
Anoka County Board chairwoman

Supports stadium

To the Editor:

I support the Anoka County/Vikings Northern Lights development.

Think of the Northern Lights project like the Mall of America but only it pays property taxes.

The Mall of America has not paid a single dollar in property taxes (tax increment financing) while the Northern Lights project will pay \$15 million property taxes a year starting from day one.

Combine this with the National Sports Center's own expansion in Blaine and the Tournament Players Club (TPC) golf course and you have one of the premier sports destinations in the Midwest.

The economic impact and opportunities this project offers are endless. It is projects like this that keeps our taxes low in Anoka County.

Leone' Sweeney
Andover

Northern Lights project backed

To the Editor:

I'm confused. The Vikings/Northern Lights development includes:

1. A county-owned stadium - 41 percent of which is paid for by the Vikings - to be used by the (rent-paying) football team only 10 days a year
2. A privately-funded development project worth \$1 billion, which will create jobs and generate taxes in our community without the use of tax increment financing (TIF) of our property taxes.

What am I missing here? Since when do we demand a referendum before we let people spend money in our community?

We here "don't build a stadium for the millionaire players and owners," yet I have read there are more millionaires working for Medtronic than there are for the Vikings.

So why was there no cry for a referendum on that project? Or, for that matter, the Target project in Brooklyn Park?

Allow me to answer my own question - because these projects are good for our community.

Let's get this money invested in Anoka County rather than Hennepin County. I support the Northern Lights project.

Gene Tomas
Coon Rapids

10/25/06 AnokaCountyWatchdog.com

E-mail Update 11/1/06

In This Issue:

1. TIME TO VOTE!;
2. County Commissioner Candidate Referendum Positions;
3. Legislative Candidate Referendum Positions.

1. Time to Vote!

This is the last email update prior to Election Day. Do your duty and show up at the polls next Tuesday. Don't know where to vote? Visit the web site for polling information. Need information on the candidates? Visit the web site. If you don't vote, don't complain about the results.

2. County Commissioner Candidate Referendum Positions.

DISTRICT 1:

Dennis Berg: Incumbent Dennis Berg has consistently opposed the right of Anoka County taxpayers to vote on the proposed stadium tax. In a recent WCCO article, he mentioned that he was now "amenable" to a referendum. His record proves he opposes your right to vote. Berg's web site is www.dennisberg.com.

Terri Cleveland: Terri Cleveland has consistently voiced her support for the stadium referendum. Get more information at www.electcleveland.com.

DISTRICT 2:

Dick Lang: Incumbent Dick Lang also opposes giving taxpayers the right to vote on the stadium tax. Like berg, he has cast votes supporting this position. Lang has no web site that the Watchdog is aware of.

Larry Peterson: Challenger Larry Peterson favors a referendum. Voters should know that Peterson has only recently been a public supporter of the referendum. In the past, he testified publicly in favor of the County stadium plan that denied the referendum. Peterson web site is www.electlarrypeterson.org.

DISTRICT 3:

Robyn West:

In this open seat (Margaret Langfeld is retiring), West has been consistent in her support of a referendum. More information can be found at www.robynwest.net.

Dick Swanson:

Current Blaine Councilman Dick Swanson favors a voter referendum. In fact, Swanson authored the resolution the city council recently approved that supports a referendum. Some, including Blaine council members, have accused Swanson of a recent conversion to the pro-referendum position, wondering aloud why he

didn't pursue a resolution before he became a candidate for county commissioner. Learn more about Swanson at www.dickswanson.com.

Note: Jim Kordiak is running unopposed in District 4. He supports the referendum.

Of course, the web site contains candidate surveys submitted by the candidates themselves, although some candidates refused to respond.

3. Legislative Candidate Referendum Positions.

The web site contains legislative candidate responses to one question: Do you support a referendum for the sales tax to finance the Vikings stadium? Nearly all responses were "yes." Below, the Watchdog highlights those candidates who are opposed to a referendum or have a "checkered past" regarding this subject.

Checkered Past:

Senator Don Betzold (Senate District 51: Blaine, Fridley, Spring Lake Park). Betzold was the chief author of the Vikings stadium bill this past session in the state Senate. In responding to the Watchdog survey, he said he "generally" favors a referendum. Hardly the assurance Watchdogs are looking for in a senator.

Representative Melissa Hortman (House District 47B: Brooklyn Park, Coon Rapids).

Hortman's tap dance around this issue reminds us of why the Watchdog was founded in the first place. Namely, to expose elected officials who try to fool the public by having it both ways. Hortman is on all three sides of the issue. The Watchdog has heard/seen first-hand Hortman support the referendum, oppose it, and express mixed feelings.

Representative Kathy Tingelstad (House District 49B: Coon Rapids, Andover). When the stadium plan was first released, Tingelstad predictably jumped on the Anoka County Board's bandwagon and waved her pom-poms in favor of the plan. She was so arrogant about the plan she essentially dared her constituents to vote her out of office if they didn't like the fact that there was no referendum (source: MPR). She also voted in favor of the plan during the 2006 legislative session.

Then campaign season started. Tingelstad is now a full convert to the pro-referendum position. Is she sincere? Only her constituents can make that judgment.

Refused to Answer:

Some candidates never responded to the Watchdog. Readers will have to make their own judgment about this. Having said that, one would think that the candidate would have responded if they favored the referendum.

Here are the candidates who failed to respond:

Senate District 17 (Saint Francis)
Rick Olseen (DFL)

House District 17A (Saint Francis)
Rob Eastland (R)
Melissa Jabas (DFL)

Senate District 47 (Coon Rapids, Brooklyn Park, Champlin)
Leo Foley (DFL)

Senate District 48 (Ramsey, Anoka, Oak Grove, East Bethel etc.)
Mike Starr (DFL)

House District 48B (Ramsey, Anoka)
Jess Langerud (DFL)

House District 49A (Andover, Ham Lake)
Joe Zimmer (DFL)

House District 49B (Andover, Coon Rapids)
Jeanine Allen (DFL)

House District 50A (Columbia Heights, Fridley, Hilltop)
Adam Davis (R)
Carolyn Laine (DFL)

House District 50B (Fridley)
Lori Grivna (R)
Kate Knuth (DFL)

House District 51B (Spring Lake Park, Fridley, Blaine)
Tom Tillberry (DFL)

Senate District 52 (Columbus, Linwood, Centerville, Lino Lakes)
David Francis (DFL)

E-mail Update 11/8/06

In This Issue:

1. Mission Statement, Re-Stated;
2. Election Results Mixed;
3. Administrative Notes.

1. Mission Statement, Re-Stated.

The results of yesterday's election are big news and will, of course, be covered by the Watchdog. As expected, the results for Watchdogs was mixed (more on that below).

Having said that, it is important to keep in mind that the philosophy behind the Watchdog publication goes beyond one election and one issue. While the Vikings stadium debate has rightly dominated the discussion of late, it is far from the only issue. The Watchdog has a long-term vision to be a voice for transparent government for years to come. In short, the issues and the names will change but the need for a government watchdog remains.

