

E-mail Update 1/5/07

In This Issue:

1. 2007 Legislature Kicks Off;
2. Mystery Quote Winner;
3. Mystery Quote II;
4. Berg Elected, Erhart Not;
5. LeDoux's Etiquette.

1. 2007 Legislature Kicks Off.

On Wednesday, the 85th Minnesota legislature kicked off. The next day, the DFL-led Senate proposed a raft of tax increases, which is no surprise. There have been no formal bill introductions or meaningful committee hearings this week.

Again, the Watchdog will be carefully monitoring the legislature, providing reports each Friday.

2. Mystery Quote Winner.

Wow! The contest was wildly popular, with many hundreds of people responding for a chance to win a stylish coffee mug. In fact, many respondents made the correct guess. Congratulations to Matt N. from Fargo, North Dakota who guessed correctly the quickest.

The second place answer goes to Larry H. of Circle Pines, who guessed "2/3rds of Anoka County." Although not the "official" correct answer, it has a high probability of being correct, so Larry gets a mug as well.

The answer: Boxing legend and former heavyweight champion of the world Larry Holmes opined that Scott LeDoux is a chump.

In a wide-ranging interview with Doghouse Boxing, The Easton Assassin also had the following to say about LeDoux:

"Scott LeDoux is a chump, I didn't try to kill him but he tried to make the fight a racial issue. He is nothing and with his commentary on ESPN telecasts he is not even good at that either. Foreman and LeDoux can say what they want about me and if they want to fight me now at fifty-four years old I will get in the ring with them and kick their asses."

“My training schedule is always good enough to beat those guys. I don’t have to train to beat Scott LeDoux. He looks like a short, fat butterball which he was when I fought him back in the eighties.”

To read the entire interview, click here:

http://www.doghouseboxing.com/Ed_Ludwig/Larry_Holmes_011504.htm.

3. Mystery Quote II.

Given the popularity of the first Mystery Quote contest, and, given the Watchdog’s desire to please our readership, we proudly introduce “Mystery Quote III!” The rules are the same as the first contest. First one to answer correctly gets the sweet-looking Watchdog mug.

The quote is as follows:

“The long flight to Hawaii is not pleasant.”

Hint: This person flew to Hawaii on your dime. Good luck!

4. Follow the Leader.

Dennis Berg has been elected as the new Anoka County Board Chairman. As the Watchdog has noted, Berg is the default, consensus choice. Being optimistic by nature, the Watchdog notes with relief that Dan Erhart was unable to reclaim the crown, though Berg is hardly a reformer. Not known for bold or visionary thinking, look for Berg to be more of a caretaker than a leader as the board continues to lose its Good Ol’ Boy flavor. By the way, the Watchdog called this one back on December 6th.

While there was little drama to the Berg election, fireworks flew regarding the election of vice chairman. After realizing he lacked the support to be board chair, Dan Erhart mounted a campaign to be elected vice chairman. Watchdogs in attendance at the board meeting report that a visibly angered Erhart watched as fellow board members rejected his candidacy and elected the more even-tempered and poised Jim Kordiak to the position. It appears that Erhart’s confrontational, strong-arm attitude has alienated just about everyone. Look for him to face a serious challenge if he decides to run for re-election in 2008. The era of Erhart is over.

5. LeDoux's Etiquette.

Today's Coon Rapids Herald features a letter to the editor from yet another unhappy constituent of Scott LeDoux. The Watchdog has reported in the past with respect to unhappiness regarding LeDoux's constituent services.

This time, Elmer Fisher of Coon Rapids writes regarding LeDoux's behavior during county board meetings. Apparently, LeDoux's constant yawning and cell phone calls have irritated Mr. Fisher.

Since LeDoux is a loyal Watchdog reader, the following advice is offered:

<http://www.miss-etiquette.com/>.

E-mail Update 1/12/07

In This Issue:

1. Legislative Update;
2. Mystery Quote Answer;
3. Northstar Rail Back to the Public Trough;
4. Anoka County Wish for Tax Increases;
5. Vikings Crank Up PR Machine.

1. House Legislative Update.

Bills to raise your taxes:

- HF 23 (Rep. Erhardt, R-Edina) raising the wheelage tax, raising the gas tax, indexing future gas tax increases to inflation, increasing license tab fees, raising the sales tax in the Metro;
- HF 65 (Rep. Thissen, DFL-Minneapolis) raising notary fees, per Anoka County's wish (see below);

Bills to reduce your freedom:

- HF 41 (Rep. Jaros, DFL-Duluth) prohibiting talking on a cell phone while driving;
- HF 105 (Rep. Hortman, DFL-Brooklyn Park) forcing parents to keep children in a car seat until age 8;
- HF 106 (Rep. Thissen, DFL-Minneapolis) making seat belt violations a "primary offense";

Bills to make you feel good:

- HF 46 (Rep. Thao, DFL-St. Paul) mandating that native speakers of a language get preference in hiring over native English speakers for translation services;
- HF 58 (Rep. Mullery, DFL-Minneapolis) a new government job training program only for minorities and closed to whites;
- HF 87 (Rep. Thao, DFL-St. Paul) issuing debt for the design of the Asian Pacific Cultural Center.

Visit www.house.mn

2. Mystery Quote Answer.

Well, we stumped the readership with this one. Surprisingly, there was not one correct answer. Many readers incorrectly guessed Scott LeDoux, Dan Erhart, and even Steve Novak. While very logical guesses, they were incorrect. You can surmise that the

quote is associated with the infamous 2006 Hawaiian junket. Many remember that commissioners LeDoux and Erhart were there. (Who could forget the “Jet Lag” scandal?) Many don’t recall that Margaret Langfeld was the third commissioner on the junket. Indeed, it was Margaret Langfeld who complained to Harold Hamilton that “the long flight to Hawaii is not pleasant!” when he called her out on this outrageous waste of taxpayer money.

The prize mug has been adopted by a loving family committed to fiscal conservatism and limited government.

3. Northstar Rail Back to the Public Trough.

Surprise, surprise. After Rep. Kathy Tingelstad (R-Andover) promised that Northstar rail wouldn’t be back for anymore state funding after filching nearly \$100 million out of the state treasury in 2006, they’re back again. And it isn’t just one thing. First, there is a \$5 million request to fund the Fridley station that Anoka County dropped because of cost overrun concerns. Second, \$750,000 is requested for planning to extend the line (which hasn’t even been built) to the crowded metropolis of Morrison County. Finally, the County is looking for a sales tax exemption for some \$7 million in capital materials purchases. Northstar rail: Rising costs, shrinking benefits.

<http://www.startribune.com/142/story/920963.html>

4. Anoka County Wish for Tax Increases.

Anoka County is also asking the state for permission to raise a host of taxes for you to pay. When it comes to your tax money, these folks just can’t get enough. Check out these lowlights:

- Taxes on mortgage and deed transactions;
- Lift the levy limits on taxes for libraries;
- A quadrupling of the “wheelage tax”;
- Increased notary fees;
- Increased candidate filing fees;

The County also requested that the state increase spending significantly and turn that money over to the County.

Perhaps it is time for the “pro business” MetroNorth Chamber of Commerce to demonstrate its commitment to capitalism by formally opposing these tax increases. It is time for the Chamber to stop supporting County tax increase proposals.

<http://www.co.anoka.mn.us/officials/legislative-package.asp>.

5. Vikings Crank Up RP Machine.

As Watchdogs will recall, a web site called "Minnesota Momentum" has been up and running for some time. While the site is styled to look like a true grass roots campaign for a new football stadium, it is really just another PR arm of the Vikings and Zygi Wilf. Spin doctors call these "Astroturf" campaigns.

In any case, the web site is now touting a plan to build a new stadium in downtown Minneapolis. Minneapolis can have the stadium. Just make sure to tax yourselves for it and not us.

<http://www.minnesotamomentum.com/index.jsp>.

E-mail Update 1/19/07

In This Issue:

1. Legislative Update;
2. Metro North Chamber: Pro-business?;
3. \$5 Billion, No Strings Attached?;
4. Governor Delivers State of the State;
5. County Needs Anti-bullying Policy.

1. Legislative Update.

The legislature has not moved any bills of significance, so the introduction of bills is still the order of the day.

Last week, the Watchdog presented bills that make taxpayers jeer. Today, some bills to make you cheer.

- HF 60 (Rep. Brod, R-New Prague) a bill to permanently reduce the state income tax rates;
- HF 61 (Rep. Sviggum, R-Kenyon) a bill to provide property tax rebates;
- HF 149 (Rep. DeLaForest R-Andover) a bill to repeal the “temporary” .5% increase in the sales tax;
- HF 73 (Rep. Paulsen, R-Eden Prairie) a bill to move the legislature back to meeting only every other year;
- HF 95 (Rep. Bigham, DFL-Cottage Grove) legislative per diem payments prohibited during special session;
- HF 187 (Rep. Brod, R-New Prague) a bill conforming Minnesota to the federal estate tax;

Of course, Watchdogs shouldn't get too excited. The biggest category of bill introductions by far is “appropriations” (i.e. spending your hard-earned money).

2. Metro North Chamber: Pro-business?

The Metro North Chamber's mission is to “advocate and promote business” in the northern Metro. It's in their mission statement.

If the Chamber is faithful to this mission, why does it allow the membership of groups that aren't in true business at all?

The Chamber's 2007 membership directory lists the following organizations as members:

- City of Andover;
- City of East Bethel;
- City of Lino Lakes;
- City of Ramsey;
- City of Ham Lake;
- City of Blaine;
- The U.S. Postal Service;
- Anoka County;
- Anoka Conservation District;
- Anoka County Partners;
- Anoka County Sheriff's Office;
- Anoka County Travel Management;
- Anoka County Community Action;
- Coon Creek Watershed District;
- Minnesota Workforce Center;
- 3 Anoka County Commissioners individually;
- Anoka Technical College;
- Anoka-Ramsey Community College;

These organizations aren't business – they're government. They don't promote business interests – they take money from business. In short, they don't have a place in an organization that is truly dedicated to protecting and promoting business.

Government has its own advocacy organization already. It's called the IRS.

By the way, guess who pays the dues these government groups pay? If you guessed "me, the taxpayer" give yourself a high-five and stop wondering why your taxes continue to rise. Government has core functions to fill, like hanging out at Chamber functions while you go to work to pay the taxes they consume.

3. \$5 Billion, No Strings Attached?

If filling out tax forms and paying for government to belong to a chamber of commerce isn't enough, your state government hands out nearly \$5 billion in grant money each year without the proper financial safeguards.

This according to the non-partisan Office of the Legislative Auditor (OLA). In a recent report to the legislature, the OLA noted that there were no systematic safeguards in place to ensure that these funds were appropriated or spent properly.

To read the report, click here: <http://www.auditor.leg.state.mn.us/ped/2007/grants.htm>.

And no, the Watchdog doesn't know where you can apply for a grant!

4. Governor Delivers the State of the State.

Governor Pawlenty this week delivered his annual state of the state address. While the address was filled with mostly feel-good proposals crafted in response to focus group data, there was one point he made that bears repeating:

"I've said before and I'll say it again – Minnesotans are not undertaxed."

If the Governor follows this simple principle, he is well on his way to a great second term.

To read the address, click here:

5. County Needs Anti-bullying Policy.

It just gets worse and worse for Commissioner Dan Erhart. Just a couple of weeks after his colleagues on the county board rejected him, he is observed lashing out again.

This time, a Watchdog witnessed Erhart publicly confront a city council member at a recent local government meeting. Erhart chastised the council member for votes she has recently taken. He called the council member a "permanent enemy" and said her political service "was finished" at the next election.

Since Commissioner Erhart is a regular Watchdog reader, the following advice is offered:

How to Win Friends & Influence People, by Dale Carnegie, click here.

Anoka-Hennepin School District, Bullying Essay and Poster Contest 2006-2007, click here.

Be a friend, Dan, don't bully!

E-mail Update 1/26/07

In This Issue:

1. Legislative Update;
2. Dumb Bill of the Month;
3. A Tale of Two Tims;
4. District 11 Plans New Levy;
5. St. Francis Levy Information.

1. Legislative Update.

Bills to make you cheer:

- HF 229 (Rep. Howes, R-Walker) a bill to accelerate highway construction;
- HF 266 (Rep. Paulsen, R-Eden Prairie) a bill to cut the size of the legislature;
- HF 273 (Rep. Howes, R-Walker) a bill to legalize the sale and use of fireworks;
- HF 317 (Rep. DeLaForest, R-Andover) a bill repealing the Minnesota “sick tax”;
- HF 324 (Rep. Holberg, R-Lakeville) a bill to prohibit school employees from using taxpayer resources to campaign for school levies
- HF 350 (Rep. Zellers, R-Maple Grove) a bill to complete HWY 610;

Bills to make you jeer:

- HF 246 (Rep. Hortman, DFL-Brooklyn Park) a bill to study commuter rail for the I-394 corridor;
- HF 305 (Rep. Huntley, DFL-Duluth) a bill to ban smoking on private property;
- HF 311 (Rep. Hornstein, DFL-Minneapolis) a bill doubling a traffic ticket fine if violator was on a cell phone;
- HF 318 (Rep. Jaros, DFL-Duluth) a bill creating the Minnesota Ethnic Heritage Commission;
- HF 333 (Rep. Lillie, DFL-Maplewood) a bill to pay state employees for work they DIDN'T do during the 2005 shutdown;
- HF 347 (Rep. Gardner, DFL-Shoreview) a bill requiring that yard waste bags be biodegradable.

2. Dumb Bill of the Month.

Some bills are so bad, they deserve their own agenda item on the update. Among many, many well-qualified bills, the Watchdog dubs HF 362 as the dumbest bill of January 2007. This bill gives Anoka County the authority to levy a “deed and mortgage

tax.” Just what Anoka County taxpayers need – another way for the out of control County board to tax them.

Notice that Rep. Hortman won't pay the tax she wants to impose. She doesn't live in Anoka County. The Watchdog also calls out Rep. Tingelstad (R-Coon Rapids and Rep. Jim Abeler, R-Anoka) for co-sponsoring this new tax.

Contact Hortman at: 651-296-4280
Email: rep.Melissa.hortman@house.mn

Read the bill here:

3. A Tale of Two Tims.

Here's the difference between talking the talk and walking the walk. Just a week after Governor Pawlenty talked fiscally tough in his State of the State address, he went on a spending spree in his proposed budget for the upcoming biennium.

The governor spends nearly the entire \$2 billion surplus while leaving table scraps for tax relief (you know, that extra money you paid to the government).

Among the lowlights:

- An increase in state spending of 9.3% (Are you getting a 9% raise this year?);
- An increase in education spending of \$985 million (7.7% increase)
- A \$1.3 billion increase in health and human services spending (15.6% increase);
- Only \$281 million in tax relief.

Don't forget, this is just the opening bid on budget negotiations with the DFL legislature. Final numbers will no doubt be higher when it's all said and done.

To read the proposed budget, visit: <http://www.finance.state.mn.us/>

4. District 11 Plans New Levy.

We knew this day would come. The Anoka-Hennepin School District has decided to go out for another levy referendum this coming November.

The Coon Rapids Herald reports that two informational hearings will be held February 20 and March 6 at locations to be determined.

The article went on to note the familiar litany of complaints from the district regarding funding. A stylish Watchdog coffee mug will be awarded to the person who can show the last year in which the district DIDN'T complain about money. There seems to be a funding "crisis" year after year, decade after decade.

Attend one of the hearings and decide for yourself. Rest assured, the Watchdog will be closely monitoring this issue to give you the straight facts, not the PR spin.

<http://www.abcnewspapers.com/2007/January/24levy.html>.

5. St. Francis Levy Information.

As reported for some time, the St. Francis schools will be holding a "do over" referendum on February 20th. A web site that discusses the levy can be found at www.saintfranciscommunity.com. The web site is very circumspect regarding who created the web site and what their agenda is, but it does appear to be pro-levy. Check it out, visit the "blog" section and leave a comment. Tell us what you think.

The Watchdog would be remiss without disclosing one fact about the site that should have been made by others. A person named Melissa Jabas is the "outreach coordinator" for the pro-levy side. She is a frequent poster on the site. She is also recent DFL-endorsed candidate for the Minnesota House. Jabas should disclose this fact.

E-mail Update 2/2/07

In This Issue:

1. 20,000 Strong!;
2. Brother, Can You Spare \$4 Billion?;
3. The Watchdog Cheers the DFL Majority;
4. Dumb Bill Update;
5. Legislative Update.

1. 20,000 Strong.

This past week, the Watchdog surpassed 20,000 visitors. The Anoka County Watchdog is the undisputed champion of spin-free news and analysis in the North Metro. The strong interest in our web site grows daily, proving the need for a counter-weight to the government funded propaganda machine.

2. Brother, Can You Spare \$4 Billion?

The non-partisan Office of the Legislative Auditor (OLA) has released a report concluding that the state's public employee pension funds are grossly under-funded, to the tune of \$4 billion. In other words, the retirement programs are a ticking fiscal time bomb. The OLA blames excessive retirement benefit adjustments as the primary culprit.

On a related note, the Watchdog congratulates the OLA for its professional and objective work. Under the leadership of Mr. Jim Nobles, the OLA has established itself as a true reform oriented office.

Read the pension report here:

<http://www.auditor.leg.state.mn.us/ped/2007/postemployment.htm>.

3. The Watchdog Cheers the DFL Majority.

Yes, the Watchdog was worried when the DFL claimed a huge majority in the Minnesota House in November. Their promises of rapid change combined with a tax and spend agenda would give any taxpayer nausea.

But rest assured, this DFL majority, so far, has turned out to be just another bunch of big talk, do nothing politicians. Consider what this group has "accomplished" in the

month of January (besides raising per diem payments and extending Housing allowances to year-round instead of just during session).

- A grand total of two bills passed off the House floor;
- Half of the committees didn't even hear a single bill.

The Watchdog congratulates the DFL majority for this stunning lack of activity. Given all the bad bills they have introduced, it is a good thing for the taxpayers that they haven't gotten around to acting on them – yet.

4. Dumb Bill Update.

Last week, the Watchdog named HF 362, authored by Rep. Melissa Hortman, as the “Dumb Bill of the Month.” Being the intelligent group that you are, a number of Watchdogs wrote back noting that we left out an important piece of information about the bill. We did mention that this was a new tax on property transactions in Anoka County. What we didn't mention is that the money would be deposited in an “environmental response fund.” Among the purposes of this fund would be expenditures to “improve property for rail traffic.”

Yet another way to sneak some tax dollars into the over-budget Northstar rail project yet keep the money off Northstar's budget books. Northstar rail: increasing costs, shrinking benefits.

5. Legislative Update.

The lack of legislative action has not stopped the torrent of bad bill introductions. Here's this week's horror stories:

- HF 478 (Rep. Walker, DFL-Minneapolis), a bill amending the Minnesota Constitution to guarantee “affordable, high quality” medical care;
- HF 504 (Rep. Hilstrom, DFL-Brooklyn Park), a bill prohibiting Internet bullying;
- HF 522 (Rep. Welti, DFL-Plainview), a bill banning glass containers on watercraft (this one is a pre-nom for February Dumb Bill);
- HF 530 (Rep. Ruud, DFL-Minnetonka), a bill requiring all young girls to undergo an STD vaccine;
- HF 375 (Rep. Ruud, DFL-Minnetonka), the Minnesota Global Warming Mitigation Act;
- HF 388 (Rep. Cornish, R-Good Thunder), a bill appropriating money for the Minnesota Agricultural Interpretive Center;

- HF 461 (Rep. Solberg, DFL-Grand Rapids), a bill appropriating money for the Children's Discovery Museum in Grand Rapids.

E-mail Update 2/9/07

In This Issue:

1. Anoka-Hennepin Levy Hearings Set;
2. Northstar Commuter Coach Shortchanged;
3. Twins Stadium a Lesson in Bad Government;
4. Legislative Update;
5. Senator Betzold Thinks Your Taxes are Too Low.

1. Anoka-Hennepin Levy Hearings Set.

The next big tax and spend battle is at hand. The Anoka-Hennepin school board has announced that it will set a school levy vote for this coming November. The board has set two hearings to provide the public with district financial information and take comments from the tax paying public. In other words, this is your chance to be heard regarding the levy.

Hearing #1:

February 20

7 P.M.

Anoka High School

3939 7th Avenue, Anoka

Hearing #2:

March 6

7 P.M.

Champlin Park High School

6025 109th Avenue, Champlin

<http://www.abcnewspapers.com/2007/February/8renew.html>

2. Northstar Commuter Coach Shortchanged.

Talk about screwed up priorities. The Anoka County Regional Rail Authority (RRA) recently adopted a budget and tax levy. Out of a \$4.3 million dollar budget, a measly \$54,500 is allocated to the successful Northstar commuter bus line. Compare that to a whopping \$3.6 million allocated for the yet to be built, increasingly expensive Northstar commuter rail. The RRA even allocates \$200,000 to plan yet another commuter rail line. Never mind the fact that the current line is a growing financial disaster.

County officials admit that the commuter bus line is so successful, they can't keep up with demand. Yet, they claim they have no money for additional busses. The Watchdog knows where they can find a quick \$3.6 million. With this group, incompetence is a way of life. RRA chairman Dan Erhart is doing a great job – if wasting taxpayer dollars is the goal.

3. Twins Stadium a Lesson in Bad Government.

The Watchdog saw this one coming from a million miles away. The taxpayer-financed Twins stadium is already in trouble. Various news outlets are reporting that negotiations have broken down with the landowners. Moreover, numerous government agencies with different agendas are attempting to cram a stadium, a light rail terminal, a commuter rail terminal, and a bike trail into a roughly ten-acre site. Leave to government to re-create the Tower of Babel – at taxpayer expense. There is already talk of moving the stadium to another site. And the Watchdog believed Carl Pohlad when he talked about the synergy between the stadium and mass transit. If the stadium is moved, look for Dan Erhart to announce a “phase III” for Northstar rail to follow the nomadic Twins stadium.