2. Election Results Mixed.

As expected, pro-referendum candidates did quite well last night. And yes, some anti-referendum candidates did well. In a nationalized election environment, there are many issues that influence voters and their choice for particular offices. But enough of that. Let's see how the results could impact the referendum issue.

Governor.

Tim Pawlenty has won a second term. Pawlenty has stated unequivocally that he supports a stadium referendum. The Watchdog takes the governor at his word. As the head of state government, Pawlenty's win is huge for Anoka County taxpayers who want a referendum.

Legislature.

While space precludes a race-by-race breakdown, pro-referendum legislative candidates did well everywhere. In fact, there are no anti-referendum Anoka County legislators with the possible exception of two, Sen. Don Betzold and Rep. Melissa Hortman. The Watchdog says "possible" because both have, in certain situations, proclaimed support for a referendum. It looks as if the Vikings and Anoka County will have to look for a legislator who doesn't represent Anoka County to find someone willing to carry a bill without a referendum.

Anoka County Board.

In District 1, anti-referendum incumbent Dennis Berg prevailed over Terri Cleveland. Congratulations to Dennis Berg. Berg's victory shows the power of incumbency and the need for a challenger to run a great race in order to win. A

good race isn't enough. Now we'll see how "amenable" Berg is to a stadium referendum.

In District 2, anti-referendum incumbent Dick Lang prevailed over Larry Peterson. Lang ran an excellent campaign and is to be congratulated on his deserved victory. It is hard to gauge the impact of the stadium issue in this race because there was no clear distinction between the candidates. Lang ran away from the stadium issue by declaring the stadium "dead" in Anoka County. Peterson was a "Johnny Come Lately" to the pro-referendum position, creating suspicion among some voters. Peterson was also seen by some as a tool of business and other special interests based outside the district. Lang was a better fit for this mostly blue collar, populist area.

In District 3, Robyn West beat Dick Swanson for the right to succeed the retiring Margaret Langfeld. (Best wishes to Commissioner Langfeld in retirement.) West's victory was well-deserved as she ran a very strong campaign based on ideas and the sweat of her brow. Negative attacks from public employee unions were overcome with ease.

West is a strong fiscal conservative and will bring some much-needed balance to a County Board that too often takes advantage of the "perks" of elective office. The Watchdog knows West will join Commissioner Sivarajah in trying to put an end to the junkets and sweetheart contracts.

If the referendum positions stay the same, there is currently a 4-3 majority opposed to a referendum. It is possible, however, that there could be a switched vote among Lang or Berg. Moreover, it is quite likely that a pro-referendum commissioner will be elected Board chair. The Watchdog's money at this point is on Jim Kordiak, a veteran commissioner who is known for his consensus building abilities. It is doubtful that the highly divisive and polarizing Dan Erhart could garner the support needed to reclaim the chairmanship he lost two years ago to Langfeld.

3. Administrative Notes.

The demand for stylish, high-quality Watchdog t-shirts has been overwhelming. We are experiencing a backlog in filling orders. Be patient! As they say, the shirt's in the mail.

Regarding email, remember that the Watchdog does not share your email address with ANYONE for ANY PURPOSE. Feel safe in knowing that if you share your email address with us, it will be safeguarded from spammers and other low lifes.

E-mail Update 11/15/06

In This Issue:

1. Anoka County Conceals Stadium Costs;
2. Tell Anoka County How You Feel;
3. LeDoux Loses Despite Not Being on the Ballot;

1. Anoka County Conceals Stadium Costs.

We hate to say “I told you so” but we here at the Watchdog have indeed told you so, once again. The media reported this week that Anoka County has come clean regarding the cost of the proposed Vikings stadium. Heck, we shouldn’t be so harsh. Dan Erhart and company only misled the taxpayers to the tune of \$125 million. The stadium is now estimated to cost \$800 million – without the roof the County a short time ago said was vital.

This debacle sounds a bit like Northstar rail. Ever-growing costs and ever-shrinking benefits.

Consider some of these gems, as reported by the Star Tribune:

Timing. Anoka County decided to reveal the new, inflated costs just days AFTER a key election. How convenient that anti-referendum commissioners Dennis Berg and Dick Lang didn’t have to face questions about an \$800 million stadium without a roof.

Inflation. Commissioner Erhart noted that the big price jump was due mainly to the fact that construction inflation hadn’t been factored into the price for over two years. What a poor excuse. Factoring inflation into the project is a simple mathematical exercise. Failing to update these simple numbers makes it appear that the omission was intentional and designed to make the project look less expensive.

The Roof. The Anoka County Board has sold this project time and again as “more than just a football stadium.” We’ve been told about all the concerts and other events that would be held under the stadium’s retractable roof. Now it appears that the roof is out of the picture. The Watchdog calls upon Anoka County to tell the taxpayers how much of the projected economic activity from stadium events will be lost because there is now no plan for a roof.

Infrastructure Costs. Amazingly, the County Board didn’t include the cost of road upgrades in the vicinity of the stadium. When they did, they ignored the Department of Transportation’s estimate of \$270 million and used their own of \$115 million (not surprising that the county had a lower number, is it?).

So, this news leaves more questions than answers. How much of a sales tax increase will be needed to cover the new costs? Will there be a referendum? How does Anoka County intend to get money out of the state for this project when the Twins required no state funding? Is the project worthwhile for Anoka County without a roof? Can we trust Anoka County to be honest with us regarding the cost? After all, does anyone really believe \$800 million is the final cost?

It would be really nice if the County would go back to the basics like law enforcement and roads and stop wasting taxpayer time and money on unrealistic mega-projects.

To read the Star Tribune article, click here:

<http://www.startribune.com/510/story/809017.html>.

2. Tell Anoka County How You Feel.

Watchdogs, don't forget that Anoka County maintains a web site where you can register your thoughts regarding the Vikings stadium. Visit

<http://www.co.anoka.mn.us/EconomicDevelopment/stadium/index.asp> to let the county know where you stand!

3. LeDoux Loses Despite Not Being on the Ballot. Despite only being in his first term, county commissioner Scott LeDoux offered his public endorsement to candidates for office. Interestingly, there were three takers. Given the results, it appears that LeDoux's endorsement is about as valuable as 1,000 shares of Enron stock. All three candidates went down to defeat, one not even making it to the general election. That candidate, El Tinklenberg, didn't even garner the endorsement of his party, the DFL. The other two candidates, running for city council in Andover, were also defeated. It will be interesting to see if any candidates in 2008 will seek LeDoux's endorsement.

(By the way, the County missed you at the canvassing board meeting, Commissioner LeDoux. We hear Arizona is nice this time of year).

E-mail Update 11/20/06

In This Issue:

1. The County Wheelage Tax Brings No New Money;
2. Minnesota Teacher Union Exposed;
3. Quote of the Year;
4. Administrative Note.

With most Watchdogs heading out of town later this week, we're going to publish this week's email update a bit early. HAPPY THANKSGIVING!

1. The County Wheelage Tax Brings No New Money.

The taxpayer-funded "Anoka County News" county newsletter this week featured an article bragging up the County's latest tax – a new tax on car registration. The Watchdog can't understand why county commissioners would brag up any tax – much less one that doesn't really do anything. As the Watchdog reported months ago, this new tax won't bring in any new money. State law mandates that the County must reduce property taxes by a corresponding amount. That fact won't stop the County from portraying this as some type of funding increase. Anyone else sick and tired of taxpayer resources being used for propaganda?