This gross negligence is precisely what happens when government takes on mega-projects that it has no business getting involved in. Why didn't Hennepin County reach agreement with the landowners BEFORE getting legislation passed? You can bet that a private company would have. You get the government you elect, Hennepin County.

Thank goodness Anoka County avoided a similar fate when Zygi Wilf suckered Anoka County out of \$850,000 with no intention to locate in the county. Come to think of it, it was pretty negligent of the Anoka County board to spend \$850,000 on a “handshake” agreement. Suckers.

<http://www.startribune.com/462/story/991147.html>

<http://minnesota.publicradio.org/display/web/2007/02/09/twinsstadium/>

4. Legislative Update.

Our ever popular look at the insanity wafting out the Capitol in Saint Paul.

- HF 620 (Rep. Jaros, DFL-Duluth), a bill requiring child protective devices in every shopping cart in Minnesota (another pre-nom for Dumb Bill);
- HF 624 (Rep. Norton, DFL-Rochester) issuing debt to expand the National Volleyball Center;
- HF 639 (Rep. Hortman, DFL-Brooklyn Park), a bill to reduce car exhaust 30%;

- HF 694 (Rep. Morgan, DFL-Burnsville), a bill to give districts with DECLINING enrollment more money;
- HF 740 (Rep. Mahoney, DFL-Saint Paul), a bill to prohibit “price gouging” on certain goods and service);
- HF 743 (Rep. Mullery, DFL-Minneapolis), a bill giving grant money to encourage women to enter “non-traditional” careers;
- HF 757 (Rep. Doty, DFL-Little Falls), issuing debt for the Upsala community center.

5. Senator Betzold Thinks Your Taxes are Too Low.

With all the happenings over in the House, the Watchdog admittedly pays less attention to the Senate. Perhaps we’re just used to the buffoonery over there, it’s been going on for 35 years.

In any case, the Watchdog decided to take a look at the Senate. We didn’t have to go far. Anoka County’s very own Senator Don Betzold is his own “dumb bill” factory. Senator Betzold should be familiar to Watchdogs. While he looks harmless enough with his “bedhead” hair, dated glasses, and rumpled suits, he’s actually quite a threat to the taxpayers. He’s the guy who thought the Vikings stadium was such a good idea, he sponsored their legislative agenda in the Senate. A career politician, Betzold is likely taking advantage of the newly minted “per diem” increase to \$96 a day for lunch expenses for our hard working, underpaid state senators.

So what’s Betzold been doing for the people of Fridley and Blaine? Read on:

- SF 495, a bill to allow Anoka County to impose a brand new real estate tax (the House companion bill was January’s “dumb bill.” Belated congrats to the senator on this one);
- SF 463, a 500% increase in notary public fees;
- SF 469, a tax increase for libraries in Anoka County;
- A host of meaningless bills “modifying” things.

Those who wish to comment on Betzold’s “leadership” may contact:
Sen.don.betzold@senate.mn

E-mail Update 2/16/07

In This Issue:

1. Feds May Not Fund Northstar Rail;
2. Fridley Gets the Short Stick;
3. HWY 10: Roads vs. Rail;
4. Legislative Update;
5. Quote of the Week.

1. Feds May Not Fund Northstar Rail.

You've heard the spin time and again – Northstar rail is a “done deal” and the trains will be rolling in 2009 (Jesse Jackson would say “ride the line in '09!”). Once again, leave it to the Watchdog to report on the facts and unmask the propaganda.

The Bush administration has recently released its proposed federal budget. Anoka County gleefully reported that Northstar was included in that budget. Not so fast. Here's what the federal government had to say about Northstar:

“Three of these projects – The New Britain-Hartford Busway, Northstar Corridor Rail, and Norfolk LRT - are in final design but remaining uncertainties related to their scopes, schedules, and/or budgets do not provide FTA with confidence...that the projects will maintain their “medium” New Starts ratings and/or achieve the necessary cost effectiveness rating to be recommended for a FFGA (Full Funding Grant Agreement).”

Read a full report on the web site.

2. Fridley Gets the Short Stick.

Poor Fridley. Perhaps no city pushed as hard for Northstar rail and its alleged benefits. Watchdogs will recall that United Defense, based in Fridley, hosted Governor Pawlenty when he had his Saul-like conversion to commuter rail acolyte. Fridley fully supported the property taxes that have been imposed on its citizens to fund the project.

Oops. Recently, the Northstar Corridor Development Authority (NCDA) dropped the proposed Fridley rail station, leaving Fridley out in the cold without a blanket. The station has been dropped (the NCDA calls it a “postponement”) because the project is over-budget. The NCDA has tried to cover this embarrassment by going to the legislature, along with the Met Council, requesting \$5 million for the station (never mind that Rep. Tingelstad promised on the floor of the House in 2006 that the NCDA wouldn't be back for more funding).

Now it gets even tougher for Fridley. According to the city's most recent newsletter, the NCDA has broken off negotiations with the property owner and has no plans to re-engage. <http://www.ci.fridley.mn.us/citymgr/citymgrnewsletter.htm>
(Editor's Note: the March/April 2007 newsletter was not yet posted online at the time this update was published).

The Watchdog calls on the NCDA and Met Council to suspend efforts to secure an appropriation for the station. Appropriating money to build something when you don't yet own the land sounds familiar. Twins stadium, anyone?

3. HWY 10: Roads vs. Rail.

Northstar is now projected to cost \$309 million to build (don't forget about the operating subsidies) with the cost rising all the time.

Compare that to what Anoka County admits is the cost of road upgrades to HWY 10. For ¼ the cost to build Northstar, a third lane, both ways, could be added to HWY 10 between Egret Blvd. and 7th Ave. in Anoka. For less than the cost to build Northstar, those lanes could be extended to Elk River. Of course, those lanes would be open 24/7 and carry thousands more commuters than Northstar's measly 5,000 daily riders (2020 ridership projection).

Don't buy the hype when you're told that Northstar is the most cost-effective way to move people. Just like you shouldn't buy the hype that Northstar is a "done deal."

4. Legislative Update.

Man, the fun just never ends with the Minnesota Legislature. Remember the gang that campaigned on "jobs, health care, and education?" Here are the latest shenanigans from this goofy group:

- HF 1015 (Rep. Murphy, E. DFL-St. Paul), a bill to guarantee access to toilets. Popularly known as the "Minnesota Right to Poop Act", this bill is definitely a pre-nom for February "dumb bill" and the front runner for the 2007 "dumb bill";
- HF 944 (Rep. Juhnke, DFL-Willmar), a bill appropriating money for grants to promote fishing;
- HF 946 (Rep. Liedler, DFL-Crookston), a bill raising the gas tax, raising the wheelage tax, increasing license tab fees, authorizing counties to impose transportation taxes, authorizing cities and counties to impose "transportation impact" fees. Ouch!!!!;

- HF 978 (Rep. Hortman, DFL-Brooklyn Park), a bill appropriating money to the Anoka-Hennepin School District to buy wetlands;
- HF 1026 (Rep. Hortman, DFL-Brooklyn Park), a bill issuing debt to build a bike trail in Anoka County. Um, Rep. Hortman, how about funding the completion of HWY 610 first?

5. Quote of the Week.

"I have a hard time giving money to someone who blew a million dollars trying to get the Vikings."

- Bill Loesch, Spring Lake Park City Council

Loesch was the only "no" vote on a motion to give city money to Anoka County for the County's birthday party.

Boos and hisses to council member Carlson who responded that Loesch "didn't care about history."

<http://www.mnsun.com/articles/2007/02/12/news/fo08slpcouncil.txt>

To the contrary, Loesch likely remembers his American history well. We revolted against the King because of high taxes and politicians who turned their backs on the people they were charged to represent.

Carlson would be well served to take a look at the County's fiscal accountability. Giving those people money is about the same as burning it in a trash barrel.

E-mail Update 2/23/07

In This Issue:

1. Legislative Update;
2. Jim Abeler Is Big Government;
3. Saint Francis Taxpayers Speak;
4. County Puts Taxpayers at Risk – Again;
5. Twins Stadium Follow-Up.

1. Legislative Update.

And some people advocate for a longer legislative session. Yikes!

- HF 1227 (Rep. Morgan, DFL-Burnsville), a bill issuing state debt to build a performing arts center for the people of Burnsville;
- HF 1269 (Rep. Davnie, DFL-Minneapolis), a bill having the state pay off Minneapolis' debt for the Target Center;
- HF 1296 (Rep. Laine, DFL-Columbia Heights), a bill mandating insurance coverage for doulas (<http://www.charm.net/~totoro/doula.html>);
- HF 1315 (Rep. Hamilton, R-Mountain Lake), a bill establishing a Minnesota Commission on New Americans;
- HF 859 (Rep. Hausman, DFL-Saint Paul), a bill having the state pay off Saint Paul's debt for the Xcel Energy Center);
- HF 1094 (Rep. Peterson, DFL-Madison), a bill providing taxpayer subsidies for cellulosic ethanol;
- HF 900 (Rep. Gunther, R-Fairmont), a bill issuing state debt to buy softball field lights for the city of Ceylon;
- HF 1155 (Rep. Madore, DFL-Apple Valley), a bill appropriating money for a state-wide "self advocacy" network.

2. Jim Abeler is Big Government.

Rep. Jim Abeler (R-Anoka) is a busy man. As of February 22, he has co-authored a mind-boggling 319 bills! Consider that 1,337 bills have been introduced in the Minnesota House so far. In other words, Abeler has co-authored nearly ¼ of all bills introduced so far.

Some of more important bills authored by this proud "Republican" include:

- The Minnesota Right to Poop Act;
- Paying state employees for work they never did;
- Biodegradable yard bags mandated;

- A new real estate tax in Anoka County;
- Funding the “Minnesota Conservation Corps”;
- Mandated health insurance coverage of doula services.

Click here for a complete listing of Rep. Abeler’s handiwork:

<http://www.house.leg.state.mn.us/members/members.asp?district=48B>

Jim, please click here yourself, it looks like you haven’t read this document in awhile:

<http://www.mngop.com/documents/mngop2006platform.pdf>

3. Saint Francis Taxpayers Speak.

This past Tuesday, voters in the Saint Francis School District put the lie to the mantra that schools are unfounded by decisively rejecting a “re do” school levy. The defeat was also a strong rebuke to the tiny minority of citizens who exploited a little known state law to force the February vote just months after the same levy questions were rejected. It looks like the big spenders were too cute by half. Their trickery was rewarded with a thumping at the polls and serious reduction in the credibility of the pro-levy crowd in that area. Good luck selling the next tax increase. You’ll need it after this debacle.

<http://www.twincities.com/mld/twincities/news/local/16743519.htm>

4. County Puts Taxpayers at Risk – Again.

Last week, the Watchdog reported the truth regarding the FTA’s budget recommendation for Northstar rail. Namely, that the FTA has serious concerns about the project and that federal matching funds are far from certain.

Since when has the County ever been concerned with the facts, especially for the train? News reports have surfaced recently regarding the millions that state and local governments (including Anoka County) are spending right now on the project.

So what happens if federal funding doesn’t happen? Like an ostrich, the County believes that if it doesn’t see something it doesn’t exist. Thus, a head stuck in the sand is the preferred method of operation.

<http://www.abcnewspapers.com/2007/February/22north.html>

5. Twins Stadium Follow-Up.

Those Watchdogs are everywhere! Like Batman, Superman, or the Flash, a Watchdog can be found anytime a taxpayer is in distress. We don't have super human attributes or utility belts, but we do have a keen sense of smell, especially for government waste, fraud, and abuse.

Two weeks ago, the Watchdog published a piece regarding the collapsed negotiations regarding the land sale for the Twins stadium.

A Watchdog close to the situation replied to the piece with additional information. He noted that "untold millions" have been spent in relocating utilities in the area. Thus, if the stadium moves to a new home, millions will have been wasted on utility re-location as well as the millions spent extending light rail to nothing more than a garbage burner.

The Watchdog calls upon our friends in the media to investigate this matter.

E-mail Update 3/2/07

In This Issue:

1. Legislative Update
2. Dumb Bill of the Month
3. Anoka County Wasting Money – Example 934
4. Erhart's Isle;
5. Memo to MetroNorth Chamber.

1. Legislative Update.

The legislature has indeed been busy. Thus far, the House has introduced 1,623 bills. Here is this week's collection of oddities, freaks, and the trans-mundane:

- HF 1382 (Rep. Thissen, DFL-Minneapolis), a bill banning all phosphorus from dishwasher detergent.
- HF 1385 (Rep. Liebling, DFL-Rochester), a bill establishing a governmental task force to re-design the state flag.
- HF 1407 (Rep. Clark, DFL-Minneapolis), a bill seeking funds for "environmental justice" mapping.
- HF 1481 (Rep. Peterson, N., R-Bloomington), a bill issuing debt for the Bloomington Ski Jump).
- HF 1377 (Rep. Johnson, S., DFL-Saint Paul), a bill to make Minnesota government "carbon neutral."
- HF 1587 (Rep. Tshumper, DFL- La Crescent), a bill increasing the staff in the Office of Ombudsman for Older Minnesotans.
- HF 1616 (Rep. Mariani, DFL-Saint Paul), a bill appropriating money for the Legislative Commission to End Poverty by 2020.

2. Dumb Bill of the Month.

It's that time of the month, sports fans. It is time to announce the winner of the prestigious, coveted "Dumb Bill of the Month" for February 2007. As expected, the competition was fierce and a number of qualified candidates emerged. From the crowded field, one bill pulled ahead and stood tall above the rest. Now, the envelope please:

Your winner is HF 1015, now infamously known as the Minnesota Right to Poop Act. Congratulations to freshman representative Erin Murphy for her diligent work in unifying Minnesota's often fractured and disparate pooping community. With toilet seat held high in hand, the brown banner of defecation rights shall undoubtedly cause Minnesota's lawmakers to tremble as the long neglected rights of the #2 crowd are

finally vindicated. The French Revolution may have had the guillotine, but the #2 Revolution has the power of the Porcelain!

3. Anoka County Wasting Money – Example 934.

When it comes to examples of government waste, Anoka County provides an endless sea of example after wasteful example. During the same month that the County proposed legislation to impose a county real estate tax and a basketful of transportation taxes, it published the quarterly “Community News” publication from the county’s Travel Management Office.

Among the more critical “must know” items were the following:

- “Words of Wisdom”
- A promotion of “National Bike to Work Day.”
- Help save the earth by not drinking bottled water
- A reminder about Daylight Savings Time
- Promotion of the County’s “Earth Day” festivities

And this is the same crowd that says the County needs more of your money.

Read the TMO newsletter at:

http://www.co.anoka.mn.us/v2_dept/highways/tmo/pdf/TMONewsletterSpring07.pdf

4. Erhart’s Isle.

The Star Tribune carried a rather pathetic tale this week regarding the Vikings stadium hunt. After being jilted at the altar, Commissioner Dan Erhart and his highly paid sidekick Steve Novak apparently still hold out hope that fugitive bridegroom Zygi Wilf will return to consummate the aborted football stadium marriage.

Talk about a bad soap opera. Worse than that, this debacle looks more like Gilligan’s Island. For 98 comical episodes, the castaways awaited a savior to rescue them from their life of tropical privation. Always to no avail (at least until the sitcom was revived in 1978 for a “rescue” episode and subsequent tv movies).

Much like their television counterparts, “Skipper” Erhart and “Gilligan” Novak bumble and stumble, but always keep their eyes trained to the south, hoping to catch a glimpse of a great Viking ship coming over the horizon out of Winter Park to swoop them into the bow and ride the wave to untold fame, riches, and NFL glory right here in the swamps of Blaine.

Sit right back and hear a tale, a tale of an \$850,000 trip...

<http://www.startribune.com/510/story/1031198.html>

5. Memo to MetroNorth Chamber.

The Anoka County Watchdog is now a proud member of the MetroNorth Chamber of Commerce. We're happy to be members. It puts us in a great position to keep an eye on the sometimes tax happy leadership of this allegedly "pro business" cast of characters.

From the Watchdog's perspective, the biggest problem has been the Chamber's failure to poll the membership regarding critical issues. For example, the Chamber rank and file was never polled regarding the sales tax increase for the Vikings stadium.

Of course, the Watchdog is, above all, an organization dedicated to helping people. Even our criticism is constructive and positive. Since the MetroNorth Chamber leadership seems to be at a loss regarding how to poll membership, we humbly provide an excellent example from the good folks over at the Twin Cities North Chamber of Commerce. They recently sent an email to every member directing them to a web site to register thoughts regarding whether or not the Chamber should oppose a smoking ban. It's that simple! Technical questions may be directed to info@twincitiesnorth.org.

E-mail Update 3/9/07

In This Issue:

1. Public Service Announcement;
2. Legislative Update;
3. When \$2 Billion Just Ain't Enough;
4. MetroNorth Chamber Supports Tax Increase – Again;
5. Want a Tax Cut?

1. Public Service Announcement.

The Anoka County Watchdog will be moving to a new email service provider. You will not notice any changes in the email. They will still be sent by Harold@anokacountywatchdog.com. As always, the Watchdog does not share your email address with any person or group for any purpose.

2. Legislative Update.

We're up to 1,890 bills in the Minnesota House (Rep. Abeler, R-Anoka is a co-author of 400 of them, NO JOKE). Here we go:

- HF 1653 (Rep. Davnie, DFL-Minneapolis), a bill appropriating money for signs for the St. Anthony Falls heritage interpretive zone;
- HF 1695 (Rep. Walker, DFL-Minneapolis), a bill requiring school districts to maintain a "How's My Driving?" program;
- HF 1700 (Rep. Hornstein, DFL-Minneapolis), a bill appropriating money to increase parent and community involvement in the education of their children;
- HF 1737 (Rep. Atkins, DFL-Inver Grove Heights), a bill establishing reduced ignition propensity standards for cigarettes;
- HF 1813 (Rep. Ozment, R-Rosemount), a bill requiring counties to consider natural heritage data in comprehensive plans;
- HF 1825 (Rep. Kahn, DFL-Minneapolis), a bill increasing the penalty for smoking in a non-smoking motel room;
- HF 1844 (Rep. Walker, DFL-Minneapolis), a bill requiring state registration to braid hair (a pre-nom for March Dumb Bill);
- HF 1854 (Rep. Lanning, R-Moorehead), a bill banning a bar or restaurant from offering a free drink;

3. When \$2 Billion Just Ain't Enough.

Grab your tissues, taxpayers. Apparently, the state of Minnesota is attempting to scrape by on a measly \$34 billion dollar budget. This budget would represent a puny \$3 billion increase in spending, which equates to a paltry 9.3% increase in spending. Before you jump on your email and ask the governor where you can send a check to grow government even bigger, relax. Your legislators have been hard at work devising ways to take more money from you so government doesn't have to go without. Taxpayers should rest easy knowing that government will not be forced to do silly things like live within a budget or find ways to do more with less. That's what families and businesses do, not government.

Here is a partial list of some of the methods proposed to separate you from your money:

- Income tax hike on the upper tier from 7.85% to 8.5%
- ½ cent metrowide sales tax
- 10 cents a gallon gas tax
- Statewide fuel taxes
- \$20 per vehicle wheelage fee
- Increase in vehicle registration taxes and tab fees
- Sales tax on prefabricated homes
- Increase in the statewide home mortgage DEED tax by 50%
- Increase tax on car leases
- Extend the 6.5% sales tax to cosmetic surgery
- Increase tax on foreign operating corporations
- New state tax on gifts
- 5 cents a gallon paint tax

Back to work! Government is counting on you!

Think that state government hasn't grown significantly? Click here:

http://www.budget.state.mn.us/budget/summary/hist_exp/070228_hist_exp.pdf

4. MetroNorth Chamber Supports Tax Increase – Again.

Talk about getting tired. Keeping tabs on a group like the MetroNorth Chamber of Commerce is a full-time job and then some. Operating under the guise of a “pro business” mission, the Chamber has rarely met a tax increase it couldn't endorse.

Just this week, the Chamber's Government Affairs Committee voted to recommend support of a 50% gasoline tax increase to the Chamber Board. Worse than that, the committee rejected an amendment to the resolution that would have demanded an

identical reduction in commercial property taxes. Apparently a majority of the committee thinks that business property taxes don't need to be reduced.

There is little doubt that the Board will approve the committee recommendation and formally endorse the tax increase.

Of course, the Chamber never bothered to poll membership regarding this important issue.

5. Want a Tax Cut?

So you think that taxes are high enough? You say you work for your family and not for government? Are you one of those hard-hearted monsters who thinks government should live within its means? Do you have the audacity to actually want a portion of the budget surplus returned to your pocket?

Then join Jason Lewis and his tax cut coalition. Lewis is leading the charge to send a strong message to our legislators that taxpayers have had enough and demand relief.

Join the coalition here:

<http://www.ktlkfm.com/pages/lewis/taxcut.html>

E-mail Update 3/16/07

In This Issue:

1. Legislative Update;
2. Dan Erhart: Conflict of Interest?;
3. Spring Lake Park Supports Property Rights;
4. Anoka County Votes Against Property Rights.

1. Legislative Update.

We're up to 2,164 bills introduced in the House. Rep. Abeler is up to 418 bills authored and co-authored. This week's list of the worst of the worst:

- HF 1899 (Rep. Kahn, DFL-Minneapolis), a bill proposing a constitutional amendment to allow non-citizens to vote;
- HF 1915 (Rep. Faust, DFL-Mora), a bill mandating signs on amusement rides telling people not to behave unsafely;
- HF 1964 (Rep. Westrom, R-Elbow Lake), a bill appropriating debt to finance the West Central Outreach Center);
- HF 1974 (Rep. Hortman, DFL-Brooklyn Park), a bill appropriating state tax dollars to pay off student loans for certain law school graduates;
- HF 2163 (Rep. Hortman, DFL-Brooklyn Park), a bill extending the sales tax to things like car repairs, haircuts, and funeral services;
- HF 2004 (Rep. Atkins, DFL-Inver Grove Heights), a bill appropriating money for the Communities for a Lifetime Initiative;
- HF 2047 (Rep. Mullery, DFL-Minneapolis), a bill expanding Workers' Compensation to cover mental injuries caused by stress (pre-nom for March Dumb Bill);
- HF 2148 (Rep. Clark, DFL-Minneapolis), a bill appropriating money to make Minneapolis schools fragrance free (pre-nom for March Dumb Bill);
- HF 2156 (Rep. Wagenius, DFL-Minneapolis), a bill taxing light bulbs.

2. Dan Erhart: Conflict of Interest?

This past week, the Star Tribune carried an article regarding Anoka County's latest commuter rail scheme. The County has recently begun the first steps to establish a commuter rail line on the Hinkley Subdivision that runs through central Anoka County to Duluth.

The second page of the article noted that county commissioner Dan Erhart and his family own real estate interests in Anoka, Pine, and Isanti counties, all counties through which the rail line runs. Hennepin County Commissioner Penny Steele publicly voiced concerns over how that particular rail line was selected, while Erhart vehemently denied that his support was influenced by potential personal gain.

The article raised but didn't fully address very important issues. Exactly how much land does Erhart have an interest in and where is it located? When was the land purchased and under what circumstances? Should Erhart have recused himself from votes relating to the line? Does Erhart stand to gain financially if the line is built? Does Erhart have other real estate interests near other county-supported projects like Northstar commuter rail and the proposed Vikings site in Blaine?

Troubling questions have been raised that need to be answered. Even an appearance of impropriety undercuts the confidence taxpayers deserve regarding the integrity of their elected officials.

The Watchdog calls upon Commissioner Erhart to do the right thing and hold a press conference in which he publicly and fully discloses his real estate interests. The media and the public deserve the opportunity to hear Erhart directly address these important questions.

Check www.anokacountywatchdog.com to read the article.

3. Spring Lake Park Supports Property Rights.

Here's a prime example of government doing the right thing. Last week, the Spring Lake Park city council voted 4-1 to pass a resolution opposing a statewide smoking ban. The resolution was a victory for private property owners in the city. While the Watchdog believes smoking to be a dirty and dangerous habit, a smoking ban improperly infringes upon the right of private property owners to decide for themselves if the consumption of a legal product should be allowed on their premises. As for those who don't like smoking, they always retain the choice whether or not to patronize that establishment.

A Watchdog boo and hiss to council member Carlson, who was the lone "no" vote. Ms. Carlson, the Watchdog offers the following for your edification:
<http://www.cato.org/special/friedman/friedman/friedman4.html>

4. Anoka County Votes Against Property Rights.

The Watchdog is scratching its head over this one. Dave Orrick of the Pioneer Press this week reported on the Anoka County Board nixing a land sale deal between private property owners and the state.

Unlike many situations where government coerces a land taking, this was a case where the property owners voluntarily offered their land for sale to the state Department of Natural Resources. A provision of state law allows the county to veto the proposed sale and that's what they did.

The land is primarily wetlands unsuitable for development but well suited to the sustainment of a variety of wildlife, including a stand of old, rare trees not easily found in the area.

Apparently, the city of Columbus wants to keep the land private in order to suck up more property tax revenue. If the land is sold to the state, it falls off the city's property tax rolls.

What a poor decision on the part of the county. The county trammled the right of a private owner to sell his property for preservation in order to keep the land on city tax rolls. Kudos to Commissioners Dick Lang and Jim Kordiak who voted in favor of respecting private property rights. For the 5 who supported government over private citizens, the Watchdog offers the following for your edification:
<http://www.cato.org/special/friedman/friedman/friedman4.html>.

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

E-mail Update 3/23/07

In This Issue:

1. Legislative Update;
2. Taxapalooza, indeed!
3. Pork, Pork, Pork;
4. Northstar May be a Lonely Ride;
5. Melissa Hortman on Taxes.

1. Legislative Update.

Since the legislature convened on January 3rd, the Watchdog has been tracking bill introductions. Now that March is coming to a close, bills are being processed through the committee structure and will be soon brought to the House floor. The action is now shifting to the House floor and away from committees.

As such, the Watchdog will be shifting its focus as well to the House floor. To that end, the Watchdog reports that the first major tax increase of the session will be taken up tomorrow in the House. The transportation omnibus bill has gas tax increases, a Metro sales tax increase, wheelage tax increases, and a variety of fee increases that will cost the average family in Minnesota approximately \$550 every year. I guess a \$2 billion dollar surplus isn't enough for some legislators, like Melissa Hortman (more on that below).

Legislative television does plan to televise the debate live.

2. Taxapalooza Indeed!

Governor Pawlenty this week characterized the mob of tax increase proposals as a "taxapalooza." Republican fiscal analysts have begun to examine the tax increase proposals to put a number on what Minnesotans might pay. A family of four in Bemidji making \$57,000 per year would see a tax increase of \$1,020 per year if all the tax increases were passed. A family of four in Woodbury making \$71,032 a year would see a \$1,557 per year tax increase. With a \$2 billion surplus, shouldn't Minnesota families be getting a tax cut? Shouldn't the family budget come before the government budget?

www.anokacountywatchdog.com will have more detailed information soon.

3. Pork, Pork, Pork!

The House and Senate have unveiled a “bonding” bill recently. A bonding bill is essentially issuing debt to build or buy things, like using a credit card. And like a credit card, the money is paid back, with interest.

This year’s bonding bill is interesting for a number of reasons. First, odd number years are supposed to be for the state to put together a budget, not to do a bonding bill. To understand this, let’s take a brief trip down memory lane. From 1858 through the early 1970s, the Minnesota legislature only met once every two years. Since that time, the legislature has met every year, with the rationale that the odd year was for making the budget while the even year (shorter session) was to do a bonding bill.

Second, the bonding bill is supposed to be for “emergency” items that just can’t wait until next year. So what’s so important? Try these porkers on for size:

- A \$30 million hockey arena for Duluth;
- \$2 million for a nature center in Fridley;
- \$1.5 million for the Minnesota Zoo;
- \$3 million for Minnesota Public Radio;
- \$30 million to plan light rail between St. Paul and Minneapolis;
- \$3.8 million for a park in Saint Paul;
- \$2.5 million for an upgrade to the Rochester Civic Center;
- And many, many, more.

To read the entire bill, click here:

<http://www.revisor.leg.state.mn.us/bin/bldbill.php?bill=ceH0886.1.html&session=ls85>

Yeah, those sound like some true emergencies, alright. It makes you wonder where taxpayers would be without our courageous legislature there to make sure Minnesota doesn’t collapse from tragedies like kids having to play hockey in the current DECC arena or aging hippies having to pay their own money for MPR to convert to digital radio. Hey, who wants to listen to biased political banter in crappy analog? Maybe the Watchdog could put in a request for a grant???

4. Northstar May be a Lonely Ride.

Last week, the City of Coon Rapids held an “open house” to brief citizens on a number of issues facing the city. One of those issues is the progress of Northstar rail.

One Watchdog in attendance reported the following comic tragedy. After a bright-eyed city bureaucrat enthusiastically briefed the assembled crowd regarding the rail station planned for Coon Rapids, he asked for a show hands from those who planned to ride Northstar to work. In a crowd of nearly 100, not a single hand was raised. In fact, the crowd broke in uproarious laughter. Oh, well. The lonely commuter will find plenty of company out on HWY 10.

5. Melissa Hortman on Taxes.

Taxpayers in District 47B, watch out! Your state representative, Melissa Hortman, wants more of your money.

Regarding the proposed 50% increase in the gas tax, Hortman said the increase was “not too rich for my taste. It’s a little too light.”

http://www.twincities.com/searchresults/ci_5454774

rep.melissa.hortman@house.mn

E-mail Update 3/30/07

In This Issue:

1. Scott LeDoux in a Pickle;
2. Scott LeDoux and Old Scratch;
3. Dumb Bill of the Month;
4. Northstar Rail = Money Pit;
5. PSA.

1. Scott LeDoux in a Pickle.

Anoka County commissioner Scott LeDoux has gotten himself in one heck of a pickle. This one relates to his other, other government job as the executive director of the Minnesota Boxing Commission (he also has a government job with the Minnesota Racing Commission).

As reported by the Duluth News Tribune, LeDoux allegedly pressured two boxing officials in an attempt to stop them from officiating a boxing card sanctioned by the Mille Lacs Tribe and not the Minnesota Boxing Commission. Those officials also alleged that LeDoux repeatedly made offensive remarks about the tribe, including labeling them as “stupid.”

LeDoux essentially denied the remarks. The Mille Lacs Band, however, demanded LeDoux’s resignation. Days later, a Pawlenty spokesman said LeDoux would not be fired.

All of that changed, recently, when it was revealed that the phone conversation was apparently taped by one of the officials. The two officials who were allegedly pressured contend that the tape will support their version of the conversation.

Watchdog sources at the Capitol report the following: The presence of the tape has put the Pawlenty administration in more of a “wait and see” mode regarding the situation. Pawlenty staffers will further investigate the matter before the Governor makes a formal decision regarding LeDoux’s status with the Boxing Commission. Moreover, state officials have reportedly requested Boxing Commission financial documents for reasons that are not yet clear. Apparently, the state wants to take a close look at the revenues and expenditures of the commission under LeDoux’s management.

Supporting articles:

<https://secure.forumcomm.com/duluth/articles/index.cfm?>

<http://www.duluthnewstribune.com/articles/index.cfm?id=38684§ion=Sports>

http://wcco.com/local/local_story_082222737.html
<http://www.startribune.com/587/story/1076460.html>

2. Scott LeDoux and Old Scratch.

LeDoux apparently believes his problems with the Boxing Commission are being directed from a very powerful source – Satan himself. In an email to supporters obtained by the Watchdog, LeDoux claims that Beelzebub himself is on a personal vendetta against LeDoux. While the Watchdog has no way of knowing if the Prince of Darkness himself is behind all this, it seems that the more likely explanation is that LeDoux himself is to blame for these problems.

In this case, however, an expert witness is needed to help us understand just what Old Scratch may be up to (<http://www.answers.com/topic/churchlady02-jpg>).

If the Devil has come to Anoka County, the Watchdog can only hope it's in this form:
http://www.aclasscelebs.com/elizabethh/images/b03_jpg.jpg

Below is the verbatim text of the LeDoux email:

"Three weeks ago I spoke at a Luthern Church on 50th and Emerson. Three people gave their life to Christ that night. Since that time Satan has been on the attack against me. The Hinckley Casino Tribe has said that I am a Racist! Now the Govenor is considering replacing me as Executive Director of the boxing commission. I need to have all our freinds at the Oak Haven to call the Govs Aid Matt Kramer tommorrow and leave a message that you support me for that job. The peopple against me do not want my strict supervision of the rules and are trying to get rid of me. Also I supported the harness track in Columbus CITY because it would mean 3000 jobs for Anoka county. They are afraid it will take some of their customers away from them. I call 651-296-0121 Tomorrow and tell Matt Kramer that you support me for the head of the commission. And also pray for me that Satan is run off by Jesus. I need your help!!"

3. Dumb Bill of the Month.

It's the end of the month and that means it is once again time to bestow the "Dumb Bill of the Month" honor. Usually, the Watchdog's crack legislative analysts crown the winner. Not this month! You, loyal reader, shall pick this month's winner. Moreover, if you respond, you may be the winner of a stylish, always-in-demand Watchdog coffee mug (one winner chosen at random). Just email us at Harold@anokacountywatchdog.com with your pick.

Without further adieu, here are the nominees:

1. HF 2354 (Rep. Fritz, DFL-Faribault), a bill to make the Tilt-A-Whirl the official state amusement ride;
2. HF 2148 (Rep. Clark, DFL-Minneapolis), a bill to make Minneapolis schools fragrance free;
3. HF 1844 (Rep. Walker, DFL-Minneapolis), a bill to require registration with the state in order to braid hair;
4. HF 2047 (Rep. Mullery, DFL-Minneapolis), a bill allowing Workers' Comp for "mental injuries" caused by stress.

4. Northstar Rail = Money Pit.

Well, that didn't take long. Less than one year after Rep. Kathy Tingelstad, Northstar's chief legislative cheerleader, stated publicly that the project wouldn't be back for more state money – it's back. In testimony before the House Tax Committee, Northstar officials presented legislation that would equal a \$7 million subsidy for the troubled project. What's worse, one of those officials admitted that the project would indeed be back for even more state money if needed.

It's about time taxpayers realized that these costly rail projects always exceed cost projections. Northstar is no different. In fact, some researchers have found that many rail projects intentionally understate costs – a phenomenon called "strategic misrepresentation." Most folks in the real world call it lying.

5. PSA.

The Watchdog has received hundreds of requests for our t-shirt. Hence, we are out of stock and awaiting a back order. If you requested a t-shirt, please be patient. If you haven't, don't be a dork. Order your free t-shirt and join all the cool kids. Or are you afraid your parents will find out?

E-mail Update 4/5/07

In This Issue:

1. Dumb Bill Award Winner;
2. Finding and Tracking Those Rascally Legislators;
3. Quote of the Week;
4. Gasoline: Who Gets Those "Windfall" Profits?;
5. Taxing Job Creators.

1. Dumb Bill Award Winner.

Last week, the Watchdog turned over the weighty duty of determining the March "Dumb Bill" winner to you, the loyal Watchdog readership. The results are in, the envelope please. And the winner is: HF 2354, the bill to make the Tilt-A-Whirl the official state amusement ride. Many readers wanted a 4-way tie, but that's against the rules. There can be only one true winner.

Congratulations to Joe H., winner of the Watchdog coffee mug. He was the first to respond to the survey, clocking in just scant minutes after the email update was released.

2. Finding and Tracking Those Rascally Legislators.

The Watchdog frequently receives email from taxpayers who want to know how they can track legislation at the Capitol and contact their state Representatives and state Senators. It's a very good question and one that the Watchdog is happy to answer.

First, of course, the Watchdog web site has legislative updates. Also, don't forget to check our "links" section on the home page that provides web links to all levels of government.

Regarding the legislature, there are two web sites of particular value, both of them non-partisan sources of objective information. www.house.mn and <http://www.leg.state.mn.us/leg/Districtfinder.asp>. The Watchdog encourages readers to consult these sources and keep your legislators accountable.

And don't forget, the Watchdog is always available to receive your email questions. At the Watchdog, we're all about service!

3. Quote of the Week.

“No.”

Minnesota House Speaker Margaret Kelliher when asked if there was a need to raise taxes in Minnesota beyond the gas tax.

Source: Minnesota Public Radio interview, November 2, 2006

It looks like Speaker Kelliher has given every taxpayer \$5 billion reasons not to believe her.

4. Gasoline: Who Gets Those “Windfall” Profits?

Now that we’re heading into the summer driving season, gasoline will undoubtedly rise in price. And, undoubtedly, we’ll be subjected to countless trite news stories and letters to the editor spouting conspiracy theories involving “Big Oil”, windfall profits, and price gouging.

Before you join the mob in demanding that Big Government oppress Big Oil on your behalf, consider a couple of facts.

On average, Big Oil reaps a profit of about 13 cents on every gallon of gas sold. Big Government, on the other hand, makes far more. In Minnesota, the state makes 20 cents a gallon at the retail level. If Rep. Melissa Hortman and others get their way, the take will jump to 30 cents for every gallon. In New York, for example, the government makes a whopping 42.4 cents a gallon at the retail level. In fact, every state in the Union except Alaska makes more money off gasoline than Big Oil.

And what about the profits Big Oil is experiencing? A good chunk of that is being invested in research and development to find ways to keep gasoline supplies up and pump prices reasonable. Big Government’s favorite whipping boy, Exxon Mobil, is a fine example. From 1987 to 2006, the company invested more than it made (\$279 billion compared to \$266 billion). The company announced in 2006 that it planned to invest \$60 billion over the next three years in oil and gas projects.

Taxpayers should be suspicious of politicians who want to engage in scapegoating instead of finding real solutions. Want another example? Check out the politicians who talk about ending our dependence on foreign oil yet oppose common sense measures to do just that by opposing exploration in ANWR or expanded drilling off our own coasts.

Note: This item borrowed heavily from a recent column by George F. Will. You can read the column here:

http://www.realclearpolitics.com/articles/2007/04/soaring_gas_prices_dont_change.html

5. Taxing Job Creators.

The DFL and their accomplices at the Star Tribune editorial board have had a good run the past two weeks touting a basket of job-killing tax increases, justified by the allegation that the “rich” aren’t paying their fair share of the tax load.

Consider for a moment just two of these proposed tax increases.

The income tax. The majority of those who fall into Minnesota’s top income tax bracket are actually small businesses that file individual returns instead of corporate tax returns. Contrary to the myth that these are just idle rich folks sitting at the country club, these people are actually main street small businesses that are the backbone of job growth. Want a quick way to kill economic growth and jobs? Tax small businesses that will see more money confiscated by the state, money that will be unavailable for salaries, benefits, and reinvestment in the business.

Consider also that the top 5% of Minnesota earners pay nearly 44% of the tax burden. The top 1% pay nearly 25% of the total burden. Adding to this already progressive tax structure will only cause capital to flee the state, taking good jobs with it.

http://www.taxes.state.mn.us/legal_policy/other_supporting_content/07_incidence_report.pdf

The property tax. Minnesota already has one of the harshest property tax rates in the country for land classified as “commercial and industrial.” Currently, commercial and industrial property comprises 11% of Minnesota’s total property tax wealth, this type of land pays 33% of the property tax burden. The DFL plan would add to this burden.

Of course, these taxes aren’t really borne by businesses. They are passed on to you at the consumer level as a hidden tax, in addition to the other taxes you pay directly.

You can’t be pro-job and anti-job creator. If Minnesota is going to be a place to grow jobs, its tax structure needs to be competitive. These proposals take the state in the opposite direction by hoping we can just tax ourselves into prosperity. What a dangerous fantasy.

While DFLers are dreaming of a socialist utopia, here's what some competitors are up to:

<http://www.siouxfallsdevelopment.com/>

<http://commerce.wi.gov/bd/BD-COM-2800.html>

E-mail Update 4/13/07

In This Issue:

1. Welfare Magnet?;
2. Legislative Update;
3. Northstar Shrinks Again;
4. Quote of the Week;
5. Rally Reminder;

1. Welfare Magnet?

It is no secret that the DFL legislative majority is attempting to liberalize and expand welfare eligibility in order to enlarge the Dependency Class.

Senate Majority Leader Pogemiller has defended these proposals while proclaiming that there is no evidence that Minnesota is a draw for people who move here seeking generous welfare benefits.

Below are a few statistics, compiled by the state of Minnesota, to help you decide:

-The Department of Human Services reports that approximately 10% of new welfare applicants each month have moved to Minnesota from another state;

-The Department of Human Services reported that between 1999 and 2005, an average of 30% of enrollees in the MFIP (MN Family Investment Program) and DWP (Displaced Worker Program) welfare programs had moved to Minnesota within the last 5 years;

-The Minnesota Department of Corrections reports that about 1 in every 16 felons in our prisons was born in a foreign country;

-In 2004, the federal government deported about 3,300 illegal aliens out of Minnesota. Of that number, 1,571 were also convicted of crimes (in addition to the crime of entering the country illegally);

-The state reported that in 2005, \$17.3 million from the state budget was spent for health care services for illegal aliens;

-The state estimates that it spends roughly \$78 million each year to educate students in our schools who are here illegally;

-The state also estimates that the number of illegal aliens enrolled in our schools has doubled between 2000 and 2004.

2. Legislative Update.

Now that the Easter break has concluded, the legislature is back in session for the final march to a May 21st adjournment, if it gets the work done. If not, taxpayers are in for another special session. The Easter recess was like the eye of the hurricane passing over. Things seemed calm for a moment, but we know that the back wall is soon to lash the wallets and freedoms of the good people of Minnesota. A true Category \$5 Billion hurricane is overhead, threatening to blow jobs clear into South Dakota and destroy family budgets from Warroad to Winona to Worthington.

This week and next should see the major spending bill receive final committee and floor action in the House. The Senate has already passed most of its major spending bills.

The differing versions will be reconciled in conference committee and then shipped to the governor, likely facing death by veto pen.

After that, the real negotiations begin.

The legislature has 40 days to get'r done.

3. Northstar Shrinks Again.

The Watchdog reported some time ago that the Fridley station for Northstar had been dropped, just the latest chapter in the saga of this mass transit project that has seen costs rise while benefits shrink.

The City of Fridley has confirmed this sorry situation with a sobering, straightforward report in the latest city newsletter. Among the lowlights:

- When the formal application for federal funding was submitted, the Fridley station was omitted;
- The Fridley station was dumped in order to save money and keep the project eligible for federal funding;

- The city is being asked to pick up the \$1 million price tag to undertake some preliminary construction in order to preserve the possibility of a Fridley station in the future. This is money the city admits it doesn't have.

Wow, Fridley got dropped like a bad habit. The Watchdog remembers the huge Northstar dog and pony show hosted by BAE systems (Formerly United Defense) in Fridley. The CEO of the BAE stood up and proclaimed the value of a station in Fridley and everything it would do for the area. This is also the event where Gov. Pawlenty had his epiphany and became the chief Northstar cheerleader. Fridley has truly gone from Northstar Cinderella to mass transit Broomhilda.

Funny, the taxpayer-funded Northstar Rail PR web site mentions nothing of this development. In fact, the route map still shows Fridley as a station site. This web site is more fiction than fact. If you visit the site, have a 100-pound grain of salt at hand. Your tax dollars at work.

Related web links:

<http://www.ci.fridley.mn.us/citymgr/newslettermayjune07.pdf>

<http://www.mn-getonboard.org/map.html>

<http://www.mn-getonboard.org/facts.html>

4. Quote of the Week.

"I don't foresee any major changes in our taxing structure as it relates to business."