2. Minnesota Teacher Union Exposed.

The Minnesota Education League Foundation is set to release a fantastic piece of research regarding Education Minnesota, the state's teacher union. The results are shocking and eye opening, to say the least. Among the findings:

- Adjusted for inflation, per pupil spending has risen in Minnesota from \$688 per pupil in 1955 to \$8,440 per pupil in 2003.
- During that time, test results have essentially remained flat.
- Since 1955, the student-teacher ratio has dropped dramatically. Class sizes have grown because so many teachers now work administrative jobs outside the classroom.
- Education Minnesota employs 58 lobbyists at the Capitol. By contrast, Minnesota's largest private employer has 4.
- According to campaign finance reports, Education Minnesota's political action committee spent over \$1 million to influence elections this year.

3. Quote of the Year.

"When school children start paying union dues, that's when I'll start representing the interests of school children."

- Al Shanker, former teacher union president

Congratulations, Mr. Shanker!!!!

4. Administrative Note.

Once again, we're fresh out of those highly desired, ever-stylish Watchdog T-shirts. Once again, Harold Hamilton has been generous enough to spring for a few hundred more. If you ordered one, wait a couple of weeks. By the way, the Watchdog staff, while bright and dedicated, has not mastered the science of mind reading. When you order a shirt, send your size and a mailing address. Carry on.

11/20/06 AnokaCountyWatchdog.com

E-mail Update 11/29/06

In This Issue:

1. Partnership Dead Long Before County Admitted To It;
2. Winning at the Water Cooler;
3. Survey Confirms Taxpayer Opposition to Stadium;
4. Greatest Hits Part III.

While we're all basking in the afterglow of a very sweet stadium victory, the Watchdog is still hard at work. This week's update is our stadium wrap-up, tying up those important loose ends before we turn to the next battles: the 2007 legislative session, the County's next proposed commuter rail line, and an inevitable levy referendum in the Anoka-Hennepin School District next year.

1. Partnership Dead Long Before County Admitted To It.

Watchdogs always knew that the County frequently misrepresented the facts about the stadium and the partnership with the Vikings. Watchdogs always knew that the stadium plan was ill conceived and poorly executed. But we never knew how bad things really were.

A recent article in the Star Tribune has revealed that the partnership was dead and gone as far back as the end of the 2006 legislative session last May.

The article noted that when the Vikings dropped a bombshell by saying they didn't need a roof, Anoka County wasn't even given notice. The Vikings, in a very public way, took the opposite position of Anoka County on a critical issue and there wasn't even any communication between the parties.

What's so disgusting about the breakup is that the County continued to put on a charade to the taxpayers for months afterward, claiming that the Vikings and the County still had a positive and strong relationship. They made those claims despite knowing the opposite to be true.

Recall that as recently as October 4th, the County and the Vikings called a press conference in Blaine to "reaffirm" the partnership.

The Watchdog takes no pride in observing that this whole fiasco has greatly damaged the County's already shaky credibility. How can any taxpayer believe what the County tells them after seeing this sorry state of affairs? Read the Star Tribune article on the web site.

2. Winning at the Water Cooler.

Okay, Watchdogs, take pride in your stadium victory. We know, however, that you've got some co-workers or family members who will want to take you to task by accusing you of helping to kill a wonderful opportunity for Anoka County. Of

course, Watchdogs are intelligent and informed, but keep these points in mind to help you lay a water cooler beat down on the misinformed.

- Don't fall victim to the numbers. The fact is that the economic data used by the County was little more than guess work. No one knows the true cost of the stadium or the true economic benefit, if any. What we do know is that the County apparently did run some numbers recently, which they held until after the election. We do know the County underestimated by \$125 million the cost stadium. We do know the County underestimated by \$155 million the cost of the related road improvements.
- Wetlands matter. Amazingly, it appears that the County never did its homework regarding wetland mitigation on the site. The site, like much of the County, has significant wetlands. These wetlands alone could have doomed the project on a number of fronts. First, it may have been impossible for the Vikings to obtain the necessary permits. Second, the land itself may have been impossible to build upon from an engineering perspective. Finally, the cost of correcting the soil may have become prohibitively expensive. Again, a poorly conceived plan poorly executed.
- Free markets work. Stadium backers will bemoan the loss of low paying, temporary jobs, as if no development will take place in the absence of a stadium. Nonsense. If there is a market for it (and there is!), the land will be developed to its highest and best economic use, bringing jobs and a tax base expansion. Perhaps this expansion will even take place WITHOUT taxpayer handouts. Economists will tell you that a football stadium is a poor use of subsidies, if they are used at all. Smartly, Blaine is already talking about encouraging biomedical firms to develop the site. Now those are the good jobs we all want to come to Anoka County.

3. Survey Confirms Taxpayer Opposition to Stadium.

County Commissioner Dennis Berg has proclaimed his re-election as evidence of voter stadium support. To the Contrary, Survey USA has recently published a survey demonstrating the deep level of citizen opposition to a taxpayer-subsidized stadium.

Seven out ten surveyed oppose the use of tax dollars to build a football stadium. Over 70% of those surveyed say the stadium isn't a legislative priority or is a low priority.

Commissioner Berg, we remember why Anoka County was afraid to bring the stadium proposal to a referendum and so do you, sir. The taxpayers are smarter than the commissioners think.

Read the survey article on the web site.

4. Greatest Hits Part III.

The Watchdog announces another installment of our highly popular “greatest hits” program, where we publish, unfiltered, your comments regarding the web site. Many accuse us of being selective in our publishing, but we simply have far more fans than foes. To our critics, we say hate the game, not the player.

To read “Greatest Hits Part III,” visit the web site.

11/29/06 AnokaCountyWatchdog.com

E-mail Update 12/06/06

In This Issue:

1. Musical Chairs;
2. Night of the Living Stadium Dead;
3. Watchdog in the News;
4. Sound Off on Property Taxes!

1. Musical Chairs.

Next month will see the installment of the new Anoka County Board, featuring Robyn West, who replaced the retiring Margaret Langfeld. The new Board will have an immediate task of electing a new Board Chairman.

Watchdog sources within the county say that Dennis Berg is favored as the new chairman. They say Berg is more of a consensus pick who will be counted on to “do no evil” instead of provide leadership.

This is a classic “good news, bad news” situation. The bad news is that a true reformer like Rhonda Sivarajah won’t lead the Board. The good news is that Good Ol’ Boy Dan Erhart will once again be denied an opportunity to reclaim his old title. Sources report that Erhart tried to sell his candidacy but couldn’t find four votes to give him the majority needed to become chairman.

2. Night of the Living Stadium Dead.

Recently, Jim Hafner published an article in the Star Tribune where he discussed the troubling fact that Anoka County has not formally withdrawn from the stadium agreement with the Vikings.

It looks like Hafner was right to be concerned. This past week, the County hosted a meeting of local elected officials. At the meeting, Andover Councilman Don Jacobson asked Langfeld to update the County’s official position regarding the stadium.