House Speaker Kelliher, November 16, 2006

Source: The Business Journal

5. Rally Reminder

This Saturday is the tax cut rally at the Capitol with host Jason Lewis. See you there!
Need some inspiration? Check this out:

http://www.taxpayersleague.org/pdf/2007_Outrageous_Taxes.pdf

<http://www.ktlkfm.com/pages/jlewispersonality.html>

E-mail Update 4/20/07

In This Issue:

1. Another Great Watchdog Product!;
2. Tax Rally Recap;
3. County Lobbyist Subject of Complaint Letter;
4. Yet Another Stadium Plan....Yawn;
5. Paging Doctor Freud.

1. Another Great Watchdog Product!

The Watchdog has always been on the cutting edge of public policy and political fashion. Our high quality t-shirts and coffee mugs can be found in thousands of homes and offices across the County and the world (no kidding! Our t-shirts are worn proudly in 10 ten states as well as military outposts where our troops are serving bravely).

The Watchdog is proud to offer yet another great product to you, the beleaguered taxpayer. Today, we unveil the "Dump the train! Add a lane!" window cling. As the Northstar rail project explodes in price while shrinking in scope, it's time to get back to basics and a little bit of common sense. Building a third lane on HWY 10 is sure fire way to add capacity, reduce drive times, and save the taxpayer from cost overruns.

The window cling is your opportunity to spread this common sense message. It's high quality, stylish, and FREE. Spread the news! Visit the web site to view and order your cling!

Or, send us an email right now: sticker@AnokaCountyWatchdog.com

2. Tax Rally Recap.

What a day! Over 7,000 hard working taxpayers rallied at the belly of the beast, appealing to the legislature and the governor to resist tax increases and huge increases government spending. It was an inspiring day, with impassioned speeches, friendship, and some creative signs and shirts.

The winning sign had to be the one that stated simply: Tax rich Meli\$\$a Hortman!

You can see a picture of the sign on our homepage.

Runner-up had to be: "Socialism in not cool!"

The photo was borrowed from the Freedom Dogs blog site. Visit them at http://freedomdogs.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1763&Itemid=1

3. County Lobbyist Subject of Complaint Letter.

The Watchdog has always wondered what Anoka County lobbyist Steve Novak was doing after presiding over the failed Vikings stadium pursuit. Watchdogs will remember that he was the County's "point man" on the project.

According to one legislator, he's spending his time soliciting funds for his failed congressional campaign.

The Watchdog has obtained a letter written by state Senator Satveer Chaudhary (DFL-Fridley) to Majority Leader Larry Pogemiller complaining of Novak's behavior at the Capitol.

According to Senator Chaudhary, Novak solicited campaign funds from Chaudhary at the Capitol. The problem is that Novak is a registered lobbyist for Anoka County and is supposed to be working for the taxpayers while he is at the Capitol.

The letter describes Novak's actions as "unprofessional, unseemly, and inappropriate" and "an abuse of his official capacity."

The allegations, if true, are very troubling. The Watchdog today offers Mr. Novak an opportunity to respond to these allegations.

The letter can be read in its entirety on our web site.

4. Yet Another Stadium Plan....Yawn.

With the enthusiasm of Ben Stein, the excitement of a nursing home visit, and the anticipation of a trip to the dentist, the Vikings unveiled their latest stadium plan. The pictures were real pretty and all, but there is just one minor problem: no plan to pay for it. This plan, like the others, is dead on arrival. Yet another dud from Zygi Wilf and company.

This franchise just can't get it right. They can't win on the field, behave off of it, or execute a plan to get a new stadium. And taxpayers are thankful.

Vikings fans can indulge their fantasy at:
<http://www.minnesotamomentum.com/index.jsp>

5. Paging Doctor Freud.

Two weeks ago, the Watchdog scooped the entire media establishment when we published Boxing Commissioner Scott LeDoux's bizarre email to supporters claiming that Satan himself was orchestrating attacks against him.

City Pages, a weekly newspaper, has picked up this story. City Pages reports the story in the manner they are best known for, with plenty of biting wit and a dash of irreverence.

Kudos to this alternative weekly for a story well done.

Read the article here: <http://citypages.com/databank/28/1374/article15288.asp>

E-mail Update 4/27/07

In This Issue:

1. Here Come the Tax Increases;
2. Meli\$\$\$a Hortman Fingerprints Found on Tax Bill;
3. The Budget That Ate Minnesota;
4. Fridley Gets the Shaft Part II;
5. What's Up With Anoka?

1. Here Come the Tax Increases!

We knew this day would come. The Minnesota House this week formally unveiled a full-frontal assault on Minnesota taxpayers in the their omnibus tax bill. Over \$700 million of the tax increase falls on job creators and business interests, costs that will merely be passed on to you, the consumer (even the Star Tribune concedes that point).

Even with a \$2 billion surplus, this gang just can't keep their hands off your money. Even as Minnesota lags behind the rest of the country in job growth, these legislators are doing the best they can to chase jobs away and hang a "Do Not Enter" sign on the state's border.

The good news is that the Governor will undoubtedly veto this recipe for economic disaster. Isn't \$34 billion and a 10% increase in spending enough? Not for some legislators, apparently.

It reminds one of the famous quote: "A government big enough to give you everything you want is also big enough to take everything you have."

Read the bill here:

http://www.revisor.leg.state.mn.us/bin/getbill.php?number=HF2362&session=ls85&version=list&session_number=0&session_year=2007

2. Meli\$\$\$a Hortman Fingerprints Found on Tax Bill.

Besides the massive tax increases in the omnibus tax bill, there are smaller ones as well. Rep. Meli\$\$\$a Hortman's (<http://www.house.leg.state.mn.us/members/members.asp?district=47B>) bill to impose a mortgage and deed tax on Anoka County real estate transactions can be found there as well.

For all the talk of lowering property taxes, why does Meli\$a Hortman want to raise them? This tax will no doubt be reflected in the purchase price of any home sold in the County. Moreover, it is a regressive tax that hits the elderly and first-time home buyers harder than others. For example, a reverse mortgage is a popular financial tool for many seniors to provide a cash stream during the final years of their lives, helping them stay independent and off government programs. They will now pay this tax when they take out these mortgages.

Of course, Hortman won't pay this tax. She lives in Hennepin County.

3. The Budget That Ate Minnesota.

Think the tax omnibus bill is bad? Try the omnibus health and human services (HHS) bill on for size. This \$10 billion leviathan totally unravels years of exacting welfare reform and increases spending significantly in areas like health care for illegal aliens.

To give you some perspective, the bill increases spending in this budget area 19.2% over the current budget. In the "out years" of 2010-2011, the spending balloons to an incredible 43% over the current budget. At this rate, the HHS budget will consume the entire state general fund within 10 years.

Is there anyone out there who thinks this is a responsible way to govern?

The Watchdog humbly submits that blowing the state's budget, rewarding illegal aliens, and reducing incentives for self-sufficiency is not a responsible way to govern.

4. Fridley Gets the Shaft Part II.

The Watchdog has documented in past editions the saga of the cancelled Fridley rail station that would have served Northstar commuter rail.

Rep. Tom Tillberry of Fridley

(<http://www.house.leg.state.mn.us/members/members.asp?district=51B>) has introduced legislation that would have Fridley taxpayers pick up the entire cost of the station.

Never mind that every other station had financial help from other levels of government.

Never mind that this legislation would drain money away from city coffers – money that could be used to plow roads, hire cops, and take care of core city functions.

Is this what Fridley tax payers truly want from their government?

5. What's Up With Anoka?

It's no secret that elected officials up in the city of Anoka don't get along very well.

The latest donnybrook is over appointments to the city's Housing and Redevelopment Authority (HRA). Appointments to the HRA have been the subject of intense debate among council members, leading to an impasse. Now things have gotten even stranger. Senator Mike Jungbauer and Rep. Jim Abeler teamed up recently to introduce a bill that was, in their words, designed to break the impasse.

However, both admitted they didn't contact the mayor regarding the bill. Moreover, the Anoka city council has not debated or passed a resolution supporting the bill. According to the mayor, the city was never notified of any legislative hearings about the bill.

While the Watchdog takes no position on the HRA issue, it is quite unusual for local, special legislation to be passed this way. You would think that the city would have been contacted in some way during the process to get feedback and input from the very people the law would effect.

<http://www.abcnewspapers.com/2007/April/18leg.html>

http://www.revisor.leg.state.mn.us/revisor/pages/search_status/status_detail.php?b=House&f=SF2043&ssn=0&y=2007

Curious, curious, curious....

E-mail Update 5/4/07

In This Issue:

1. Pawlenty Unveils the Whoopin' Stick;
2. How Do You Spell T-A-X?;
3. Traitors?;
4. They're Baaaaaaaaaaaaack...;
5. Scott LeDoux's Cousin?

1. Pawlenty Unveils the Whoopin' Stick.

Maybe they didn't believe him. Maybe they want a government shutdown. Maybe they're just too arrogant. Maybe they just can't help themselves. Whatever the reason, the DFLers in Saint Paul got a harsh dose of reality this week when Governor Pawlenty brought some adult supervision to the budget process when he vetoed a bloated, excessive bonding bill that was four times the amount he requested.

Noting that the DFL was "utterly incapable of exercising fiscal restraint," he vetoed the entire bill instead of using his authority to line item veto individual projects. It appears the DFL will have to "settle" for a 9.8% increase in state spending.

The governor has been warning the DFL since January that excessive spending wouldn't be tolerated. Like the commercial says, "CAN YOU HEAR ME NOW?"

2. How Do You Spell T-A-X?

Follow the Watchdog on this one. The current state general fund budget is \$31 billion. The governor's proposed budget is \$34 billion for the upcoming biennium. \$1 billion of that amount is a built in increase in the current budget. Another \$1 billion is one-time surplus dollars. The last \$1 billion is on going surplus money. Hence, \$31 billion turns into \$34 billion.

On top of that, the DFL has proposed another \$5 billion in tax increases. Most Watchdogs are aware of this money grab.

But you're probably not aware of yet another money grab. In addition to blowing the surplus and raising taxes, the DFL has proposed millions in fee increases. These total fee increases amount to nearly \$74 million dollars.

As Ronald Regan observed, "I spell 'tax' 'f-e-e.'

3. Traitors?

A Watchdog in attendance at Wednesday's meeting of the Metro North Chamber of Commerce got a big surprise from the featured guest speaker, state Rep. Meli\$\$a Hortman.

During a question and answer session, Hortman was asked what could be done to find a solution to funding the state's transportation infrastructure, particularly the looming veto of the current transportation spending bill.

Hortman replied that the solution for the current bill was to override the governor's veto. Noting that it only takes 5 House Republicans to join the DFL to override a veto, she stated that 4 House Republicans had already committed their vote to override any gubernatorial transportation funding veto.

Surprisingly, she went further and actually called out the 4 alleged defectors. The alleged four are: Kathy Tingelstad (Andover), Jim Abeler (Anoka), Ron Erhart (Edina), and Neil Peterson (Bloomington).

True? Only the four named legislators know for sure. Having said that, Hortman will owe these four a very public apology if they are planning to sustain a veto on the bill.

4. They're Baaaaaaaaaaack...

What if you threw a stadium party and no one cared? The Vikings experienced that "no love" vibe last week when they showed up in front of a Senate committee to show off some shiny new drawings of a proposed \$954 million stadium for downtown Minneapolis. The committee seemed less than impressed. Senator Warren Limmer (R-Maple Grove) registered his angst when he remarked "What are we going to hook the taxpayers on this time?"

Avoiding the elephant in the living room, the Vikings offered no plans to finance the venture, including taxpayer subsidies. Instead, the team claimed to be there to "start the conversation." That's like a fox poking his head inside the henhouse just to check on the welfare of the chickens.

Don't be surprised if the financing plan appears at the start of the 2009 legislative session. And don't be surprised if the plan includes a Metro-wide sales tax implemented without a referendum. You heard it here first.

5. Scott LeDoux's Cousin?

Loyal readers are quite familiar with Scott LeDoux's famous "The-Devil-Is-Out-To-Get-Me" email. One would think that there aren't many other odd folks out there.

Oh yes there are. It looks like LeDoux isn't the only one who blames Satan for certain issues.

The Salt Lake Tribune reports that one Dan Larsen sees illegal immigration as the nation's biggest problem. And who is to blame? No, not the government. No, not the people who harbor and help illegal aliens. And, no, not the illegal aliens themselves. According to Larsen, Satan himself has sent them streaming over America's borders.

Wow. Beelzebub is one busy man. In addition to visiting disease, famine, and war on the human race, he is also taking time out of his busy schedule to swim the Rio Grande with Mexican friends and undermine LeDoux's career as Boxing Commish.

Read the article here: http://www.sltrib.com/ci_5756635

The Watchdog can see it coming, Satan as organizational and time management whiz. Move over Dale Carnegie!

And so it goes in Anoka County...

E-mail Update 5/11/07

In This Issue:

1. Tick, Tick, Tick?;
2. The Obituaries;
3. FTA Concerned About Northstar Again;
4. Is That My Legislation?;
5. Quote of the Week.

1. Tick, Tick, Tick?

It appears that the DFL majority at the Capitol all graduated from the Dennis Green Institute of Clock Management. With just ten days to go until adjournment on May 21, they have managed to get only two major spending bills signed into law. The other bills were all vetoed after the governor gave ample warning about what he could sign into law and what he couldn't. It looks like this gang is content to "take a knee" until May 21, pushing the state into yet another special session. Dennis Green must have found a new career: political advisor.

2. The Obituaries.

Since September of 2005, the Watchdog has been the North Metro's leading source of news and information. Further confirmation came this week in the form of an email from a loyal reader. He noted that if the Watchdog would start publishing the obituaries, he could cancel his newspaper subscription.

Here are the dead who were called home for the week ending May 11:

- The bonding bill. Cause of death: morbid obesity at \$300 million.
- The Health and Human Services Bill. Cause of death: Massive internal injuries from a rapid 42% increase in size.
- The State Government Finance Bill. Cause of death: Severe Kahnitis, an affliction whose symptoms include authoring silly legislation like a state poet laureate. Named after State Rep. Phyllis Kahn.
- The Higher Education Bill. Cause of death: Giving in-state tuition breaks to illegal immigrants.

- Other spending bills are in critical condition, including the tax bill and the transportation bill.

3. FTA Concerned About Northstar Again.

It is a close race to determine who is in trouble more often: Northstar rail or NFL degenerate Adam "Pac Man" Jones of the Tennessee Titans.

Watchdog sources have reported that the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) has demanded that the troubled project add another \$10 million to the ◆contingency◆ account that is reserved for cost overruns and other unforeseen fiscal issues.

This is not the first time the FTA has demanded an increase. A demand for increased contingency funds is a sign that the FTA continues to be troubled by Northstar.

The NFL suspended Pac Man for the 2007 season. Will the FTA likewise suspend Northstar?

By the way, where will that \$10 million come from? Will the county increase taxes? Will other county programs be cut? Contact the Anoka County Board to find out:

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

4. Is That My Legislation?

It was a doozy of a meeting for state Rep. Meli\$\$\$a Hortman last week. The Watchdog has already reported her "outing" of four legislators who allegedly have committed to overriding the governor on a gas tax veto.

She also apparently is unaware of provisions in bills she herself has authored. One attendee at the meeting questioned Hortman with respect to her Anoka County mortgage and deed tax bill. Specifically, it was asked why proceeds of the fund could be used to improve land for Northstar rail. Hortman responded that her bill didn't allow for that type of spending and continued to deny it after being pressed on the issue.

This is why the Watchdog exists, to cut through the smoke screens and plain BS spread by politicians. Check page 2, lines 15 and 16 of her bill: "(5) paying for the costs associated with improving the property for economic development, recreation, housing, transportation, or rail traffic."

Still don't believe it? Read for yourself:

<http://www.revisor.leg.state.mn.us/bin/bldbill.php?bill=H0362.0.html&session=ls85>

5. Quote of the Week.

The quote of the week comes from a politician who finds her way into the pages of this newsletter on a frequent basis, state Rep. Meli\$\$a Hortman.

Hortman has been champion of raising taxes, especially gas taxes. In a week when gas is over \$3 per gallon, she had this to say about the legislature's proposed gas tax increase:

"Everyone in this room knows a nickel is not enough. A dime isn't enough either."

Source: Star Tribune, <http://www.startribune.com/587/story/1173407.html>

So how much is enough, Rep. Hortman?

E-mail Update 5/18/07

In This Issue:

1. Tock, Tock, Tock,...
2. More Than a Gas Tax;
3. Override? What Override?;
4. Farmington Smack Down;
5. Watchdog Gets the Scoop – Again.

1. Tock, Tock, Tock.

Here we are with three days left in the legislative session and the legislature still hasn't gotten the majority of its work done. The task is quite simple. Convene in January and get a budget done by the middle of May. The legislature has yet to even attempt an override of a gubernatorial veto or pass new spending bills to replace the earlier, vetoed bills. This goes beyond taking a knee. Coach Pogemiller and Coach Kelliher have pulled their teams off the field. A timely budget agreement is still possible but time is short.

2. More Than a Gas Tax.

The governor last week vetoed a highly unpopular transportation bill that contained a gas tax increase. It's not too hard to figure out that increasing the cost of gasoline isn't a smart idea when hard working families are paying \$3 a gallon. In fact, a KSTP poll showed a strong majority opposed. <http://www.kstp.com/article/stories/S73868.shtml>

Of course, there are some misguided folks who thought the gas tax was a great idea. As a public service, the Watchdog will break down the bill and show these folks how expensive this bill really is:

- A 5 cent per gallon tax increase;
- A 2.5 cent per gallon increase to finance debt, making for a 7.5 cent per gallon increase;
- A .5% sales tax increase in the Metro area, with NO voter referendum;
- A wheelage tax increase;
- A county sales tax on vehicles sold in the county;
- License tab caps removed (the ones Gov. Ventura passed);
- Fee increases on just about every service the DMV offers.

This increase would have cost the average Minnesota family upwards of \$500 per year. While there is a need to allocate more funds to roads, the state should look at tapping that \$2.2 billion surplus before coming after the family budget.

Here in Anoka County, our commissioners whine and complain that they need more money for roads. What they need to do is stop spending hundreds of thousands of dollars every year on lobbyists.

http://www.osa.state.mn.us/reports/gid/2005/lobby/lobby_05_report.pdf

Taxpayers also remember the \$1 million squandered on the failed Vikings stadium fantasy. It's a matter of priorities, not taxes.

So you think that all that new tax money would go to improving your drive times and relieving congestion? Check out these earmarked projects in the bill:

- \$20 million for a new MnDOT administration building in Mankato;
- \$13 million to fix the exterior of the MnDOT building in Saint Paul;
- \$4 million to preserve historic roadside buildings;
- A buy down of debt issued to build the Hiawatha light rail line.
-

Thank you, Governor Pawlenty!

3. Override? What Override?

Score one for the taxpayers. After the governor vetoed the piggy transportation tax bill (see above), the liberal media immediately started clucking their collective tongues in anticipation of a group of Republicans joining the DFL to override the governor. The liberal establishment was downright giddy at the prospect of a two-fold victory: A major tax increase and a stinging defeat for a governor who had the audacity to ask the legislature to live with a mere 9.8% increase in state spending.

After hearing from concerned taxpayers, including constituents, Reps. Jim Abeler and Kathy Tingelstad yesterday declared that they would stick with the governor and not vote in favor of an override. This development makes the prospect of a successful override remote indeed. This is a rare triumph of the humble taxpayer over the massive transportation-industrial complex and their accomplices in the media.

The Watchdog has criticized these two often-wayward legislators for good reason. Today, their decision to stick with the governor is to be commended. These two may be reached at rep.jim.abeler@house.mn and rep.Kathy.tingelstad@house.mn.

Read an article on the subject here:

<http://www.abcnewspapers.com/2007/May/17anokaduo.html>

4. Farmington Smack Down.

As the legislature debates massive tax increases and proponents claim that the public voted for that kind of change last November, take a look at what happened in Farmington last week.

The city held a referendum to build a massive “sports and wellness” center at a cost of \$24 million. The vote was resounding “NO!” with nearly 70% of the vote going against the project. In addition, a remarkable 40% of eligible voters turned out for an off-year election in the middle of May.

The Watchdog offers a tip of the cap to Tim Burke, the man widely credited with quarterbacking the opposition. His web site, www.nosportsplex.org, was a rallying point for beleaguered taxpayers.

The Watchdog has watched Burke’s efforts with great interest now that Coon Rapids is considering a similar type of community center.

Read an article on the issue here:

<http://www.startribune.com/332/story/1179865.html>

<http://www.abcnewspapers.com/2007/may/3commcet.html>

5. Watchdog Gets the Scoop – Again.

Sometimes, it’s hard for the Watchdog to be humble. When you’ve become the leading source of local news and information in the North Metro, you’re entitled to some bragging rights on occasion.

Last week, the Watchdog scooped the story regarding the federal government’s demand that Northstar rail add another \$10 million in contingency funds to the project. This development pushes the cost of the line to \$320 million. The project is now \$55 million over budget and has yet to run a single train. Oh, yeah. The line is now half as long as planned and has dropped station stops, including Fridley. Increasing costs, shrinking benefits.

The mainstream media has picked up the story. Read an article here:

<http://www.abcnewspapers.com/2007/May/16fta.html>.

It's not too late to order your window cling. Dump the train! Add a lane!
sticker@AnokaCountyWatchdog.com

E-mail Update 5/25/07

In This Issue:

WATCHDOG SPECIAL! 2007 LEGISLATIVE WRAP UP!

The 2007 legislative session concluded Monday evening. The Watchdog recaps the session by recounting the ten biggest things you need to know about the session. Five issues will be highlighted this week and five next week. For now, it appears that no special session will be called, meaning taxpayers will be safe from the legislature until high noon on February 12, 2008.

#10: Law Makers or Law Breakers?

Just hours after the session was adjourned, Senate President James Metzen (DFL – South Saint Paul) was arrested for allegedly driving drunk. According to media reports, Metzen's blood alcohol content was .15, nearly double the legal limit. Police reports state that Metzen admitted to drinking before he got behind the wheel.

What an embarrassment for the citizens of Minnesota. The President of the State Senate arrested for driving drunk. Watchdogs will recall the KMSP television investigative report from the 2004 legislative session where undercover cameras caught legislators boozing with lobbyists in Metzen's office. That report led to the ouster of state Representative Scott Wasiluk (DFL – Maplewood).

In the recent past, two current legislators (Tom Rukavina, DFL – Virginia is the other) and a former legislator (former state Senator Ted Mondale) have been arrested for drunk driving. Another one was arrested last fall for domestic assault (Mark Olson, R-Big Lake).

#9: County Lobbyist Comes Through – For Himself.

Anoka County lobbyist Steve Novak is no stranger to Watchdogs. He was the county's point man on the ultra-expensive, ultra-unsuccessful Vikings stadium project. During the legislative session, Novak is paid by county taxpayers to manage the county's lobbying efforts. For this, he is compensated well, earning a reported six-figure salary.

It appears that Novak is serving multiple masters in Saint Paul. Tucked inside this year's 136-page pension bill was a provision that apparently is specifically for Novak that will accrue to his and his ex-wife's benefit regarding his pension (Novak is a former state Senator). The county board ought to ask how involved Novak was in getting this language passed and if he was on county time when doing so.

Moreover, another serious question is raised by Novak's own lobbying report to the state campaign finance board. In addition to listing Anoka County, Novak also reports being a lobbyist for the Minneapolis Radiation Oncology Physicians since 2006.

<http://www.cfboard.state.mn.us/lobby/lbdetail/lb701.html>.

It is troubling when a public employee who lobbies for the government is also at the Capitol lobbying on behalf of a private client. The potential for divided loyalties, efforts, and outright conflicts of interest is obvious. Where is the media on this issue?

#8: Dumb Bills To Become Law.

Throughout the session, the Watchdog closely tracked dumb bills. Shockingly, two of these bills are about to become law. The infamous Right to Poop Act and a bill to force hairbraiders to get a license were hidden inside a larger omnibus spending bill, thus putting the governor in the tough position of exercising a veto on an entire bill or allowing goofy things to become law along with the good provisions. Look for the governor to sign the bill, thus giving Minnesotans everywhere the right to poop in private business restrooms.

#7: Anoka County Property Tax Increase Hangs in the Balance.

The governor has threatened to veto the entire omnibus tax bill. Among the clunkers in the bill is a provision giving the Anoka County Board the authority to levy a brand new "deed and mortgage" tax on property transactions in the county. This provision would amount to little more than a property tax increase for the over-taxed citizens of the county. If you wish to contact the governor to encourage him to veto this bill, send an email to: tim.pawlenty@state.mn.us.

#6: Legislature Gives Itself a Huge Budget Increase.

The DFL gained the majority in both Houses of the legislature by promising action on things like healthcare and education. No DFL candidate campaigned on a promise to get more money for the legislature.

So what happened? Let the numbers speak for themselves. Nursing home and long-term care workers, amongst the lowest paid folks out there, received a 2% pay raise each year, not even enough to cover inflation. Nursing home workers face demanding working conditions as they care for the most vulnerable Minnesotans. This is their reward.

How about education? Education received a 2% increase to the basic funding formula for the first year and got a 1% increase the second year. Most school districts will face operating deficits from this 1% increase.

Now on to the legislature. After giving themselves big per diem increases, the House then gave itself a housing allowance for legislators to have housing in Saint Paul year-round, not just during the session. In the final government spending bill, the legislature increased its own budget a whopping 17%. These numbers are proof positive where the priorities truly lie for this group. They give themselves a huge budget increase while giving small increases to core functions.

Next Week: The top 5.

E-mail Update 6/1/07

In This Issue:

5. Anarchy in the House;
4. Spending Millions Per Second;
3. Anoka County Gets Skunked;
2. Low Override;
1. Taxpayers Win, Taxpayers Win!

5. Anarchy in the House.

The last night of session in the Minnesota House will go down in history as one of the most shameful. In a last minute rush to ram billions in state spending through the House before the midnight deadline, Speaker Kelliher and her leadership team resorted to heavy-handed, rarely used parliamentary tricks to stifle debate and cut short the right of legislators to question what exactly was in each bill. Some Capitol veterans told the Watchdog that it was the most chaotic, out of control floor session they had ever seen.

The viability of our democratic institutions is founded upon the principle of free speech, unfettered debate, and the free exchange of ideas. To gag any member of the legislature and stifle the right to free speech is shameful, regardless of which party is in control and which one is in the minority. A commitment to democratic principles is more important than party affiliation.

To see a video of the chaos, click here:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=--Rg5_kPM44

Editor's Note: This video clip was produced by a partisan source not affiliated with the Anoka County Watchdog. This clip is linked because it offers a concise, six minute accounting of this historic event.

If you wish to view the May 21 floor session in its unedited entirety, running into many hours, you can access that video here:

http://www.house.leg.state.mn.us/htv/archivesHFS.asp?ls_year=85

4. Spending Millions Per Second.

Despite being in session since January 3rd, the majority party in the legislature couldn't get their budget completed in a timely, orderly fashion. Instead, major spending bills

were crafted on the fly and rammed through the House and Senate without a full and thorough debate. In the final six hours of the 2007 session, the majority party passed \$26 billion in spending, about 75% of the state's entire general fund budget. Take a look at the break down and ask yourself if this is a good way run a democracy:

\$26 billion in total spending in six hours;

\$4.3 billion per hour;

\$71 million per minute;

\$1.2 million per second.

3. Anoka County Gets Skunked.

Fortunately for the taxpayers, the County's ineptitude at the Capitol this session leaves more money in their pockets. To be blunt, the County got almost nothing it wanted from the legislature this session. Perhaps County lobbyist Steve Novak was spending too much time lobbying for himself and his private client instead of the County. Perhaps the County doesn't have enough lobbyists on the payroll (ten, according to state campaign finance records) or perhaps Commissioner Dan Erhart is a bad luck charm.

Erhart spent the last evening of session sitting on the House floor watching the County's agenda go down in flames.

Here's a partial list of bullets Anoka County taxpayers dodged in 2007 that will likely come back for consideration in 2008:

- County mortgage and deed tax
- Increased notary fees
- Increased wheelage tax
- County vehicle excise tax
- County sales tax
- A host of goodies for the troubled Northstar rail program

2. Low Overrider.

The classic tune "Low Rider" from War could be the theme song for a DFL majority that had high hopes in January of steamrolling over gubernatorial vetoes and thus relegating the governor to a bit player role.

Despite a flurry of vetoes on major bills, the DFL could muster the courage to attempt only one solitary veto override. That attempt, during the waning moments of session, failed. It is no secret that the DFL worked furiously behind the scenes to buy off

Republican override commitments with various pork barrel projects. When Rep. Mei\$sa Hortman famously declared in early May that her party had four GOP House members “committed” to an override on the transportation tax bill, the chips looked to be down.

History, however, has now proven Hortman dead wrong. The history books will observe that every veto survived the 2007 session – making the governor a big winner and the DFL agenda a big loser.

It will be interesting to see how the veto issues play out in 2008.

Editor’s Note: The Minnesota Constitution declares that a veto override must be passed by a 2/3rds majority in each House of the legislature. Despite large majorities in both, the DFL needed one Republican in the Senate and five in the House for a successful override.

Editor’s Note II: Vetoed bills stay “alive” after the 2007 session ends and could be the subject of override attempts in 2008.

To read more, click here:

<http://www.house.leg.state.mn.us/cco/rules/mncon/Article4.htm>

1. Taxpayers Win, Taxpayers Win!

There can be no doubt that the defining issue of the 2007 legislative session was taxes, particularly tax increases. Despite a budget that would increase some \$3 billion without taxes, the DFL majority nonetheless proposed some \$5 billion in additional taxes. The governor famously declared that a 9.8% increase in state spending over the two-year budget cycle was enough, leaving the DFL to try valiantly to justify a 15% increase.

The DFL attempted to spin the tax increases as merely a “soak the rich” class warfare scheme that would benefit the many by confiscating from the few. Of course, to buy that argument would require overlooking an orgy of regressive tax increases on gasoline, light bulbs, beer, hockey tickets, paint, deeds, mortgages, cars, underwear, and a host of sales tax increases that all punish regular folks far more than the wealthy. One would also have to buy the argument that higher taxes on businesses and job creators don’t get passed on to regular folks in the form of higher priced goods and services as well as potential job lay-offs. Moreover, never mind that the wealthiest 1% of Minnesotans pay 24% of the taxes.

Overall, the taxpayers won a major victory as these massive tax increases were beaten back by the governor and a small GOP minority in the House and Senate. Of course,

there were some DFL successes with respect to big fee increases and a spending of the entire budget surplus.

That's a wrap, Watchdogs. The taxpayers are safe until the legislature comes back on February 12, 2008. Take it to the bank. There will be no special session.

E-mail Update 6/8/07

In This Issue:

1. They're Baaaaaaaack....
2. The Myth of Road Subsidies;
3. The Watchdog in the News;
4. Looking to 2008 Locally;
5. Looking to 2008 Nationally.

1. They're Baaaaaaaack....

And you thought they were going away? Like a nasty strain of drug resistant tuberculosis, the Minnesota Vikings just won't go away. They're still on the prowl in their quest to get a few hundred million in taxpayer subsidies for a new stadium.

The propaganda campaign for the 2008 legislative session has already begun and the Vike's horde of Armani-clad lobbyists were seen patrolling the halls of the Capitol this past session in hot pursuit of "persuadable" legislators.

In fact, the Vikings and the Metropolitan Sports Facilities Commission (MSFC) testified before the House Taxes Committee on May 18 to "get the conversation started." While no votes were taken at the hearing, it was made crystal clear that the Vikings would be coming back in full force in 2008 to wrest public subsidies out of the legislature.

While most of the testimony was laughable, perhaps the most absurd testimony came from the lips of Lester Bagley, the Vikings' stadium guy who has made a living by failing to pass a football stadium bill year after year. Bagley declared, with a straight face, that the Vikings were "prepared to help Minnesota with its football stadium problem." Um, Lester, the only stadium problem the taxpayers have is that they already subsidize too many. We don't need another.

Watch the Tax Committee stadium presentation here:

http://www.house.leg.state.mn.us/htv/archivesCOMM.asp?comm=taxes&ls_year=85

To see some pro-stadium propaganda, visit this web site, which purports to show "grassroots" stadium support:

<http://www.minnesotamomentum.com/index.jsp>

2. The Myth of Road Subsidies.

We all know that mass transit requires subsidies, meaning that those who don't benefit from using mass transit help pay for it. For example, the Met Council reports that bus fares only cover about 30% of the cost to operate Met Council busses, thus leaving the taxpaying public to pick up the other 70%. The Hiawatha light rail line does little better, with a 42% fare box recovery and a 58% taxpayer subsidy requirement.

Mass transit apologists try to quell justified taxpayer outrage at the size of these subsidies by claiming that roads require subsidies as well. Not true. According to the Minnesota Department of Transportation, here is the breakdown of state highway funding:

- License tab fees: 27%
- State gas tax: 34%
- Federal gas tax: 17%
- Motor vehicle sales tax: 9%
- Other fees, grants, and income: 13%

So where's the subsidy?

Careful readers will note that the above funding breakdown is for state roads, not local roads. The media has reported extensively lately on the subject of property taxes "subsidizing" roads.

Think about this carefully for just a moment. Counties and cities bear primary responsibility for county highways and city streets. In other words, it is their job to fund the construction and maintenance of these roads, though there is state and federal aid available.

Now think about how local jurisdictions raise money. They do it through the property tax. Thus, it should be no surprise to anyone that local jurisdictions use the one taxing tool available to them (property taxes) to raise money for roads and bridges that belong to them.

On a related note, a "subsidy" is essentially a tax payment made by a taxpayer to support something from which they derive no benefit. The Watchdog is hard pressed to think of any type of property taxpayer who receives no direct benefit from roads and bridges.

3. The Watchdog in the News.

As a recognized opinion leader in the North Metro, the Watchdog reports the news and is frequently a subject of the news. This past week was no exception.

First, the Watchdog was the feature article on the Sam Adams Alliance web site. The Sam Adams Alliance is dedicated to holding government accountable, especially at the local level. The article can be accessed through the Watchdog web site home page.

Second, Watchdog founder Harold Hamilton was interviewed by KSTP television regarding recent developments with respect to Northstar commuter rail. The mainstream media have come to view the Watchdog as a trusted, legitimate source regarding issues like Northstar rail. The news item is expected to run on KSTP early next week.

4. Looking to 2008 Locally.

With the legislative session now over and the warm breeze of summer upon us, it can be tempting to ignore politics and view the next election as a faraway event to be considered at a later date. Wake up, Watchdogs! Government is constantly at work and now is the time to think about 2008. While most of the world may be asleep at the political wheel, the 2008 campaigns are already heating up. Of course, the Watchdog is on top of these local races and here to report the news.

Locally, 2008 will see Anoka County commissioners Dan Erhart and Scott Ledoux on the ballot, provided they decide to seek re-election (Commissioner Jim Kordiak is the third race on the ballot). Erhart and Ledoux have both been strong advocates of Northstar rail and the Vikings stadium.

The Watchdog can report that at least three legitimate, viable candidates have begun to take the initial steps towards a formal campaign to challenge Scott LeDoux in District 5, which covers Coon Rapids and Andover.

What is interesting about these challengers is that they appear to cover the political spectrum from liberal to conservative. If these potential challengers are any indication of the public mood, it would appear that Ledoux's first term on the County board has engendered a good deal of dissatisfaction across his entire constituency. It is rare to have multiple county commissioner candidates considering throwing their hats in the ring so early in the process. The election in District 5 is shaping up to be a battle royal

in which multiple candidates could force a September primary and push the top two primary winners into an exciting November finale.

5. Looking to 2008 Nationally.

Hillary Clinton is one of the frontrunners to receive the Democrat nomination for president. With America owing its prosperity to a capitalist economic system, it is important for voters to know where the candidates stand regarding capitalism.

Republican presidential candidate Rudy Giuliani made headlines last month when, during a GOP presidential debate, he quoted Clinton as saying that the unfettered free market was “disastrous.”

The liberal media took issue with Giuliani and questioned the accuracy of his comments.

So what’s the real deal on this vital issue? Who told the truth? This, my friends, is why the Watchdog exists.

Here is what Giuliani said:

GIULIANI: There's something, I think, really big at stake here. We're looking at a race here in which the leading Democratic candidate for president of the United States has said that the unfettered free market is the most disastrous thing in modern America. That's a quote -- or that's a quote she agreed with.

The quote is actually from a man named Alan Ehrenhalt who Clinton quoted in her infamous “It Takes a Village” book. Ehrenhalt wrote: “The unfettered free market has been the most radically disruptive force in American life in the last generation.”

In a 1996 C-Span interview, host Brian Lamb asked Clinton about the quote:

BRIAN LAMB (host): There's a quote here. I want to ask you if you agree with this. This is from Alan Ehrenhalt, author of The Lost City -- you put it in your book. "The unfettered free market has been the most radically disruptive force in American life in the last generation."

Clinton’s response?

CLINTON: I believe that. That's why I put it in the book.

E-mail Update 6/15/07

In This Issue:

1. We're Number 12! We're Number 12!
2. Mayor Coleman is no Mayor Coleman;
3. Energy...I Think I'm Runnin' Out;
4. Hidden Costs of Housing;
5. Hortman vs. Newton.

1. We're Number 12! We're Number 12!

Minnesota has finally dropped out of the dreaded "top 10" of the most highly taxed states. This according to a recently released analysis of U.S. Census Bureau data by the non-partisan Taxpayers' Association. Minnesota now ranks 12th in per capita taxes.

Governors of both political parties have tried for decades to get Minnesota out of the top 10, especially since jobs and capital have such increased mobility in the 21st Century. Congratulations to Governor Pawlenty for his leadership and ability to understand the importance of a competitive tax structure. High taxes kill jobs; they don't create jobs.

Liberals standing on the window ledges of tall buildings can crawl back inside. The state budget increased over \$3 billion for this upcoming budget cycle and taxes are still rather high, especially business property taxes. Moreover, Minnesota still leads the nation or is near the top in nearly every quality of life ranking. There are still 38 states below Minnesota on the per capita taxation scale.

The news prompted Dane Smith, the president of a tax and spend group called "Growth & Justice" to complain that Minnesota was moving away from the "shared prosperity" model. The Watchdog will have to add 'shared prosperity' (confiscatory taxation) to the euphemism hall of fame, right up there with "revenue enhancements" (tax increases) and "government investments" (big spending).

Remember also that Dane Smith was a long-time reporter for the Star Tribune. So much for objective journalism.

To read a supporting article, click here:

<http://www.startribune.com/587/story/1239955.html>

To visit the Taxpayers' Association web site, click here: <http://www.mntax.org/>

2. Mayor Coleman is no Mayor Coleman.

The Capitol City has had Norm and Chris. While they share a last name, they are worlds apart with respect to leadership and management skills. Norm led the city for eight years, holding the line on property taxes, growing jobs, and reducing crime.

Chris, on the other hand, seems to think public whining and complaining about a perceived lack of money is what leadership is all about. Two events regarding the city's finances provide a great opportunity to examine a couple of public policy issues that have been in the public eye lately.

The first is local government aid (LGA). The omnibus tax bill that was vetoed by Governor Pawlenty contained about \$70 million in LGA, including millions for Saint Paul.

Watchdogs need to remember two things about LGA. First, LGA is welfare for cities and counties. The program was designed to provide basic aid for cities and counties so poor they couldn't provide adequate police and fire protection. It was never meant to supplement major metropolitan cities nor was it ever meant to fund things like municipal greenhouses or municipal movie theaters. Like most government programs, LGA has been perverted.

Moreover, there is no need for LGA in the first place. If a city can't provide basic services, then that city should go back to being a township and have services provided by the county. If a county is in a similar position, the county should merge with another and take advantage of economies of scale. Why is it that cities with a few hundred residents need their own police department when a city of 30,000 like Andover does just fine by contracting with the County for police protection?

The other issue is bonding. As Watchdogs know, next year is a "bonding" year at the Capitol in which legislators will pass a capital projects spending bill that will be financed with bonds that must be paid back over time, with interest.

On the heels of Saint Paul's LGA "crisis" comes news of that city's bonding "wish list." At the top is a \$25 million request for a sports facility and \$11 million for the Como Zoo.

Huh? At a time when the Mayor is threatening to raise property taxes sky high while freezing hiring, presumably to include police and fire hiring, the city wants to talk about state aid for sports and zoos. Talk about a lack of priorities.

Watch for the hypocrisy as well. There are a number of legislators who bashed Governor Pawlenty for wanting to issue bonds to build roads and bridges. They said it was a moral outrage to put debt on the backs of our children. Watch these same legislators support Saint Paul's bid to issue debt for a zoo exhibit and a soccer stadium in 2008.

To read an article on the bonding proposal, click here:
http://www.twincities.com/searchresults/ci_6134883

3. Energy... I think I am running out.

The Star Tribune ran a sobering article yesterday noting the rising number of utility shutoffs now that the cold weather rule is no longer in effect. A rising number of homes and businesses are facing a shut off because of payment delinquencies.

This is what happens when energy is made more expensive. The raft of feel good laws being passed to mandate renewable energy and the like will raise the cost of energy for everybody, including those least able to absorb it. Rich or poor, you need to stay warm in the winter. The leading cause of increased energy prices is your own government.

Of course, the solution from government will be more taxes to finance more heating aid programs.

Read an article here: <http://www.startribune.com/462/story/1244702.html>
For a lighthearted look: <http://www.schoolhouserock.tv/Energy.html>

4. Hidden Costs of Housing.

Last week, the Watchdog reported on the myth of subsidized transportation with respect to local roads and bridges. A loyal Watchdog reader who develops land replied that we should remember another way local governments get road improvements without paying. Namely, they stick the developer with the entire cost of making improvements near the development and then the government takes over ownership. Who bears those costs? They are reflected in the price of real estate, or course.

5. Hortman vs. Newton,

No it's not a Supreme Court case. Not yet. State Rep. Meli\$a Hortman has been spending a great deal of time defending her vote in support of the legislature's education funding bill. She even called it a "sturdy little bill."

Anoka-Hennepin School Board member Jerry Newton was quoted as saying that it is obvious that the bill favors Minneapolis and Saint Paul over the suburbs. Moreover, DFL state Rep. Denise Dittrich, a former Anoka-Hennepin Board member herself, voted against the bill.

While the amount the state spends on education is a very important issue, whatever that amount is shouldn't punish the suburbs. In this case, it is quite clear that the pie got cut heavily in favor of the urban school districts at the expense of suburban districts. It is all the more galling to note that Minneapolis and Saint Paul are two of the worst performing districts in the state.

Speaker Kelliher (Minneapolis) and Majority Leader Pogemiller (Minneapolis) looted the education budget in favor of their districts. Suburban legislators like Rep. Hortman and Rep. Kranz (Blaine) acted as willing accomplices. Hey, Meli\$\$a, how about voting your district instead of the party line for once?

To read the Hortman quote, click here:

<http://www.mnsun.com/articles/2007/06/08/news/bp07legislature.prt>

To read the Newton quote, click here:

<http://www.abcnewspapers.com/2007/June/13distbid.html>

E-mail Update 6/22/07

In This Issue:

1. Per Diem is Latin For...
2. Who Supports Business?
3. MetroNorth Chamber Snow Job.
4. Teachers Union = Fat Cats.
5. County Puts Taxpayers at Risk, Again!