Langfeld, in so many words, replied that Anoka County would still be interested in working with the Vikings if things didn’t work out in Minneapolis. While she later added that she was speaking only for herself, it does indeed look like the County is waiting in the weeds to resurrect the stadium issue.

It is high time for one of the commissioners to introduce a board resolution formally ending the county’s stadium pursuit with the Vikings.

3. Watchdog in the News.

Watchdog founder Harold Hamilton has been featured in local media outlets regarding the Watchdog's role in fighting the stadium debacle. CTN news in Coon Rapids and the Sun Focus newspaper interviewed Hamilton this past week. CTN will feature Hamilton both on camera and in a news article while the Sun Focus features an article.

http://www.ctnstudios.com/CTNNews/News_Stories/vikingsstadium12-1-06.htm
<http://www.mnsun.com/ch/>

4. Sound Off on Property Taxes!

Homeowners have recently received their "Truth in Taxation" statements regarding the proposed property taxes they will be forced to pay in 2007. Right now, public meetings are being held to give you an opportunity to sound off regarding these taxes. After the meetings, these local units of government will meet to formally adopt a property tax levy for 2007. Yes, local governments can and sometimes do lower the proposed levy from what was proposed. So yes, your voice does matter.

Check your statement for times and dates regarding these meetings.

For Anoka County, the meeting will be held TOMMORROW, December 7th at 7 p.m. at the Government Center (County Board Room). A big "thumbs down" to the county for not having this important information posted on the web site.

If you don't attend, you give your local elected officials a pass and ammunition to claim that taxpayers are okay with their property taxes!

12/6/06 AnokaCountyWatchdog.com

E-mail Update 12/13/06

In This Issue:

1. County Makes Progress on Lobbyist Contracts, Results Still Poor;
2. Speaking of Lobbyists;
3. Wooden Stake, Anyone?;
4. Eternal Vigilance: The Price of Freedom.

1. County Makes Progress on Lobbyist Contracts, Results Still Poor.

Amongst Anoka County's many fiscal sins, spending on lobbyists is perhaps the greatest. The Watchdog has reported on the vast sums the County spends every year on lobbyists, with Anoka County always in the top 5 amongst all Minnesota cities and counties.

Recently, some progress was made, although the end result was disappointing. The County Board last week re-authorized a contract with lobbyist Ron Jerich by a narrow 4-3 vote.

In the past, contracts with Jerich were automatically re-approved without a vote of the Board. Jerich is seen as an associate and friend of Commissioner Dan Erhart. The County already has employees on staff who are paid to lobby. Why the need for these outside lobbyists?

Perhaps 2007 will be the year the County does the right thing and eliminates these "hired gun" lobbyists.

2. Speaking of Lobbyists...

Watchdogs need to remember that the 2007 legislative session is mere weeks away. It is vital that a close eye be kept on the Capitol as many decisions made there affect taxpayers in the north Metro.

As any Watchdog might guess, the County has an army of lobbyists at the Capitol:

Anoka County Board: one lobbyist;

Anoka County: three lobbyists;

Anoka County Regional Rail Authority: four lobbyists;

Anoka County Housing and Redevelopment: three lobbyists.

Remember, the County Board controls all four of these organizations.

Is there any reason that the commissioners themselves can't drive a few miles down to the Capitol to lobby? After all, the Board justifies salaries in excess of \$57,000 by arguing that county commissioner is a full-time job.

To see the lobbyist registrations and reports, click here:
http://www.cfboard.state.mn.us/lob_lists.html.

3. Wooden Stake, Anyone?

Yes, the Watchdog is not infallible. Even the Watchdog makes an occasional mistake. When we do, we confess and make amends. We indeed failed on one aspect of the Vikings stadium issue. We were too optimistic when we opined that the stadium debate was over and declared victory.

The December issue of the Blaine Banner featured an editorial written by the editor regarding a conversation she recently had with Commissioner Dick Lang. During the conversation, Lang was asked about the future of the football stadium in Anoka County. It was reported that Lang's reply invoked Yogi Berra's famous statement that "It ain't over 'til it's over."

It has become obvious in recent weeks that the stadium issue, like a vampire, can only be killed in a special way. In this case, that special way isn't a wooden stake; it's a Board resolution formally ending the agreement with the Vikings.

The Watchdog promises to closely follow this issue.

4. Eternal Vigilance: The Price of Freedom.

To make amends, the Watchdog offers the following new item regarding an NFL football stadium. The Dallas Cowboys have begun to accelerate work on their new \$1.1 billion stadium complex, to be open in 2009.

Part of the project is financed through multiple local tax increases. These tax increases were VOTER APPROVED in November 2004. While the Watchdog can't applaud these tax increases, the Watchdog applauds the fact that voters were given an opportunity to vote. That's more than the Vikings and Anoka County are willing to do for all of us, even though state law mandates it.

E-mail Update 12/20/06

In This Issue:

1. 'Tis the Season;
2. Christmas Comes Early for County Commissioners;
3. How do You Spell "Tax?";
4. Divorce, Hollywood Style;
5. Saint Francis Public Schools "Mulligan";

1. 'Tis the Season.

This is the last email update prior to Christmas. Therefore, Harold Hamilton and the entire Watchdog staff take this opportunity to wish all our loyal readers a Merry Christmas. Thanks for a great year. We look forward to 2007!

2. Christmas Comes Early for County Commissioners.

Ho, ho, ho!!!! The Watchdog has learned that the Anoka County Board has decided to play Santa to themselves. Instead of a well-deserved lump of coal, the commissioners have stuffed their personal stockings with tax dollars in the form of a pay raise. It looks like raises for the Board are indeed not merit based.

Let's review 2006. \$850,000 down the stadium rat hole; Northstar rail costs skyrocket while service is reduced even before the first train has run; cuts to vital human services programs; sweetheart "consulting" deals for buddies; crumbling roads; and fee increases all over the place. Yeah, that deserves a pay raise.

Keep in mind that this pay raise is in addition to sweet fringe benefits like unlimited reimbursement for travel and meals.

In 2007, Anoka County Commissioners will be paid a salary of \$57,058 dollars. Not bad for part-time work. Compare to the following wages:

- \$34,188 (The 2004 Anoka County per capita annual income estimate);
- \$31,200 (Average 2006 salary for an American coal miner);
- \$29,632 (2006 annual salary for a U.S. Army Lieutenant);

3. How do You Spell "Tax?"

Ronald Reagan famously stated that he spelled "tax" "f-e-e." Recently, the Coon Rapids Herald reported that Anoka County will be jacking up a variety of fees in 2007. Here's a partial list:

- solid waste license;
- hazardous waste license;
- generator license;
- hazardous waste facility license;

- tobacco sales license;
- body art license;
- lodging establishment license;
- swimming pool license;
- construction inspections;
- food & beverage license;
- salt & sand fees;
- property record requests;
- GIS requests;
- green fees for county courses;
- Riedel Farm rental.

4. Divorce, Hollywood Style.

Okay, so Minnesota doesn't have Britney and K-Fed. We don't have Brad and Jen. But we do have Zygi and the Board. According to a well-placed Watchdog source, one Vikings official has put the odds of the team and Anoka County reuniting at virtually zero. In fact, according to our source, the official described the differences between the parties as "irreconcilable." Even in Minnesota, "irreconcilable differences" are grounds for divorce. Can this Board get along with anyone? It looks like Dr. Phil may be the next one to get a consulting contract from the County.

5. Saint Francis Public Schools "Mulligan."

This one comes straight from the dirty tricks department. At the November general election, the St. Francis public schools put forward a number of levy issues. One of them, for a new elementary school, failed (another for gym space failed as well). According to state law, a small number of citizen petitions can force a new vote.

Some 171 district residents signed a petition to do just that. According to some of the people who signed the petition, voters were ignorant when they voted "no" on this question. One mother noted that if a new school wasn't built, the resulting "split schedule" would reduce summer vacation time for the kids. Just what American school kids need: a continued three month lay-off every year based on the 19th Century agrarian economy.

Unfortunately, this is often times the attitude of the public school crowd. Any "no" vote is the product of ignorance and a hard heart. Any "yes" vote is enlightened and generous. Apparently, these folks are not calling for a re-vote on the two issues that passed.

The special election is estimated to cost upwards of \$15,000. The cost will be borne by the school district alone.

12/20/06 AnokaCountyWatchdog.com

E-mail Update 12/27/06

In This Issue:

1. TNT is a Dud;
2. Northstar Pork in Jeopardy;
3. County Sells Northstar Bonds, Still No Federal Approval;
4. Mystery Quote;
5. PSA.

1. TNT is a Dud.

Earlier this month, local governments held their annual Truth in Taxation (TNT) hearings. These hearings are an opportunity for taxpayers to speak directly with local elected officials regarding proposed property taxes.

Across the board, these hearings were poorly attended. Watchdogs, we need to do better. Poor attendance deludes these officials into believing their own spin about big tax increases. Yes, property taxes are complex. Yes, the meetings can be inconvenient. Yes, the meetings can be intimidating. Still, a better showing must be made.

2. Northstar Pork in Jeopardy.

The Star Tribune ran a story this past week listing a number of pork-barrel earmarks that are in jeopardy because the new Democrat majority in Congress has pledged to reform this shameful process.

Specifically, millions in pork-barrel earmarks for Northstar rail would be erased if Congress follows through on its pledge. While actions speak louder than words, it is encouraging to see Nancy Pelosi and the Democrats speak seriously of fiscal reforms the Republicans wouldn't tackle.

Shame on Norm Coleman for continuing to defend the indefensible. If a project has merit, it should be funded through the regular appropriations process, where it can be examined via public hearings. No project should be funded through backroom deals that are invisible to the public.

To read the articles, click here: <http://www.startribune.com/587/story/895474.html>
<http://www.startribune.com/462/story/893017.html>

3. County Sells Northstar Bonds, Still No Federal Approval.

Last week, Anoka County approved the sale of over \$32 million in bonds for Northstar rail. The federal government has yet to approve the project for any federal funding. Federal funding is expected to cover 50% of the project's capital costs.

So what happens if federal funding is denied or seriously delayed? County taxpayers could be left holding a very expensive bag.

<http://www.abcnewspapers.com/2006/December/21northstar.html>

4. Mystery Quote.

Can you guess who uttered the quote below? The first one to submit the correct answer will receive a Watchdog coffee mug, similar in style to the famous and highly desirable Watchdog t-shirts.

“Scott Ledoux is a chump.”

5. PSA.

Starting next week, the Watchdog will publish the weekly email update on Fridays instead of Wednesdays. A Friday publication will allow for better coverage of the 2007 Minnesota legislature.

12/27/06 AnokaCountyWatchdog.com



The City of Ramsey Announces Bus Service from the New Municipal Parking Ramp: Ramsey Star Express

The much anticipated commuter coach line, Ramsey Star Express, is tentatively scheduled to begin in November, 2006. The Ramsey Star Express will provide service from the new Municipal Parking Ramp located in Ramsey Town Center along Sunwood Drive, between Ramsey and Armstrong Boulevards. The Ramsey Star Express is a new bus service from Ramsey Town Center to Downtown Minneapolis (5th Street Garage). Fares will be \$4.50 one-way with four trips in the morning and four return trips in the afternoon/evening. The Star Express schedule is listed below.

The city of Ramsey will be hosting an Open House to kick-off this new service. The event is scheduled on November 2 from 6:00-8:30 pm at the Ramsey Municipal Parking Facility. The event is open to the public. Come and tour the bus and learn more about this exciting new service and see the latest developments in Town Center. Refreshments will be provided and a program is scheduled beginning at 6:30 pm.

The Ramsey Star Express is a new bus service along the Northstar Corridor. The Ramsey express service will be operated and managed in cooperation with the Northstar Corridor Development Authority (NCDA) Northstar Commuter Coach. The NCDA currently operates the Northstar Commuter Coach which has stops in Elk River and Coon Rapids to Downtown Minneapolis. The Ramsey Star Express will provide a bus similar to Northstar Commuter Coach. According to the NCDA, "These buses are quiet, smooth, luxury-style busses. Amenities include comfortable seating with head and foot rests, power outlets for laptops or cell phones, overhead reading lights and storage compartments." Each bus is handicap accessible. The city of Ramsey is excited about the introduction of the Ramsey Star Express which will provide additional opportunity for the public to take advantage of transit service along the future Northstar Commuter Rail corridor.

If you have questions about the Ramsey Star Express, please contact the city of Ramsey Public Works Department at 763-433-9820. Hope to see you at the Ramsey Star Express Open House on November 2 from 6:00-8:30 pm at the Municipal Parking Facility located at 7650 Sunwood Drive.

Morning Routes		
	Depart Ramsey	Arrive Minneapolis
Ramsey Star Express A	5:25 AM	6:05 AM
Ramsey Star Express B	5:35 AM	6:15 AM
Ramsey Star Express A	7:00 AM	7:40 AM
Ramsey Star Express B	7:10 AM	7:50 AM
Afternoon/Evening Routes		
	Depart Minneapolis	Arrive Ramsey
Ramsey Star Express A	3:35 PM	4:15 PM
Ramsey Star Express B	4:20 PM	5:00 PM
Ramsey Star Express A	5:10 PM	5:50 PM
Ramsey Star Express B	5:55 PM	6:35 PM

ARRIVAL TIMES WILL VARY DEPENDING UPON CURRENT TRAFFIC CONDITIONS

WCCO-TV - Minnesota's Breaking News, Video, Weather, Traffic and Sports: Vikings Stadium A Issue In Anoka County

Advertisement

Politics

Oct 22, 2006 8:25 pm US/Central

Vikings Stadium A Wedge Issue In Anoka Coun



Lisa Kiava
Reporting

(WCCO) Lino Lakes, Minn. The push for a new stadium for the Minnesota Vikings has been stalled for quite some time, but the team didn't get help they wanted from state lawmakers.

But the stadium issue is still a topic for voters this Election 2006. You'll remember that the Vikings have proposed a stadium in Anoka County. It's unclear if the project will go forward or not. The Anoka County Board voted to raise sales tax \$280 million, if it happens.