1. Per Diem is Latin For...

“Per Diem” is a Latin phrase meaning “to pig out at the public trough.” Actually, per diem is a daily payment that legislators receive in addition to their salary for each day the legislature is in session. In the Senate, payments are \$96 per day. The House has a daily limit of \$77. Legislators have control over these payments, with some taking the “full monty” and others taking less than the full amount or declining to take payments on certain days (e.g. weekends).

So who leads the way on taking this mega-perk? In the House, Speaker Margaret Anderson Kelliher (DFL-Minneapolis) led by example in taking \$12,379.68 in per diem payments, an amount equal to approximately 40% of a legislator’s annual salary of \$31,140.

At the bottom was Rep. Steve Simon (DFL-Saint Louis Park) who took no per diem.

In the Senate, a number of members took the maximum of \$13,344, including every Anoka County senator with the exception of Don Betzold (DFL-Fridley) who took \$9,216 in per diem. Senator John Marty (DFL-Roseville) took the least per diem at \$8,340.

But that’s not all, taxpayers. Legislators get a host of other payments, most notably mileage and year-round housing (these payments are available to legislators who live more than 50 miles from the Capitol). Year-round housing? The legislature is in session only a few months each year. Why are the taxpayers picking up the tab for legislators to have housing outside the session?

In the Senate, Rod Skoe (DFL-Clearbrook), claimed \$14,370 in expenses in addition to \$13,344 in per diem payments. All told, Skoe claimed \$27,713 in per diem and expenses. Combined with his salary, Skoe took home \$58,853. By the way, per capita personal income in Skoe’s area was \$21,998 in 2004, according to this web site

<http://www.fedstats.gov/qf/states/27/27029.html>. Not a bad salary for a humble, part-time public servant.

In the House, Rep. Mary Ellen Otremba (DFL-Long Prairie) claimed \$13,022 in expenses. With per diem and salary included, the amount rises to \$55,063. In Otremba's area, the 2004 per capita income was \$21,121 (<http://www.fedstats.gov/qf/states/27/27153.html>).

Editor's Note: This news item was based upon an article and associated documentation compiled by the Pioneer Press. To read the Pioneer Press article, click here: http://www.twincities.com/politics/ci_6154920?nclick_check=1

2. Who Supports Business?

It seems every candidate for office wants to tout their "pro-business, pro jobs" credentials. Talk is cheap, especially in politics. The truth is that some politicians are indeed serious about supporting job creators and some are just full of BS.

The Minnesota Chamber of Commerce has released a scorecard reviewing the voting records of legislators during the 2007 session.

The following Anoka County legislators received a 100% score for the session: Sen. Vandever, Rep. DeLaForest, and Rep. Dettmer.

The following Anoka County legislators received a 0% score for the session: Sen. Betzold, Sen. Chaudhary, Sen. Foley, Sen. Olseen, Rep. Hortman, Rep. Laine, and Rep. Tillberry.

To see all scores, visit this web site:

http://www.minnesotaprosperty.org/page.asp?content=voting_records&g=MINNESOTA

3. MetroNorth Chamber Snow Job.

It appears that the MetroNorth Chamber of Commerce didn't get a copy of the Minnesota Chamber scorecard. Yesterday, the MetroNorth held a legislative review luncheon. The invited guests were Reps. Jim Abeler, Denise Dittrich, and Meli\$a Hortman.

The Watchdog was in attendance and can report that the meeting was rather uninteresting. The affair was punctuated by Rep. Hortman's shrill, insufferable partisan

attacks on Governor Pawlenty's successful efforts to stave off job-killing DFL tax increases.

Let's get this straight. Hortman got a zero. Dittrich scored just one correct vote and Abeler voted with the Chamber half the time. Is this what passes for "pro business" at the MetroNorth Chamber? No wonder only about 15 people showed up. Next time, the Chamber should try inviting actual, real life pro-business elected officials. But that would probably upset the Chamber's overlords on the Anoka County Board.

4. Teachers Union = Fat Cats.

That special interests have unique access to politicians and disproportionate influence over legislation is an uncomfortable and troubling fact of life that undermines the concept of democratic government and the rule of law. Any visitor to the Capitol in Saint Paul during the legislative session can see a virtual army of well-heeled lobbyists plying their trade in the halls of the people's house.

And like any endeavor in life, some do it better than others. Take Education Minnesota, the teacher union. The Watchdog has reported in the past with respect to the enormous amount of money and the large number of lobbyists employed by this special interest leviathan.

The 2007 session was no different. According to reports filed with the Minnesota Campaign Finance Board, Education Minnesota earned the dubious honor of being the special interest group that spent the most in 2007 to influence legislators.

In a session that ran from January 3rd to May 21st, this group spent \$1.1 million lobbying the legislature.

This group is financed with compulsory dues from teachers, many of whom do not support the political activities of the union. Those teachers may want to visit this link:
http://hosted.ap.org/dynamic/stories/S/SCOTUS_UNION_FEES?SITE=AP&SECTION=HOME&TEMPLATE=DEFAULT

To read an article on this subject, click here:

<http://www.startribune.com/587/story/1261509.html>

Visit relevant campaign finance board documents here:

http://www.cfbreport.state.mn.us/pdfStorage/2007/Lobby/LD/P1/l_4725_9831.pdf

<http://www.cfboard.state.mn.us/lobby/adetail/a4725.html>

5. County Puts Taxpayers at Risk, Again!

Here we go again. The song remains the same: Northstar, Anoka County, taxpayers at risk.

This time, the County has voted to front at least \$17 million to keep Northstar construction schedules from falling behind.

In essence, the state is unwilling to release money it appropriated for Northstar because the project has yet to receive federal approval, meaning that the county had to step in or allow some construction to fall behind.

Ignoring the risk to the taxpayers, the county went ahead and covered \$17 million of the \$44 million needed.

And what happens if the federal government doesn't approve Northstar? That seems to be a question the County is unwilling to answer.

Commissioner Rhonda Sivarajah was the only board member willing to protect the taxpayers. Said Sivarajah, "We're putting the taxpayers' money at risk before we have a full funding grant agreement in place."

Dump the train, add a lane!

E-mail Update 6/29/07

In This Issue:

1. Northstar Math: It's Fuzzy!
2. Anoka County Sings the Blues.
3. MetroNorth Chamber Looking for Love.
4. Blaine Gets Smart.
5. Quote of the Week.

1. Northstar Math: It's Fuzzy!

Even the Watchdog can admit that the odds are in favor of Northstar rail getting built. You would think under those circumstances the County would stop the BS and fuzzy math surrounding the project. But then again, this is an Anoka County operation. You know, the folks who view taxpayers as a money tree to be seen and not heard. (New roads? No way! What we need are lobbyists to pursue a stadium!)

Check out the latest attempt to mislead the taxpayer regarding Northstar ridership. A recent County publication tells readers that the train "could carry as many as 10,000 riders per day." Read that again: "COULD carry AS MANY AS 10,000 riders per day." (A copy of the piece will be published on the web site soon.)

What a sham. The FACTS are far different.

First, What the government doesn't tell you is that the projections they use are for the year 2025, not the opening year (projected at 2009). In 2025, the projected daily ridership is 5,100 – period. It's nowhere near 10,000.

For the 2009 opening date, average weekday ridership is projected to be 3,600.

Don't take the Watchdog's word for it. See the Federal Transit Administration's latest project profile here:

http://www.fta.dot.gov/documents/MN_Minneapolis_FD_NS_2008.doc

That same profile will also highlight the FTA's ongoing concerns with the project, concerns that belie the sunny propaganda spewing forth from the County's public information workshop.

http://himlehorner.typepad.com/northstar/2007/05/fta_letters_enc.html

2. Anoka County Sings the Blues.

With the mood down at the County courthouse, you would think that someone had run over Tax'n'Spend, the County's official mascot dog.

http://standeyo.com/NEWS/06_Animals/06_Animal_pics/060527.ugliest.dog.jpg

The faces were long and mood sour as law enforcement deputies were reportedly dispatched to seal the windows of despondent County Commissioners to keep them off the window ledges.

The reason? In all seriousness, the County was virtually skunked in its quest to wring a host of pork and tax increases out of the 2007 legislative session. The failure was spectacular, even by Anoka County standards. (By the way, is it merely a coincidence that the failed Vikings stadium effort and the County's 2007 legislative agenda were both managed by Steve Novak?)

Anyhow, Watchdogs are aware of this situation by virtue of our June 1st email update that explored this topic. This follow-up concerns one manifestation of the County's outrage over the failure of its legislative agenda.

On June 13th, Board Chairman Dennis Berg sent each and every legislator who represents Anoka County a grievance letter restating the failure of the many proposed tax increases while holding out hope of a special session to pass the pork and taxes the County so desperately wants.

Among the more comically tragic subjects is the language in the failed bonding bill (remember that 2007 was NOT a bonding year to begin with) that would have released state bond dollars for Northstar rail before the federal government had granted final approval to Northstar. You see, the state was smart enough when it foolishly voted to give money to this project to at least minimize taxpayer exposure by releasing the funds only AFTER federal approval.

Of course, the County wanted language to release the funds now, before federal approval. In any case, it's now a moot point as the County stepped forward to front another \$17 million to cover the gap – of course, with no federal approval in hand.

A copy of the letter will be posted soon on the web site.

3. MetroNorth Chamber Looking for Love.

The MetroNorth Chamber must not be feeling loved these days. Last week, the Watchdog took the Chamber to task for organizing a legislative wrap up luncheon featuring a trio of legislators with a decidedly poor pro-business voting record. The Watchdog also noted the rather small crowd on hand, numbering “about 15 people.”

Soon after, Chamber head honcho Tom Snell sent an email to the Watchdog complaining that the actual attendance at the luncheon was a whopping 24 people. Snell furthermore requested a retraction and that the Chamber be given proper “credit” for the 24 who apparently had little better to do that afternoon.

Okay, Tom, here’s our retraction: The Watchdog retracts the language from our June 22 email update and issues the following in substitution:

“There were about 15 PRIVATE SECTOR people in attendance. The rest looked to be bureaucrats and politicians, many from Anoka County.”

The Watchdog notes that Snell took no issue with the Watchdog’s contention that he takes his marching orders from Anoka County.

Tom, if you want some love from the Watchdog, your Chamber needs to pursue a truly pro-business, pro-capitalist agenda. Until then, this is our song:

Looking for love in all the wrong places, looking for love in too many faces...

The Watchdog will post a copy of the email soon.

4. Blaine Gets Smart.

Kudos to Blaine for doing the right thing. Yes, they may have been dragged kicking and screaming, but they did the right thing. After being left at the boat launch as the Vikings ship sailed for Minneapolis, Blaine wisely assessed its options over the future of the Pheasant Ridge property and decided to develop the land for business use, to include medical, technical, and financial service organizations.

The Watchdog is pleased that Blaine has come around to our point of view. Technical, medical, and financial service jobs are the kind of professional vocations that Anoka County cities should seek. The only difference between Blaine and the Watchdog now is that Watchdog was talking about this very subject as far back as 2005

http://www.anokacountywatchdog.com/vikings_twins/position_papers/Paper%2006/Vikings%20Stadium%20paper%206.htm.

Read two articles on the subject here:

http://www.anokacountywatchdog.com/vikings_twins/2007/06.07/06.10.07_Strib,_Blaine_sets_corporate_goal_for_ex-Vikings_site.pdf

<http://www.abcnewspapers.com/2007/June/28infinitecampus.html>.

5. Quote of the Week.

“It’s a piece of s**t.”

House Minority Leader John Boehner of Ohio referring to the recently defeated Senate immigration amnesty bill.

http://www.politico.com/news/stories/0607/4700_Page2.html

E-mail Update 7/6/07

In This Issue:

1. Anoka County Lobbyist Breaks the Law;
2. Santa Wilf;
3. DNR = Don't Need to be Reasonable;
4. Violent Crime Wiped Out in Saint Paul!
5. Andover Water Gestapo.

Editor's Note: As this is the email update closest to July 4th, the Watchdog pauses to recognize America's 231st birthday. We remember the words of Benjamin Franklin when he was asked in Philadelphia what type of government the Framers had drafted. Said Franklin, "A democracy. If you can keep it." In 2007, it remains an open question.

1. Anoka County Lobbyist Breaks the Law.

Honestly, the Watchdog was hoping to catch a breather over the holiday. Great weather, a non-election year, the middle of summer would all cause one to think that politics would hibernate for a few weeks. Not when Anoka County is around.

The latest chapter concerns Anoka County Regional Rail Authority lobbyist Elwyn Tinklenberg. The County is infamous as a rest home for DFL politicians who have lost an election but don't want to rejoin the real world (isn't that what PhD programs are for?). Watchdogs will recall Tinklenberg's failed attempt to serve in Congress, losing the DFL endorsement to Patty Wetterling.

As reported months ago by the Watchdog, Tinklenberg received a sweetheart deal from the County to serve as a consultant and lobbyist.

All lobbyists are required by Minnesota law to submit financial reports on a periodic basis. The latest report was due June 15th, three weeks ago. To date, Tinklenberg has failed to file his report as required by state law.

Tinklenberg's failure to follow this law isn't a small matter. Lobbyists are required to file these reports because Minnesota has a tradition of open government. These reports allow the public to see what these lobbyists are doing to influence our elected officials in Saint Paul. This is especially true when that lobbyist is being paid with public tax dollars.

The County should do the right thing and immediately terminate its relationship with Tinklenberg. We at the Watchdog won't hold our breath. In fact, Tinklenberg will probably get even more money out of the County in the future.

Read the list of delinquent lobbyists here:

<http://www.cfboard.state.mn.us/lobby/LobNoDisburseR.html>

Look at the link where Tinklenberg's report should be here:

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

Read the state law that requires the lobbyist disclosures here:

http://ros.leg.mn/bin/getpub.php?pubtype=STAT_CHAP_SEC&year=2006§ion=10A.04

2. Santa Wilf.

Mark Brunswick of the Star Tribune filed an excellent news item last week regarding the Wilf's family sudden interest in Minnesota politics. Zygi and his family have opened their checkbooks to legislators of both parties. It is no coincidence that these contributions come at a time when the Vikings have been and will continue to lobby for a taxpayer handout to build a new stadium. Of course, a stadium that will enhance the value of the Vikings and also the value of Wilf's real estate investments around the stadium site. A new stadium has boosted the value of Mr. Pohlad's team quite a bit (http://www.forbes.com/lists/2007/33/07mlb_Minnesota-Twins_330400.html).

We all know how this will likely play out in the 2008 legislative session. The Wilf's will throw around thousands upon thousands of political contributions while at the same time plowing in excess of \$1 million into lobbyists with "connections" at the Capitol.

Many of the same legislators who told their constituents that they don't support public subsidies for stadiums will have an epiphany, declaring that their views have "evolved" and that they don't want the Vikings to head to LA "on their watch." They'll thump their chests and talk about "enhancing the tax base" while singing Wilf's praises for his "strategic investments" in Minnesota. We'll all hear about how sitting on the couch on a Sunday afternoon to swill beer and yell at the TV is "part of our social fabric."

Think the Watchdog is engaging in unfounded cynicism? Just watch.

To read the Brunswick article, click here:

<http://www.startribune.com/587/story/1278470.html>

A concise list of contributions can be found here:
<http://www.startribune.com/587/story/1278454.html>

3. DNR = Don't Need to be Reasonable.

Although this story is out of Stearns County, it certainly belongs in the “stupid government” category, a position all too familiar to the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources.

It seems that the residents of tiny Freeport, Minnesota wanted to build a public fishing dock. In a show of strong community spirit, the needed funds were raised privately through voluntary contributions. In that same spirit, the citizens also offered their time to build the dock, in the old tradition of a “barn raising.” All this even though the good people of Freeport could have done the modern thing and complained to their public officials until a dock was built at taxpayer expense.

You can guess what happened next. When the citizens asked the DNR for the dock blueprints, the DNR said the information was “proprietary” and that the citizens, if they wanted the dock, had to fork over the money to the DNR, which would build the dock at higher expense (big shock).

MINNCOR is also to blame for this bureaucratic fiasco. MINNCOR is the state prison program that makes license plates, furniture and the like. The DNR claims that MINNCOR actually has rights to the blueprint. The Watchdog never knew our pedophiles and drug dealers were so actively employed behind bars.

It seems to the Watchdog that the public, not the prisoners, owns the blueprints. After all, who pays for the prisons where these folks are serving their “punishment” for harming innocent people?

To read the article, click here:

<http://www.sctimes.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=2007107020042>

4. Violent Crime Wiped Out in Saint Paul!

At least that's the conclusion that the Watchdog reached on the 4th of July. It was reported by the Pioneer Press that day that the city would be devoting extra police patrol cars to respond to illegal fireworks calls. Never mind extra patrols for gang and drug activity. What's really needed is a crackdown on folks lighting the occasional firecracker or bottle rocket. Don't you feel safer already?

Saint Paul has seen 12 murders so far this year. By the way, a loud boo for the Saint Paul Police Department's utterly lame web site. You would think a police department web site would have, first and foremost, up to date information on crime statistics.

If this is the way the City of Saint Paul prioritizes law enforcement resources, no wonder they have a craving for more money from the state treasury – and it's a good thing Governor Pawlenty vetoed that bill.

As the Watchdog mentioned in a previous update, Chris Coleman is no Norm Coleman.

To read the article, click here: http://www.twincities.com/ci_6297051?IADID=Search-www.twincities.com-www.twincities.com&nlick_check=1

5. Andover Water Gestapo.

Saint Paul wasn't the only city that bathed itself in putrid buffoonery this past week. Anoka County's own city of Andover proved that it has excess staff, money, and idle time by unveiling a special web page devoted to the life threatening issue of folks who run their sprinklers when it isn't their day or time.

Like most cities, Andover has a Byzantine system regarding who can water their lawn and when. And like other cities, Andover devotes staff resources to busting and fining folks who forget that today isn't their water day.

What separates Andover and takes it to a whole new level is Andover's creation of a special web site where you can fink on your neighbor. The web site promises cowardly complainers that they're contribution to justice and orderly society is strictly anonymous and that all complaints will be promptly checked out (no confirmation yet if Sheriff Andersohn has agreed to the use of the County SWAT team).

Ever sat up late at night wondering how to confront your hose happy neighbor? Jealous and suspicious that your neighbor's grass is just a little too green? No problem. Rat on them via the city web site and watch government swoop in, searching for tell-tale signs of moisture as you laugh in smug appreciation of your strict observance of city ordinances.

File your complaint here, O' keepers of the flame of justice:

<http://ci.andover.mn.us/index.asp?Type=DYNAFORM&SEC=%7bD7A27CAA-6ACF-4719-8A26-3BF1A55AB0E1>}

E-mail Update

7/13/07

In This Issue:

1. Ramsey Spends \$19 Million on Nothing;
2. Giroux: "Show me the Money!";
3. Anoka County Board "Leadership";
4. Quote of the Week;
5. Senator Coleman and Northstar.

1. Ramsey Spends \$19 Million on Nothing.

The City of Ramsey has pulled off a stunning feat of ineptitude and arrogance that may well go down as the biggest white elephant in the history of Anoka County. And that's saying something in a county where government thinks a \$320 million train is a good investment and that Zygi Wilf is a man you can trust.

This week, the Pioneer Press released a series of articles detailing Ramsey's quest to plop a taxpayer-subsidized "downtown" into the city. Apparently, Ramsey was having some self-esteem issues and wanted something to "put them on the map." City leaders have certainly gotten their wish to be on the map – the map of shame.

The Watchdog strongly encourages readers to take a moment to read the entire the series here:

Part I: http://www.twincities.com/ci_6320432

Part II: http://www.twincities.com/ci_6328853

Part III: http://www.twincities.com/ci_6344491

Part IV: http://www.twincities.com/ci_6328858

Part V: http://www.twincities.com/ci_6335963

Part VI: http://www.twincities.com/ci_6324065

Note: The Pionner Press requires a free subscription to access these stories.

Watchdog Comments:

First, a sincere and hearty congratulations to Dave Orrick and Nicole Garrison-Sprenger for a magnificent piece of investigative journalism. This is what newspapers are supposed to do: ask tough questions, dig deep for background material and then produce news that is thought-provoking and meaningful to readers. Too much of what

passes for news these days is superficial garbage that appeals to emotions instead of intellect but can be read in 2-3 minutes (For an example, click here): <http://www.mn-getonboard.com/>.

Second, the Watchdog was founded precisely because governmental officials frequently embark on mega-projects without doing any serious analysis of the risks, costs, and potential benefits. Instead, these elected leaders allow emotion to rule the day. This boondoggle is a prime example.

One aspect of the story that the Pioneer Press did not cover is the current whereabouts of Jim Norman, the former city administrator who guided the council into this disaster. He is currently a consultant for local units of government and in business with none other than Elwyn Tinklenberg. The Good Ol' Boy network is alive and well indeed.

2. Giroux: "Show me the Money!"

It looks like Anoka-Hennepin Schools Superintendent Roger Giroux has Jerry Maguire for his agent (<http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/en/9/9d/JerryMaguirecruise.jpg>). Giroux has scored a big pay increase and contract extension as the district embarks on a levy campaign to convince voters to raise their property taxes to increase school funding.

Giroux received a three-year extension that will boost his annual salary from \$155,000 to \$190,000. It should be noted that the base salary in the new contract is \$170,000 with an additional \$20,000 that may be awarded by the board. The Watchdog is confident the board will award the full \$20,000 each year.

<http://www.mnsun.com/articles/2007/07/08/news/p105girouxcontract.txt>.

Awarding Giroux a salary three times the Anoka County median household income isn't exactly the smartest PR move as the district tries to convince voters it has a money problem.

3. Anoka County Board "Leadership."

Here's how the Anoka County Board handles a challenge to one of its core obligations to the citizens it represents: dump the problem on someone else. The Coon Rapids Herald reported last week that the County is considering the "turnback" of 42 miles of County road back to the cities, meaning that the cities in which the roads are located will be responsible for the maintenance.