Stadium opponents have said if there's a sales tax, it would cost each Anoka County family \$100 a year, on average. Revenues from the development would lower property taxes.

The possible project -- and its cost to taxpayers -- is a topic in the county commissioner races in Anoka County. The question of whether Anoka County should help pay for the new stadium with a sales tax, a question that will not be on the ballot.

However, voters will choose from three Anoka County Commissioners, and some voters, like Ron Holch, will vote based on whether a candidate stands on the stadium issue. Holch, a Lino Lakes resident and stadium opposition leader, wants a county referendum to give voters a say on the sales tax.

"The vast majority of people want a say on the stadium. It's a huge amount of money," said Holch.

"I'm the candidate who will stand up for a referendum on a stadium issue," said candidate Terry Cleveland, as she spoke on a campaign visit. Cleveland calls the referendum the county's preeminent issue.

"I'll get people who say, 'I'm in favor of the proposal, but I want a referendum.' Then I'll get, 'I oppose the proposal referendum.' They want to have a say," said Cleveland.

"Unless I bring it up, it doesn't come up," said incumbent Dennis Berg, who insists the stadium topic is not a hot-button issue.

Berg says that's because the Vikings are considering other locations for the stadium now. As a commissioner, he vetoed a tax proposal, but he claims he's amenable toward a voter referendum on the issue as well. He believes voters would support a plan that would reduce the tax burden on homeowners.

"The main issue in Anoka County -- and it's not one that is brought up in a campaign -- is economic development,"

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The proposed Vikings stadium for Anoka County has divided voters.

Anoka County

**CITY OF BLAINE
ANOKA COUNTY, MINNESOTA**

**CITY COUNCIL MEETING NO. 06-52
Thursday, October 5, 2006**

**7:30 P.M.
Council Chambers
10801 Town Square Drive**

- 1. CALL TO ORDER BY THE MAYOR**
- 2. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE TO THE FLAG**
- 3. ROLL CALL**
- 4. APPROVAL OF MINUTES**
 - Workshop Meeting – September 14, 2006
 - Special Meeting – September 14, 2006
- 5. AWARDS - PRESENTATIONS - ORGANIZATIONAL BUSINESS**
 - 5.1 PROCLAMATION** – Recognizing Columbia Park Medical Group
 - 5.2 PROCLAMATION** – Domestic Violence Awareness Month
 - 5.3 PRESENTATION**- Kris Sanda, Met Council
- 6. COMMUNICATIONS**
- 7. OPEN FORUM FOR CITIZEN INPUT** - *Open Forum is an opportunity for citizens to present an issue or concern to City Council. There is a maximum of fifteen minutes set aside for open forum. Each presentation should be limited to no more than three minutes. If your item needs follow-up from the City, staff will arrange for that follow-up and will contact you to let you know what is being done. Thank you for coming this evening.*
- 8. ADOPTION OF AGENDA**
- 9. 8:00 P.M. - PUBLIC HEARINGS AND ITEMS SET FOR A CERTAIN TIME**
- 10. APPROVAL OF CONSENT AGENDA:** *All items listed under the "Consent Agenda" are considered to be routine by the City Council and will be enacted by one motion. There will be no separate discussion of these items unless a Councilmember or citizen so requests, in which event the item will be removed from the Consent Agenda and considered in its normal sequence on the agenda.*
 - 10.1** Schedule of Bills Paid
 - 10.2** Approve a Temporary On-Sale 3.2 Percent Malt Beverage Licenses for the Blaine Jaycees Minnesota Owls Hockey games to be held at Fogerty Arena on October 7, 13, 27, and 28th, 2006 – *Jane Cross, City Clerk*

- 10.3** Adopting an Administrative Policy for Fencing in City Parks and Trails – *Robert Therres, Public Services Manager*
- 10.4** Second Reading - Ordinance No. 06-2106, Chapter 162, Vacation of Drainage and Utility Easement for Lots 7, 8, 9 and 10, Block 1, Radisson Pond, Vacation No. V06-09 – *Jean M. Keely, City Engineer*
- 10.5** Cancel Public Improvement Project No. 05-04, Austin Street Alignment North of Pheasant Ridge Drive NE - Sewer and Water Main – *Jean M. Keely, City Engineer*
- 10.6** Authorize Temporary Removal of Parking Restrictions on Davenport Street NE from 91st Avenue NE to 93rd Lane NE for Unique Body & Paint, Inc. Open House on October 8, 2006 – *Jean M. Keely, City Engineer*
- 10.7** **HANDOUT:** Appointment of Additional Election Judges for the 2006 General Election – *Jane Cross, City Clerk*
- 10.8** First Reading – Ordinance No. 06-2109, Authorizing the Conveyance of Real Property by the City of Blaine – *Jean M. Keely, City Engineer*
- 10.9** Authorize Temporary Removal of Parking Restrictions on Cloverleaf Parkway NE a Distance of 500 Feet East of Polk Street NE for a Fundraiser Garage Sale on October 12, 2006

11. DEVELOPMENT BUSINESS

- 11.1** The Applicant, Merit Development Company, Inc., is Requesting the Following at 2010 Cloud Drive NE (Case File No. 06-20/LSJ): – *Bryan Schafer, Community Development Director*
- A.** Resolution No. 06-250, Granting Final Plat Approval to Subdivide 12.38 Acres Into 21 Lots and One Outlot to be Known as Granville Villas 2nd Addition
- B.** Resolution No. 06-257, Authorizing Installation of Regulatory Signs
- 11.2** Resolution No. 06-251, Granting a Conditional Use Permit to Operate an Indoor Recreation/Education Hockey Training Facility With Limited Retail Sales in an I-1 (Light Industrial) Zoning District at 1550 91st Avenue NE. Goal Crease, Inc. (Case File No. 06-64/LSJ) – *Bryan Schafer, Community Development Director*
- 11.3** First Reading – Ordinance No. 06-2107, An Amendment to Interim Ordinance No. 06-2103, Exempting Certain Construction Activity from the Development Moratorium in the Pheasant Ridge Planning Area. City of Blaine. (Case File No. 05-79/BKS) – *Bryan Schafer, Community Development Director*

12. ADMINISTRATION

- 12.1** First Reading – Ordinance No. 06-2108, Resolution 06-2108, Amending the City Code Regarding Solid Waste – *Roark Haver, Communications Technician*
- 12.2** Resolution No. 06-252, Accept Work and Authorize Final Payment to Inland Utility Construction, Inc. in the Amount of \$25,981.22 for Construction of Xylite Street NE from

Radisson Road (CSAH 52) to 1,325 Feet North, Improvement Project No. 04-15 – *Jean M. Keely, City Engineer*

- 12.3** Construction of Xylite Street NE from Radisson Road (CSAH 52) to 1,325 Feet North, Improvement Project No. 04-15 – *Jean M. Keely, City Engineer*
 - A.** Resolution No. 06-253, Order Preparation of Proposed Assessment
 - B.** Resolution No. 06-254, Call for Hearing on Proposed Assessment