While turnback situations are common, they are almost always done in cooperation of the particular city. In this case, the County would dump the roads in the same way people leave a mutt at the animal shelter.

The reason? You guessed it. The County has no money. Ever the statesman and paragon of leadership, Board Chairman Dennis Berg whined, "What we're doing here can put a financial hardship on the cities like the state has done to us."

How ironic that this week, two county commissioners are off on a junket to Virginia at taxpayer expense.

Here at the Dog, we're all about solutions. Here are a couple of suggestions to help the county find some spare change:

- Fire every contract lobbyist, including Elwyn Tinklenberg;
- Terminate every employee lobbyist, including Steve Novak, who makes more money than the governor;
- Stop all non-essential travel;
- Freeze county commissioner pay and benefits;
- Zero out the "mega funds" account, the account used to fund things like failed Vikings stadium debacle.

It's all about priorities, Mr. Chairman.

Editor's Note: This news item appears to be unavailable on the Internet. The original story was published in the July 6th edition of the Herald.

4. Quote of the Week.

"It's a little bit of a risk."

Governor Tim Pawlenty on the wisdom of the state and local governments risking millions on Northstar rail when the federal government has offered any guarantee of federal funds.

Star Tribune, July 10, 2007

Governor, the Watchdog would settle for someone, anyone, to step forward and explain the contingency plan if federal funding doesn't happen.

4. Senator Coleman and Northstar.

Senator Norm Coleman this week supported a \$65 million appropriation for the Northstar rail project. In supporting the project, Coleman proclaimed that “The Northstar project is one that will help reduce our dependence on foreign oil, relieve congestion and contribute to the quality of life for thousands of north metro commuters.”

http://www.twincities.com/ci_6362025?IADID=Search-www.twincities.com-www.twincities.com

That’s interesting. Watchdog founder Harold Hamilton months ago asked Senator Coleman at public meeting to provide analysis and documentation to support claims that Northstar would be a good investment and a meaningful way to move traffic on Highway 10.

Coleman claimed to have the data at hand and would provide it promptly. Today, Hamilton is still waiting.

Quite to the contrary, the state has found that traffic congestion on Highway 10 will be virtually the same with or without Northstar. That documentation can be accessed at www.anokacountywatchdog.com by clicking the “Northstar Rail” button.

E-mail Update 7/20/07

In This Issue:

1. Watchdog Milestone;
2. A Good Way to Reduce Outsourcing;
3. Required Reading for the Met Council;
4. Reader Comment on Steve Novak;
5. PSA.

1. Watchdog Milestone.

This week, the Watchdog web site hit received visitor number 25,000. This impressive milestone cements the Watchdog's status as the North Metro's leading source of local news and information. During that time, the Watchdog has seen competitors and opponents come and go. They just can't touch us. Anyone remember www.anokacountyunited.org?

2. A Good Way to Reduce Outsourcing.

Many folks decry outsourcing and lament the loss of American jobs to foreign locations. What they forget is that capital, even human capital, flows to locations that encourage efficiency. This simple concept has been known to economists ever since Adam Smith and is as true today as it was in the 18th Century.

Thus, a good way to keep jobs in America is to encourage businesses to expand or locate within our borders. Sadly, our government is going in exactly the opposite direction. The Wall Street journal reported last week that America now holds the dubious distinction of being the nation with the highest corporate tax rate in the world. An excerpt from the WSJ appears below:

U.S. has "unflattering distinction" of world's highest corporate tax rate. In its Review & Outlook section, the Wall Street Journal (7/13, A12, subscription required) editorializes, "Some good news on the tax cutting front: Last week lawmakers approved an 8.9 percentage point reduction in the corporate income tax rate. Too bad the tax cutters are Germans, not Americans. ... At least 25 developed nations have adopted Reaganite corporate income tax rate cuts since 2001. The U.S. is conspicuously not one of them." And, "In each of the countries that have cut corporate tax rates this year, the motivation has been the same -- to boost the nation's attractiveness as a location for international investment." Now the U.S. "has the unflattering distinction of having the developed world's highest corporate tax rate of 39.3%..., according to the Tax Foundation."

However, the Journal adds, "Lower corporate tax rates with fewer loopholes can lead to more, not less, tax revenue from business." The Journal laments, "If only the tax writers in Washington would heed this advice." They recommend cutting "the 35% U.S. federal corporate tax rate to the industrial nation average of 29%," and warn, "as the U.S. fails to act, the rest of the world is looking more attractive all the time."

3. Required Reading for the Met Council.

One other thing economists have known for centuries is that centralized planning doesn't work. Markets are far more efficient in allocating scarce resources because the individuals who participate in the market have far better information than the bureaucracy, which in turn produces the best possible commodity for the best possible price. The Soviets learned this example the hard way.

So why is it that government still engages in centralized planning? Perhaps the most egregious example is urban planning. Somehow, the bureaucrats think they know better than the market place how much land should cost, what should be built on particular parcels, and even where people should live and work.

Predictably, this type centralized planning has failed just as surely as one of Stalin's infamous "5 year plans." While the failed Ramsey Town Center is one example, there is an entire region's worth of failure to examine as taxpayers contemplate the future of Met Council and concepts like "Smart Growth."

Portland, Oregon has been engaged in centralized planning for years and is now reaping the bitter harvest. The result is unaffordable housing, gridlocked transportation systems, and an overall diminished quality of life.

The Cato Institute has just released an intriguing report entitled "Debunking Portland: The City That Doesn't Work." Read it here:

http://www.cato.org/pub_display.php?pub_id=8463

4. Reader Comment on Steve Novak.

The Watchdog some weeks ago commented on Anoka County lobbyist Steve Novak's private lobbying contract. One loyal reader who spends time at the Capitol had the following to say about Novak's moonlighting:

“Why, when Novak is moonlighting his lobbying services for other organizations, has the county turned around and hired another lobbyist? And surprise surprise, it's another one of Novak's buddies--former State Sen. Dave Johnson.”

While the Watchdog cannot confirm the relationship between Novak and Johnson, and while the Watchdog cannot divine the reasons Johnson was hired, it can be confirmed that Johnson does indeed lobby for the County:

<http://www.cfboard.state.mn.us/lobby/lbdetail/lb9100.html>

<http://www.bestlaw.com/attorneys/johnsondh.htm>

5. PSA.

The famous Watchdog t-shirts has gone into a third printing. If you have requested a t-shirt recently, please stand by. They'll be in soon.

E-mail Update 7/27/07

In This Issue:

1. If You Thought Northstar Was Bad...
2. The Dave Johnson Connection.
3. The Dog Ate My Finance Report – No, Really!
4. Ramsey Blog Questions Northstar.
5. Free Markets AND Free Drinks!

1. If You Thought Northstar Was Bad...

Here they go again. With the Northstar rail line growing rapidly in cost and already delivering far less service than was promised, Anoka County has hatched another brilliant rail scheme – a train to Duluth. Never mind the fact that passenger service was dumped years ago because of poor ridership and failing revenues.

Even worse, this project is for passenger rail, not commuter rail. Since when is it a good idea to spend scarce taxpayer dollars to move tourists from Anoka County up to Duluth? This is yet another example of the County's inability to set the right priorities.

Your property taxes go up and up while the County claims poverty. Yet the commissioners always seem to have money for these kinds of boondoggles.

Watchdog sources within the County also report that GOB (Good Ol' Boy) and former county commissioner Paul McCarron will likely receive a consulting contract from the county related to this project. Of course, "consulting" means wining and dining elected officials on your dime.

The same sources also report that Steve Novak will coordinate the project. This is a bit of good news for taxpayers given the outcome of the Vikings stadium, another Novak-led enterprise.

The County Regional Rail Authority is now considering a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with other governmental jurisdictions, including the Mille Lacs Band. The Watchdog has obtained a copy of the MOU and will post it soon.

2. The Dave Johnson Connection.

Last week, the Watchdog posted an item about former state Senator turned lobbyist Dave Johnson. That item included confirmation that Johnson does indeed lobby for Anoka County.

The Watchdog this week can also reveal two interesting ties between Johnson and Anoka County officials.

First, as a contract lobbyist, Johnson has a number of clients beyond Anoka County. One of those clients is Minneapolis Radiation Oncology Physicians. Anoka County lobbyist Steve Novak also lobbies for this group, despite his status as a full-time public employee of the County.

<http://www.cfboard.state.mn.us/lobby/adetail/a5091.html>

Second, Johnson is employed by the law firm of Best and Flanagan. This law firm has a political action committee (PAC) that makes campaign contributions to candidates for office.

This past fall, the Best and Flanagan PAC made campaign contributions to county commissioners Dick Lang and Dennis Berg, both of whom were successful in their respective re-election bids last November.

The PAC also made a contribution to Dick Swanson, the man who lost to Robyn West in the contest to succeed retiring commissioner Margaret Langfeld. The Watchdog wonders how well West gets along with Johnson these days.

See the PAC report here:

<http://www.cfbreport.state.mn.us/pdfStorage/2006/CampFin/YE/30584.pdf>

3. The Dog Ate My Finance Report – No, Really!

In the July 6th edition, the Watchdog reported that County lobbyist and GOB Elwyn Tinklenberg was delinquent in filing his campaign finance report with the state, a violation of the law.

Watchdog sources report that commissioner Rhonda Sivarajah recently expressed her concern regarding the late report to her colleagues on the board. These sources report that GOB Godfather Dan Erhart jumped to Tinklenberg's defense with a 21st Century version of the "dog ate my homework" excuse. According to the source, Erhart attempted to explain away the issue as a "computer glitch" that apparently kept Tinklenberg from getting credit for a report timely filed.

Oh, really? What do the facts say? The facts say that Tinklenberg didn't file his report until July 11th. The report was due June 15th. It is highly unlikely that the state experienced a nearly month-long computer glitch that kept this one man from filing his report. The more likely explanation is that the Watchdog's July 6th exposure of this matter led Tinklenberg to get his homework done. Nice try, Commissioner Erhart.

Read Tinklenberg's report here:

www.cfbreport.state.mn.us/pdfStorage/2007/Lobby/LD/P1/l_3135_3835.pdf

4. Ramsey Blog Questions Northstar.

There's a nice blog out there focusing on the city of Ramsey that has a similar philosophical mission to the Watchdog. Operated by Eric Zaetsch, the blog probes many of the same County mega-projects and also wonders aloud regarding the lack of empirical data and scientific analysis underpinning these projects.

Recently, Zaetsch took up the Northstar rail issue by asking the following:

“And NorthStar has the disturbing attached Crabgrass dimension - you make it easier to commute from Big Lake to downtown [ultimately, St. Cloud to downtown] and you foster the build-out of what is being built along the tracks in Ramsey - failures and halting starts and all - but it is just adding far more strain on the highways than NorthStar will ever alleviate. For that reason, is the tradeoff a lane vs. a train? Or are the stakes even higher? Also, I have not seen any firm lane-vs-train comparative figures from the Yantos or Tinklenberg consulting crowd. The Yantos crowd, they appear to have nice dinners together - all paid from tax money - but nothing firm about whether their pork-barrel for Developer interests rail proposal is anywhere near a payback, (at anticipated round-trip pricing), to meet its full and ever escalating cost - whatever hidden real figure that is or ultimately will be. Moreover, so far it's been the train dumping Ramsey; not Ramsey dumping the train.

No stop planned in Ramsey - that continues unchanged as best as I can see from the news that gets reported. I am sure if there were a turnaround by the Yantos crowd on that - the City of Ramsey official website home page would feature that very prominently. No such feature. Hence, no such change.”

Amen, Brother Zaetsch! Check out his blog here:

<http://zaetsch.blogspot.com/2007/07/ramsey-star-express-success-failure.html>

5. Free Markets AND Free Drinks!

Let's face facts. Supporting and defending free markets can be dull and boring. On the other hand, free drinks are always fun. When you combine free markets and free drinks, well, you've got yourself a hell of a good time!

As a loyal Watchdog, consider yourself invited to just such an event. Please join our friends at the Minnesota Free Market Institute as they celebrate their inauguration with an evening of free drinks in honor of free markets and Milton Friedman, the man who enlightened a generation regarding economic freedom.

Of course, this isn't some ham and egger affair with potato chips and Pepsi. Only the finest spirits and hors d'oeuvres will be served in the swanky ambiance of Trocadero Boardroom in Minneapolis. Details below:

What: Minnesota Free Market Institute Kick Off

When: July 31st, 5-7:30 p.m.

Where: Trocadero Boardroom. 107 3rd Ave. N (Downtown Minneapolis) RSVP encouraged but not required.

Call 651-294-3590 ext. 203 for details and RSVP.

E-mail Update 8/3/07

In This Issue:

1. Recommended Reading;
2. Benefits of Globalization;
3. Tom Snell is at it Again!
4. School Board Elections.

Editor's Note: The Watchdog takes a moment to acknowledge the tragic I-35W bridge collapse this week. With recovery efforts ongoing, we offer condolences to the victims and a word of thanks to the many who participated, and are still participating, in rescue & recovery efforts.

1. Recommended Reading.

The Watchdog is hard to please, very hard to please. Few books make our recommended reading list, but we have an addition to announce. "Who Killed Healthcare?", by Regina Herzlinger, is a powerful book that offers a stinging critique of America's broken health care system.

Herzlinger's thesis is that America's health care system is controlled by powerful special interests that have reshaped the system to maximize their power and profits at the expense of consumers.

Specifically, she identifies five special interests (ominously labeled "killers") that control health care:

- Health insurers;
- Hospitals;
- Employers;
- The Congress;
- Academics.

Herzlinger proposes market-driven, consumer-driven solutions as the best way to reform health care. While the Watchdog doesn't necessarily agree with all of Herzlinger's proposed reforms, her book is nonetheless an accurate, scathing indictment of the "killers" and a refreshing call for market-driven reforms. There are far too many books devoted to "fixes" that are little more than calls for nationalized, single-payer systems that further diminish the power of individuals over their health care.

To read an interview with Regina Herzlinger about her book, click here:
<http://hbswk.hbs.edu/item/5676.html>

To read reviews of her book, click here:
<http://www.manhattan-institute.org/healthcare/reviews.htm>

2. Benefits of Globalization.

There is no shortage of people who decry “globalization” and the increasing integration of the world economy. These folks pine for the good old days when America hid behind a high wall of protectionism. You know, the good old days when our life expectancy was 59 years, kids died from polio, the Dow traded at 2,000, and it took three days to get from Fridley to Chicago – if you had a really fast horse.

Watchdogs know that free trade has made the world a better place. It is no coincidence that the world has never had more free trade at the same time the world is experiencing unprecedented prosperity. While industrialized nations are seeing greater prosperity, the real story is what is happening in developing countries. In short, the prosperity gap between first-world and third-world nations is rapidly shrinking. Globalization benefits everyone, including Americans.

Read excellent articles on the benefits of globalization here:
<http://www.freetrade.org/>

3. Tom Snell is at it Again!

MetroNorth Chamber of Commerce executive director Tom Snell keeps the Watchdog busy. You see, Tom is something of an anomaly among chamber of commerce executives. Simply put, he is suspicious of free markets.

Anyone who knows Tom shouldn't be surprised. From turbulent Augsburg College days where some called him “Tommie the Commie” to halcyon times as a well-heeled chamber executive, Tom Snell has always been a man to embrace the New York Times and not the Wall Street Journal.

Thus, it should come as no surprise that the chamber Tom leads hosted yet another public policy event that turned into yet another rally for tax increases and more government.

This time, the event featured two political lobbyists who advocated for more taxes to benefit their particular industry (big surprise). While these lobbyists were notably predictable in their style and speech, they did surprise the Watchdog by unveiling a new euphemism for tax increases. Instead of the tried and true “enhanced investment” code speak, these two unleashed the untested “expand the pie” catch phrase on the unsuspecting yet receptive crowd. The Watchdog will be closely monitoring this situation to see if liberals across Minnesota adopt this tasty and non-threatening alternative.

Can't you see the lawn signs next fall? Who needs “Happy to Pay for a Better Minnesota” when you can “Expand the Pie!” Who needs “Tax the Rich” when you can “Expand the Pie!” The Watchdog predicts Keith Ellison will become the first Democrat to adopt this slogan. And like Pat Reilly with his “threepeat,” look for Ellison to register the slogan as a trademark, thereby earning royalties to pay off parking tickets, late property taxes, and the like.

C'mon, Tom! Where's the balance? How about inviting a speaker every now and then who doesn't have a vested interest in more government? How about a speaker who actually supports reforming government and expanding capitalism? Just once? Pretty please? We bet Dan Erhart will grant permission!

4. School Board Elections.

Hey, Watchdogs. Don't forget that there will be school board elections in certain jurisdictions this fall. Filings are closed and the candidates are on the ballot. In places where more than two candidates file, there will be a primary election next month. Get to know the candidates and where your polling place is located. A good way to get an accountable school district is to elect the right people in the first place.

Our homepage has two articles regarding two upcoming Anoka-Hennepin school board elections. Get educated, then vote!

E-mail Update 8/10/07

In This Issue:

EMAIL UPDATE SPECIAL: ROAD AND BRIDGE FUNDING

Editor's Note: In the wake of the 35W bridge collapse, a vigorous debate has been launched regarding the funding of Minnesota's roads and bridges. This week, the Watchdog offers its perspective on this important topic.

First, however, we have some unpleasantness to report. Unfortunately, every tragedy draws out buffoons who seek to capitalize on the misery of others. One such character is none other than Good Ol' Boy Elwyn Tinklenberg. Just hours after the bridge collapse, while public safety personnel were working to save the injured and recover the dead, Tinklenberg was grandstanding in front of television cameras and attempting to assign blame for the tragedy.

The well-respected, bi-partisan newsletter "Politics in Minnesota" had the following to say regarding Tinklenberg's antics:

Finally, while on the subject of Minnesota transportation commissioners, one of the lowlights this past week was former Jesse Ventura Administration Commissioner of Transportation Elwyn Tinklenberg. Mere hours after the bridge went down, he was being interviewed on KARE-11 TV (our local NBC affiliate) standing in front of the dark Capitol building blathering (there is no better word) about MnDOT's "constant deterioration of the budget, constant layoffs, failure to replace people," etc. Most of what he said was not only not true, but it was crass in the immediate aftermath of the bridge falling down. And for the record, the collective opinion on Tinklenberg in the transportation job was much worse than Molnau's.

To visit Politics in Minnesota, click here: <http://www.politicsinminnesota.com/>

Among all the reprehensible and irresponsible stunts the Good Ol' Boys have pulled over the years, this one is by far the worst. In fact, it is nothing short of disgusting.

Now, back to the business at hand. Because the precise reason for the bridge collapse won't be known for some 12-18 months, the Watchdog will refrain from joining the debate over who is to blame. Let the National Transportation Safety Board complete the investigation. There will be plenty of time to assign blame after we know what caused the tragedy.

Having said that, it is patently unfair to lay blame solely at the feet of Tim Pawlenty for the state of our roads and bridges. As you will see, there has been a good deal game playing going on for some time by politicians of all stripes.

Moreover, it is quite apparent that funding wasn't an issue regarding the bridge collapse. Based on what is known so far, MnDOT never came forward with a specific or emergency funding request to repair or replace the bridge. It just simply isn't the case that funding was requested and subsequently denied.

Nonetheless, the tragedy raises a very important question. Are Minnesota's roads and bridges underfunded? If so, why is that and what should be done?

At the outset, it is obvious that our roads and bridges are underfunded. In fact, the Watchdog has been complaining about this state of affairs from the start. MnDOT has documented a significant backlog of road and bridge maintenance and expansion projects. There is no serious dispute in that regard.

The real debate starts when the solution to this problem is broached. Of course, many think the solution to any funding problem is a tax increase. On the other hand, some argue that there is a good deal of money in the system and the real problem is that roads and bridges are constantly shortchanged in favor of education, health & human services, and mass transit. What is needed isn't a tax increase but instead a commitment to fund core governmental functions like roads and bridges.

Editor's Note: Transportation funding is a complex subject. While space does not permit a detailed explanation of how this funding works, there are excellent primers available. The non-partisan Minnesota House research office is a great place to start.

You can visit them here: <http://www.house.leg.state.mn.us/hrd/issinfo/trans.htm>

Let's take a look at the various funding sources and what has happened in that area in the recent past.

The General Fund.

While roads and bridges are funded primarily through dedicated taxes and fees, the state's general fund can be a source of revenue. In fact, the state dedicated some \$400 million in general fund surplus dollars in 1998 to transportation purposes, dubbing the program "Minnesota Moves."

The state is again sitting on surplus dollars. These dollars could be used as a direct appropriation to the Highway Trust Fund or they could be used to leverage bonds (more on that later).

In any case, general fund dollars can be used for roads and bridges. Far from being “under funded”, the state’s general fund has experienced phenomenal growth. For example, ten years ago, the general fund was about \$21 billion. Today, it stands at \$34.5 billion.

In addition, the unrestrained growth in some general fund programs could be pared back to create more funding for an appropriation to the Highway Trust Fund. For example, the Health and Human Services budget has been growing at a rate of over 20% per budget cycle. In fact, it is projected to grow 38% in the “out biennium” of 2010-2011.

Look at state budget and spending documents here:

http://www.budget.state.mn.us/budget/summary/hist_exp/070628_hist_exp.pdf

http://www.budget.state.mn.us/budget/summary/charts/070628_piecharts.pdf

http://www.budget.state.mn.us/budget/summary/charts/070628_all_funds_piecharts.pdf

Gas Tax

The gasoline “tax” is a misnomer. In fact, the gas tax is really a user fee since 100% of the proceeds are constitutionally dedicated to the Highway Trust Fund, meaning that the funds are not used to supplement the general fund or even to pay for mass transit.