- 12.4** Construction of Dunkirk Court NE from Coral Sea Street NE to South of 87th Avenue NE Alignment, Improvement Project No. 00-12 – *Jean M. Keely, City Engineer*
 - A.** Resolution No. 06-255, Order Preparation of Proposed Assessment
 - B.** Resolution No. 06-256, Call for Hearing on Proposed Assessment

- 12.5** Reconstruction of 117th Avenue NE and Trunk Highway 65 Intersection Improvements, Improvement Project No. 06-08 – *Jean M. Keely, City Engineer*
 - A.** Resolution No. 06-261, Approve Change Order No. 1
 - B.** Amend Contract for Professional Services with RLK, Inc. in the Amount of \$64,625.00

- 12.6** Resolution No. 06-260, Calling for the Sale of the City’s General Obligation Tax Increment Refunding Bonds – *Joe Huss, Finance Director*

- 12.7** Rejecting Bids for a Restroom Building in the Baseball Complex and Authorizing Staff to RE-Bid the Project – *Jim Peterson, Parks and Recreation Director*

- 12.8** Resolution No. 06-259, Supporting the Requirement of Holding a Referendum for the Funding of a Sports Stadium – *Ronald R. Wood, City Manager*

13. OTHER BUSINESS

14. ADJOURNMENT

anokacountywatchdog.com

From: "Melissa Hortman" <hortman@visi.com>
To: "anokacountywatchdog.com" <harold@anokacountywatchdog.com>
Sent: Tuesday, August 01, 2006 8:54 AM
Subject: RE: Survey Question

I support a referendum.

Melissa Hortman

From: anokacountywatchdog.com [mailto:harold@anokacountywatchdog.com]
Sent: Thursday, July 27, 2006 4:12 PM
To: harold@anokacountywatchdog.com
Subject: Survey Question

Dear Legislative Candidate,

The Anoka County Watchdog asks the following brief question regarding the Vikings stadium proposal:

Do you favor or oppose a voter referendum regarding the proposed sales tax increase to finance Anoka County's share of the stadium cost?

Your response will be posted on my web site, anokacountywatchdog.com, to educate visitors with respect to your position on this important issue.

The Anoka County Watchdog is a trusted source for Anoka County news and information. Visit me at www.anokacountywatchdog.com.

Sincerely,

Harold E. Hamilton
Anoka County Watchdog Founder

Posted on Sat, Jul. 29, 2006

LeDoux will fight for local cards

Former pro heavyweight to head state commission

BY JOHN SHIPLEY
Pioneer Press

Joey Abell is a heavyweight boxer from Minneapolis training in Coon Rapids with a professional record of 7 -0. The southpaw has fought in his home state just twice, and his biggest bouts were on cards out of Philadelphia.

That is about to change, said Scott LeDoux.

Gov. Tim Pawlenty appointed LeDoux, a former heavyweight contender who fought Muhammad Ali and George Foreman, executive director of the reformed Minnesota Boxing Commission on Friday. LeDoux immediately promised to bring safe and competitive cards to Minnesota.

Cards that will include promising local boxers such as St. Paul's Jason Litzau and Abell.

"He's been on the road. He hasn't been able to show his tools here and get a crowd going here," LeDoux said of Abell, one of about 50 people gathered for Pawlenty's announcement at the Anoka-Coon Rapids Boxing Club in Coon Rapids. "We'll have fun here again."

Friday's gathering was a double celebration for LeDoux, an Andover resident who retired in 1983 with a 33-13-4 professional record. As eager as he is to be the commission's director, he's happier that there even is a commission. He was incensed when in 2001, former Gov. Jesse Ventura decided to dissolve the boxing commission, on which LeDoux served for 18 years.

"I started to complain Day 1," he said.

But it wasn't until about a year and a half ago that LeDoux got together with state Rep. Andy Westerberg, R-Blaine, and started working on a bill that would reinstate the commission formerly responsible for creating and enforcing regulations related to boxing.

LeDoux will direct a five-person commission, which will be appointed by Pawlenty as early as late August. LeDoux's job will be paid, but part time; the commission will determine his salary. He already is a member of the Anoka County Board of Commissioners and a governor-appointed member of the Minnesota Racing Commission.

"He's been at this since 2001," Pawlenty said. "Scott has been the champion of getting this commission reinstated, with the goal of having rules that are known and transparent, making sure the boxers who participate in Minnesota are treated fairly, consistently and appropriately."

LeDoux stopped short of calling recent local boxing cards crooked but said they "smelled." The competition was suspect. Too many boxers, he said, came off "the stiff list."

One nationally televised card, he said, featured a fighter with a 14-46 record. "Fourteen wins and 46 losses!" he said. "We would not have allowed him to fight."

That card, staged in January 2004 at the Minneapolis Convention Center, also contained the most notable example of the need for a commission, LeDoux said. In the main event, St. Paul light middleweight Matt Vanda beat Sam Garr with a split decision that was lambasted by nearly everyone, from the ESPN analysts to boxing bloggers.

After the fight, ESPN analyst Teddy Atlas told the Pioneer Press he had Garr winning every round on his scorecard. "Garr did everything he needed to do to win," he said. "It's a shame he got treated this way."

LeDoux said a boxing commission will put an end to that by watching and regulating who participates in and judges a fight. Forty-six states work under rules created by the American Boxing Commission, he said, and Minnesota will be the 47th.

"We'll fall in step with them," LeDoux said. "I've already printed out the rules. I love them."

As for the first fight card regulated by the new commission, LeDoux said he hopes to have one in September.

John Shipley can be reached at jshipley@pioneerpress.com.

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<http://www.twincities.com>

Last update: July 25, 2006 – 12:42 PM

Fridley rail station delayed

Northstar Commuter Rail's first stop outside downtown Minneapolis will require \$9.5 million more.

Sarah Moran, Star Tribune

The Fridley station along the Northstar commuter rail line is on hold until an additional \$9.5 million is secured.

That money is needed in order for design, engineering and construction work to move forward. Rail critics say it's just the latest in a series of price jumps for the line that now carries a \$317 million price tag.

Project officials are hopeful the Fridley station will be built and open at the same time as the stations planned for Minneapolis, Coon Rapids, Anoka, Elk River and Big Lake, said Tim Yantos, executive director of the Northstar commuter rail. If the project's remaining federal funding is provided, those stations are set for construction in 2007 and 2008.

But it's possible the train will whiz past 61st Way and East River Road in Fridley when the line opens in 2009. Although Fridley is in the contract with the railroad to be built at some point, there is no time frame attached like there is for the other stops.

Officials from Burlington Northern Santa Fe, which owns the rail lines and property where stations would be constructed, told Northstar officials during negotiations this spring that they wanted the Fridley stop removed from the line, Yantos said.

The reason they gave was the station's proximity to the Northtown Yard, where many of the railroad's freight trains switch tracks. The railroad was concerned the construction and operation of the commuter rail could create delays on their freight lines, Yantos said.

The station, he said, presented the most expense and technical challenge.

During negotiations a deal was reached that kept Fridley in the plans and gave the railroad another \$9.5 million, said Steve Billings, Fridley City Council member and Northstar Corridor Development Authority (NCDA) executive committee member.

"[The money] had to come out of the working capital budget, so now there's not enough money left in the budget to build all the stations," he said. "They essentially moved the money that had been set aside to construct the Fridley station and used that money to pay Burlington Northern."

Railroad spokesman Steve Fornsberg said he had "no information on the additional money and how it would help," when asked about the relationship

between the money and the railroad's concerns about the station location.

"Our people don't have a concern about being unable to work through any issues," Fornsberg said.

Rep. Phil Krinkie, R-Shoreview, isn't surprised by the jump in price.

"Every three to six months they announce another cost increase on the project, so it's very, very difficult for anyone to follow how much the proposal has been cannibalized from its original proposal and how much the costs have increased," he said.

Krinkie, who opposes the project, said he suspects original price estimates and proposal details for Northstar and other transit projects are initially presented in a misleading way in order to gain public support. Then costs go up, but once some money has been spent, people are less likely to scrap the project, he said.

Northstar project leaders are confident they'll be able to get the \$9.5 million needed to move Fridley ahead, Yantos said, possibly from federal sources.

"Eventually it will be built because we believe there's tremendous interest," he said, mentioning current and future businesses such as Medtronic.

Bob Barnette, Fridley City Council member and delegate to NCDCA, said the stop is important as a major hub for residents in Fridley as well as Columbia Heights, New Brighton and Brooklyn Center.

Though Barnette said he is concerned about the rising costs, he's confident the Fridley station will be built.

"There have been a million roadblocks thrown at this thing over the years, but we tend to work them out," he said.

Sarah Moran • 612-673-7512

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Last update: July 25, 2006 – 12:39 PM

My View: And the award for stadium pork goes to ...

Each year a great number of awards are given to people in acknowledgement of their contributions to society. Nobel Prizes, United Nations Public Service Awards and Pulitzer Prizes are just a few examples of extremely prestigious awards. The hard-working taxpayers of Anoka County will be thrilled to find out there is a new award dedicated to frivolous stadium funding proposals and the politicians who support them. This year will be the first time, and hopefully the last time, the highly coveted Purple Pigskin Pork Award will be given to the most deserving politician in Anoka County.

James Hafner

Each year a great number of awards are given to people in acknowledgement of their contributions to society. Nobel Prizes, United Nations Public Service Awards and Pulitzer Prizes are just a few examples of extremely prestigious awards. The hard-working taxpayers of Anoka County will be thrilled to find out there is a new award dedicated to frivolous stadium funding proposals and the politicians who support them. This year will be the first time, and hopefully the last time, the highly coveted Purple Pigskin Pork Award will be given to the most deserving politician in Anoka County.

While Anoka County lobbyists and Vikings officials tried desperately to win this important award, the judges have decided only elected officials who failed to represent Anoka County taxpayers could be considered. After all, the taxpayers can do little to rid themselves of those pesky lobbyists. But elected officials are a different story. Diebold voting machines aside, the taxpayers can actually hold elected officials responsible for attempting to ram the pork-filled purple pigskin palace down their throats. Because Anoka County and Vikings stadium supporters were so eager to mention representative government as their reason for preventing taxpayers from voting on stadium funding sales taxes, the nominees considered for this year's Purple Pigskin Pork Award should be rewarded with an extended stay in the unemployment line.

The nominations were many, but only one local politician can actually win the award. Let's start with two honorable mentions before we present the three finalists.

Rep. Melissa Hortman, DFL-Brooklyn Park/Coon Rapids. Hortman said she was for a stadium funding referendum before she was against one. Take a look at her voting record on HF2480. Will she campaign for or against a referendum when the Anoka-Hennepin School District seeks new funding in 2007? Is the school district building a stadium? This coming November the taxpayers will be moving ahead without Hortman.

Rep. Kathy Tingelstad, R-Andover. Tingelstad chaired the only House committee to hear and pass the Vikings stadium legislation this past year. The chairwoman of the House Government Operations and Veterans Affairs

Committee, Tingelstad is also listed as an author of both Anoka County stadium bills. HF2294 and HF2295 have her fingerprints all over them. Both bills contain stadium funding referendum waivers yet she claims to support the voting rights of the taxpayers. The judges feel that actions speak louder than words. For some reason, Tingelstad fails to mention these facts in her legislative achievements for the year. Let's hope the taxpayers give her a referendum waiver this coming November and vote for someone who respects the voting rights of the taxpayers.

Third place goes to **Rep. Andy Westerberg, R-Blaine**. Andy was quoted as being "mad as hell" after being left off the stadium conference committee. During a hearing before Tingelstad's committee, Westerberg, the main author of HF2294, testified it would be unfair to the residents of St. Cloud, Thief River Falls, Duluth and Mankato if Anoka County residents were to vote on stadium funding. The judges checked and found these communities are not in Anoka County. With a tragically limited knowledge of geography, Westerberg seems to have forgotten it just may be unfair for Anoka County residents to fork over nearly \$300 million to a billionaire from New Jersey without a vote. Little did anyone know Westerberg was just practicing to become an Anoka County commissioner. He is running for the District 2 seat soon to be vacated by Commissioner Dick Lang. The taxpayers of District 2 are a tough crowd and take their voting rights seriously. Look for Westerberg to become a lobbyist after he gets the results this fall.

Second place goes to **Sen. Don Betzold, DFL-Fridley**. Betzold recognized the stadium legislation was going nowhere fast. Instead of lobbying hard for the funding of Springbrook Nature Center and other worthy causes, Betzold decided to use his limited influence in the Senate Tax Committee to attach the Vikings stadium bill to the more successful Twins stadium bill. Even though the hard-working taxpayers of Anoka County would pay a sales tax increase five times higher than Hennepin County taxpayers, Betzold was undeterred. The main author of the Senate version of the Vikings stadium bill (SF2061), he donned his purple tie and pursued an agenda described by Senate Minority Leader Dick Day as a "train wreck waiting to happen." Let's hope Betzold's campaign experiences a train wreck this fall.

And the winner of the first, and hopefully last, Purple Pigskin Pork Award is **Anoka County Commissioner Dan Erhart**. The judges knew Anoka County Chairwoman Margaret Langfeld was more deserving, but her refusal to seek reelection this November makes her irrelevant for this award. After shamelessly promoting this fiscally irresponsible and now potentially catastrophic environmental disaster posing as a stadium proposal, Langfeld is wise to hide from the hard-working taxpayers this fall. Aside from a handful of real estate developers and Blaine City Council members, Langfeld would need a microscope to find any support for her candidacy.

Erhart worked tirelessly behind the scenes promoting the economically handicapped pork-filled stadium proposal. Unwilling or unable to personally offer meaningful public testimony on behalf of the fiscally impaired purple palace, he made sure county lobbyists provided most of the commentary. Unfortunately, Erhart is not up for reelection until 2008. His fondness for subsidizing billionaires could make this award an annual event.

There will be several honest hard-working candidates running for office in Anoka County this year. If you plan to vote for anyone mentioned above, you can't say you weren't warned. The stadium debate is only a symptom of a more pressing problem. Our elected officials must get back to serving every member of our society. The concept of representative government requires it. This year, the taxpayers will demand it.

James Hafner works as a financial analyst and lives in Coon Rapids.

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