While some type of gas tax seems all but certain, there are some caveats. First, a rather large increase is necessary to make a difference in reducing the project backlog. In fact, the tax would need to rise to about 35 cents per gallon to eliminate the backlog. Second, the gas tax is not a viable solution in the long-term. With more efficient vehicles and the race to find alternatives to gasoline, there will come a day when revenues from this source will fall precipitously.

It is also important to bear in mind that Minnesota is already a high tax state, with high income, sales, and property tax rates. It should also be noted that the gas tax is regressive, meaning that it hits the poor the hardest. Don’t liberals care about the poor? Any increase in the gas tax should be matched by a corresponding reduction in some other tax to make the program revenue neutral.

License Tabs

Like the gas tax, license tab fees are dedicated to roads and bridges. In 2000, Governor Ventura successfully pushed a plan to reduce tab fees, thus cutting money out of the Highway Trust Fund.

It should also be remembered that many of the legislators now decrying the lack of transportation funding voted to cut tab fees. The DFL Senate, GOP House, and a third party governor all agreed to the cuts.

As a true fee, a valid argument can certainly be made in defense of an increase, especially one that would return the fee structure to what it was prior to the reduction. Having said that, corresponding cuts ought to be made to other taxes and/or fees to offset the increase and keep taxpayer burdens from rising.

Motor Vehicle Sales Tax (MVST)

After 25 years of being raided to supplement the general fund, the MVST will be 100% dedicated to transportation starting in 2012, thanks to a constitutional amendment passed in November of 2006.

When it was first passed, the MVST was supposed to be wholly dedicated to roads and bridges. Instead, the legislature raided the fund and diverted dollars to the general fund year after year. This happened under the leadership of Republicans, Democrats, and Governor Ventura. All told, some \$6 billion in funds has been drained away since 1981.

The amendment as passed, however, has a quirky formula for dividing money between roads and mass transit. No more than 60% of MVST can go to roads while no less than 40% can go to transit. This mix is tilted too far towards mass transit. At least 80% ought to go to roads since the vast majority of people use roads and very few use transit.

Bonding

Bonding simply means that the state sells debt instruments that are paid back over time with interest. Like any financial tool, bonding can be a good idea or a bad idea depending upon the circumstances.

Read more about bonding here:

<http://www.house.leg.state.mn.us/hrd/issinfo/clssbond.htm>

While “pay as you go” is ideal, it doesn’t reflect reality. In fact, bonding for road and bridge projects often makes financial sense. First, current interest rates are lower than the rate of construction inflation. Second, borrowing money to build something today

allows the public to derive the full benefits today as opposed to some future date. Finally, most road and bridge projects last for decades, so it makes sense to spread the payments out over time.

It is similar to a home mortgage. Most folks don't have the upfront money to buy a house. They also don't want to save for 30 years to buy a house. So they take out a loan, buy a home, and start enjoying the advantages of home ownership right away.

Moreover, don't be fooled by the rhetoric of legislators who decry bonding and make dramatic speeches about not wanting to burden our kids and grandkids with debt. The state passes a bonding bill every two years. These bonding bills are filled with pork projects like community centers, polar bear exhibits, volley ball courts, and the like.

The hypocrisy of bonding bills is almost overwhelming. If you show the Watchdog a legislator who decries bonding for roads, the Watchdog will show you a legislator who has voted to bond for pork. In fact, last session, an amendment was offered to the bonding bill that would have stripped out \$180 million in pork and dedicated the money to roads and bridges, including a special account specifically for road safety. That amendment was defeated 37-92. In the aftermath of the bridge collapse, votes like this will get extra scrutiny as many voters ask why their legislator voted for polar bear exhibits instead of bridges.

In sum, these are the primary ways roads and bridges get funded in Minnesota. It is important for voters to understand how this system works and how their legislator voted with respect to allocating the money.

E-mail Update 8/17/07

In This Issue:

1. Oberstar Gets an Award;
2. Voters are Smarter Than Oberstar;
3. Kudos to LeDoux and Lang;
4. MetroNorth Holds Secret Meeting;
5. Quote of the Week.

1. Oberstar Gets an Award.

In the race to see who can be the biggest opportunistic jerk over the bridge collapse, Congressman Jim Oberstar has raced ahead of former front-runner Elwyn Tinklenberg. In what the Watchdog dubs the "Tour de Farce", Oberstar has taken the lead and the yellow jersey.

This week, Oberstar shot to the front by proposing a \$24 billion "temporary" tax increase to fund the core governmental function of bridge maintenance and repair. He apparently believes voters are stupid enough to believe that the federal government is so lean and efficient that only a tax increase can properly fund our bridges. Feigning outrage, Oberstar held a press conference in which he unveiled his tax hike and said of potential opponents "God help them."

Congressman Oberstar has been on the House Transportation Committee for decades. What have been his spending priorities?

When the 2005 surface transportation bill was crafted, the committee considered appropriating \$3 billion for bridge repairs. The committee settled on \$2 billion and instead spent money in the following ways:

- Nearly 6,500 pork barrel "earmarks" worth more than \$24 billion, the same amount as the proposed tax hike;
- \$452 million for the infamous "Bridges to Nowhere";
- \$495 million in total earmarks for Minnesota;
- \$50 million for a highway between Virginia and International Falls no one, including MnDOT, seems to think is a high priority;
- \$25 million for bike trails in the Metro area.

For years, Congress has played pork barrel games with our hard earned tax dollars by draining away critical repair and maintenance monies in favor of pork. The voters know

it and want some reform instead of a tax increase. If you don't deliver, God help you, Congressman.

For his ridiculous proposal and an equally ridiculous voting record, Oberstar has received the "Porker of the Month" award from Citizens Against Government Waste. [Click here for article.](#)

2. Voters are Smarter Than Oberstar.

A recent poll regarding a gas tax increase proved what the Watchdog already knew. Namely, that the voters are smarter than Jim Oberstar thinks.

The poll, done in the wake of the I-35W bridge collapse, gauged voter sentiment with respect to a gas tax increase. A strong majority of 57% oppose a gas tax increase while only 38% approve. This survey mirrors what many legislators are saying about what they hear back home. Many report that voters want more spent on roads but think that spending should be prioritized instead of relying on a tax increase.

While politicians like Rep. Oberstar and House Speaker Kelliher may think they can hoodwink the voters into supporting a tax increase, the poll says otherwise. Voters know full well that government has enough money to meet bridge funding needs. Voters also expect the pork to stop and good governance to start.

You can read a KSTP story on the poll here: www.anokacountywatchdog.com.

3. Kudos to LeDoux and Lang.

The Watchdog is duty bound to give credit where it is due. Even if the credit belongs to Anoka County Commissioners Scott LeDoux and Dick Lang.

In our July 27th email update, the Watchdog reported that GOB Godfather Dan Erhart was attempting to get a sweetheart consulting contract for GOB and former county commissioner Paul McCarron regarding the Duluth tourist rail project.

Sure enough, Erhart brought forth a motion at this week's Anoka County Regional Rail Authority meeting to consider the McCarron contract. LeDoux, Lang, West, and Sivarajah all voted against even considering the contract.

This stunning rebuke of GOB Godfather Dan Erhart is certainly welcome news for County taxpayers. All four, especially LeDoux and Lang, deserve praise for their principled stand against this egregious sweetheart deal.

It's too bad Commissioner Jim Kordiak didn't join the other four. It doesn't surprise the Watchdog in the least that "chairman" Dennis Berg followed Erhart like a lost puppy.

Maybe, just maybe, the tide is starting to turn down at the county courthouse.

4. MetroNorth Holds Secret Meeting.

A little birdie has told the Watchdog that GOB Elwyn Tinklenberg was the featured guest at a recent "special" meeting of the MetroNorth Chamber of Commerce Governmental Affairs Committee. Funny, the Watchdog, being a Chamber member, did not receive the standard email that is disseminated to remind attendees of upcoming Governmental Affairs meetings. Moreover, the Chamber web site says nothing of this secret meeting.

This is the second time in a month that the Chamber has given a microphone to Elwyn Tinklenberg. After his antics in the wake of the bridge collapse, one would think that he would be the last person the Chamber would invite to an event. Maybe the agenda included Tinklenberg recounting how he presided over a multi-million dollar cut in road monies when license tab revenues were reduced on his watch as Transportation Commissioner.

5. Quote of the Week.

"You wonder if this bridge was built to withstand the massive heat we have had this summer."

State Representative Melissa Hortman speculating on the cause of the I-35W bridge collapse in the Denver Post 8/2/07

Let's hope that Melissa Hortman isn't the legislature's expert on science and engineering.

In looking at the monthly National Weather Service summary for July 2007, the average high was 85 degrees with a maximum high of 98 on July 7.

On the other hand, steel has a melting point of approximately 2,500 degrees (F), depending upon the alloy composition.

Broadly speaking, structural steel does not begin to lose strength until it is heated to approximately 350 degrees (F), losing half its cool strength at approximately 1,100 degrees (F).

Yes, Melissa, the bridge was designed to withstand 90-degree days. Perhaps you could stick to lawyering and let the engineers do their work.

Read the Denver Post article here:

Read Hortman's response to criticism of her remarks here:

E-mail Update 8/24/07

In This Issue:

1. Happy Birthday!
2. Tour de Farce, Stage II;
3. Executive Authority;
4. Put Down the Pen and No One Gets Hurt!
5. Quote of the Week.

1. Happy Birthday!

Next week, the Watchdog celebrates two years of media excellence. As the North Metro's leading source of relevant news and information, we have a sacred obligation to celebrate this milestone.

As such, all Watchdogs are cordially invited to the Dog's birthday party. While we firmly believe there is no such thing as a free lunch, there is such a thing as a free dinner. Please join us for pizza, pop, and cake FREE OF CHARGE! GRATIS! A FREEBIE!

Host and Watchdog founder Harold Hamilton will be joined by special guests Rep. Marty Seifert (House Minority Leader), David Strom (MN Free Market Foundation), and Phil Krinkie (Taxpayers League of MN) as well as other elected officials. Join us for an evening of good food and free market fellowship!

Here are the details:

September 6 (Thursday)

5-7 p.m.

Tasty Pizza

11822 HWY. 65 in Blaine

All we ask is that you RSVP at Harold@anokacountywatchdog.com so we can get a head count on food. Wear your t-shirt!

2. Tour De Farce, Stage II.

The Watchdog has faithfully reported on the cynical, hypocritical race between Congressman Jim Oberstar and former Transportation Commissioner Elwyn Tinklenberg to see who can best exploit the I-35W bridge tragedy. We dubbed this

race the “Tour de Farce.”

Oberstar last week took the lead after his proposal to increase the gas tax to fund road programs that he himself shortchanged in favor of bike paths.

In this seesaw battle of cynicism, Tinklenberg has shot back into the lead after the Watchdog’s crack research staff uncovered a glaring example of Tinklenberg and the Ventura administration neglecting our bridges.

In fiscal year 2000-2001, the Ventura administration (and Commissioner Tinklenberg) recommended \$30 million in bonding dollars for local bridges despite the fact that the identified need was almost twice that amount (\$57.4 million).

The non-partisan House Fiscal Analysis office had this to say about the paltry recommendation:

The recommendation for local bridge aid of \$30 million is significantly lower than the request of \$44 million. This also follows a veto of \$10 million in the 1999 capital investment bill, and a projected need in the 1998 planning estimates of \$57.4 million for the current biennium. The Department of Transportation also shows sharp increases in program needs versus the Governor’s planning estimates of \$30 million in each of the next three biennium. This could result in greater costs to local governments, delay in the replacement of structurally deficient bridges, and an increased number of bridges with posted weight restrictions.

Read the entire report here: <http://www.house.leg.state.mn.us/fiscal/files/00gvbond.pdf>

There is indisputable evidence that Tinklenberg presided over a shortchanging of road and bridge funding during his tenure as Transportation Commissioner. For him to stand in front of microphones and decry the lack of road and bridge funding is truly despicable.

3. Executive Authority.

As we march towards yet another special session and take another step towards a full-time legislature, it may be helpful for citizens to actually take a look at some of the laws under which they live.

Before you buy into the we-must-have-a-special-session-or-else-nothing-will-happen mentality, take a look at the power the governor already has to deal with disasters in the

state. There is an entire chapter of Minnesota law dedicated to the state's ability to provide a rapid response to disasters entitled "Emergency Management."

http://ros.leg.mn/bin/getpub.php?pubtype=STAT_CHAP&year=2006§ion=12

There is no doubt that the governor already has the authority to deal with both these issues. The fact that we have a part-time legislature has already been taken into account.

So before we start an open-ended special session and start paying per diem and resurrecting "emergency" items like local government aid and the Fridley train station, tell your legislator to do his/her job and take a look at the laws he/she wrote and voted upon.

Contact your legislator here:

<http://www.house.leg.state.mn.us/> or <http://www.senate.leg.state.mn.us/>

4. Put Down the Pen and No One Gets Hurt!

Speaking of a full-time legislature, it appears that Rep. Meli\$\$a Hortman has been pretty bored this summer. Readers of local newspapers have been bombarded with Hortman's banal, obtuse views on subjects ranging from the sun's power to melt steel to the tedious details of something called the Neighborhood Action Program.

As if that wasn't enough, the Star Tribune this week published another inane missive from Hortman regarding one of her true obsessions – raising the price of gasoline.

The essay attempted to explain why you need to suffer a gas tax increase by using a clumsy, illogical analogy between the gas tax and a grocery cart. (Read the essay here: <http://www.startribune.com/562/story/1377759.html>.)

The Watchdog has better analogy regarding the way government works. A man bursts into your home and points a gun at you demanding money. He is quick to point out that he's really a compassionate type, needing only about 40% of your income. He takes further pains to point out that the money he takes is actually for your benefit, and more importantly, for the benefit of "the public good." He also states, matter of factly, that he can spend your money better than you anyway. You watch as the merry and altruistic thief walks out the door and fritters the money away on useless programs rife with waste and abuse. Now you see him coming back for more...

Amongst the more laughable passages is Hortman's Quote: "Government 101: tax fairly, spend wisely."

Meli\$\$a Hortman spending wisely? The response is like shooting fish in a barrel. In the interest of space, however, we think Hortman's lifetime 22% rating from the Taxpayer's League says enough about her commitment to "spending wisely."

Tracking Hortman's prolific foolishness is starting to overwhelm our research office as well as local psych wards, which are starting to overflow with rational thinking, beleaguered taxpayers tortured by her relentless pursuit of their money. Put down the pen, Meli\$\$a!

5. Quote of the Week.

"Our agreement calls for fewer Burlington Northern trains, and fewer trains means fewer people."

Northstar rail bureaucrat Tim Yantos 8/21/07 (Star Tribune)

The Yantos quote was provided in the context of the revelation this past week that Northstar rail will carry even fewer people than the reduced ridership projections that, once upon a time, stood at 15,000 commuters. That projection now stands at about one-third that amount (5,200).

Too bad the cost isn't one-third of what was initially projected. In fact, the \$260 million line has a current price tag of \$320 million, not counting operating subsidies.

Rising costs, shrinking benefits.

E-mail Update 8/31/07

In This Issue:

1. Birthday Bash Reminder;
2. Anoka-Hennepin Levy Briefings;
3. Who Does Hortman Represent?
4. Anoka County Budget;
5. Test Your Transportation IQ.

1. Birthday Bash Reminder.

If you missed our email update last week, you missed an invitation to attend the Watchdog's bash to celebrate two years of journalistic excellence. Last week's invitation is posted below:

Watchdogs are cordially invited to the Dog's birthday party. While we firmly believe there is no such thing as a free lunch, there is such a thing as a free dinner. Please join us for pizza, pop, and cake FREE OF CHARGE! GRATIS! A FREEBIE!

Host and Watchdog founder Harold Hamilton will be joined by special guests Rep. Marty Seifert (House Minority Leader), David Strom (MN Free Market Foundation), and Phil Krinkie (Taxpayers League of MN) as well as other elected officials. Join us for an evening of good food and free market fellowship!

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2. Anoka-Hennepin Levy Briefings.

Sound the alarm, ring the bell, and get Paul Revere on his horse. The Anoka-Hennepin School District is coming back for more money on November 6th. While the details of the levy are just being released, some information is emerging. The Watchdog will have an analysis once full details are available.

In the meantime, plan to attend one of two briefings the district will conduct in mid-September.

Briefing one:

September 13 (Thursday)

7 p.m.

Champlin Park High School

<http://www.anoka.k12.mn.us/education/school/school.php?sectionid=10299>

Briefing two:

September 18 (Tuesday)

7 p.m.

Blaine High School

<http://www.anoka.k12.mn.us/education/school/school.php?sectionid=10300>

Gather all the information you can, Watchdogs!

3. Who Does Hortman Represent?

Since being elected in 2004, state Representative Meli\$\$a Hortman has established herself as a champion of environmental regulations as well as a gas tax increase.

Read Hortman's bill authorship list here:

<http://www.house.leg.state.mn.us/members/members.asp?district=47B>

So how do her constituents feel about these subjects? One loyal Watchdog reader who lives in Hortman's district sent us a copy of her 2005 constituent survey.

Question: Which areas would you prefer the legislature cut first?

Most popular answer: Environmental protection and remediation.

Question: Which method(s) of raising revenue do you support?

Least popular answer: Gas tax.

To read the entire survey, click here:

<http://www.house.leg.state.mn.us/dflpdf/l85/mh05surveyresults.pdf>

So who do you represent, Meli\$\$a?

4. Anoka County Budget.

Anoka County recently published its summary financial statement for the year ending December 31, 2006. The document provides a good deal of information on the year-to-year changes in revenues and expenditures in the county. While all the information presented would cause most people to fall asleep faster than a county commissioner at a public meeting, there are just a couple of facts that stand out.

First, from 2005-2006, the county's population increased 1.85%.

Second, inflation at that time increased approximately 3%.

Third, county spending from 2005-2006 rose 12.43%.

And the county wonders why voters get angry over tax increases.

To read county financial documents (bored, are you?), click here:

http://www.co.anoka.mn.us/v1_departments/div-finance-cent-serv/index.asp

5. Test Your Transportation IQ.

Our good friends over at the Taxpayer's League of Minnesota have produced an excellent piece of educational literature to counter all the transportation funding propaganda filling our ears these days, primarily from the mouths of Congressman Jim Oberstar and lobbyist GOB Elwyn Tinklenberg.

Fact-based and well researched, this piece will test your transportation IQ and determine just how deeply the media and these Tour de Farce participants have snookered you.

Take the quiz here:

<http://www.taxpayersleague.org/NewIssues/TransportQuiz/MNTransportQuiz.htm>

There are 10 questions. Here's how to interpret your score:

9-10 correct: You must be a Watchdog.

7-8 correct: You're paying more attention than 90% of your neighbors.

5-6 correct: You need to read the Watchdog – frequently.

3-4 correct: Stop reading the Star Tribune editorial pages.

1-2 correct: Stop listening to Air America (you're probably the only listener left).

0 correct: You need de-programming. Call Patty Hearst.

E-mail Update 9/6/07

In This Issue:

SPECIAL THURSDAY EDITION

Editor's Note: This edition is published today in honor of the Watchdog's second birthday.

1. Tonight's the Night...
2. As the Special Session Turns.
3. Vikings Stadium as Popular as...
4. Northstar's "Early" Promise.
5. Primary Election!

1. Tonight's the Night...

Hey, Watchdogs! Don't forget the Dog's Second Annual Birthday Bash. It's tonight! Yes, tonight! Join us for fellowship, free food, and free drink. The RSVPs have been through the roof and it promises to be a full house. So if you're tired of being the only capitalist and free market defender at the table or water cooler, stop by and meet some like-minded friends. Details:

September 6 (5-7 p.m.)

Tasty Pizza

11822 HWY. 65

Blaine

763-755-5080

Editor's Note: We will be in the lower level banquet room. Come in and follow the stairs down one level.

2. As the Special Session Turns.

The Governor is turning the special session debate into quite the unnecessary soap opera.

In the past month, he's taken at least four different positions on a special session:

1. We need one for everything from the bridge to LGA to a gas tax increase;
2. We don't need one at all;
3. We need one but just for the bridge and flood aid;

4. We only need one for flood aid.

Uh, Guv, the Watchdog has already laid out this one for you, big guy. Chapter 12 of Minnesota statutes already gives you all the authority you need to restore good public order.

(http://ros.leg.mn/bin/getpub.php?pubtype=STAT_CHAP&year=2006§ion=12)

This isn't rocket science, as the governor noted in a Pioneer Press article this morning. Option four, the flood aid, is the only POSSIBLE need. The other three either aren't "extraordinary" circumstances as outlined in the state constitution or other means of addressing the problem exist.

<http://www.house.leg.state.mn.us/cco/rules/mncon/Article4.htm>

There is recent precedent for special sessions for flood aid (Red River and Roseau). Be careful, Governor. Letting the special session genie out of the bottle could be hazardous to your political health. Then again, you can trust Larry Pogemiller, right? Yeah, right!

http://www.senate.leg.state.mn.us/members/member_bio.php?mem_id=1048&ls=85

3. Vikings Stadium as Popular as...

We always knew Vikings lobbyist Lester Bagley had the "reverse" Midas touch, turning everything into garbage. It looks like that "gift" has infected new owner Zygi Wilf.

Each year, the Minnesota House runs a poll from the State Fair. Folks who stop by the booth answer a variety of poll questions regarding relevant public policy topics. While not scientific, the poll is respected and considered an accurate barometer of what folks think about the issues of the day.

If the poll is at all accurate, it could be long, long wait for the Vikings to wring a new football stadium out of the taxpayers of this great state.

The poll asked the following question:

Should public financing be used to help fund a new football stadium to house the Minnesota Vikings?

A whopping 81.4% said "NO" to any public funding. Only 13% approved of public help.

That 13% approval rating is BELOW the approval ratings for the following organizations:

Congress: 19%

HMOs: 15%

<http://www.galluppoll.com/content/default.aspx?ci=1597>

Good luck on that stadium, Lester and Zygi. And good luck on that sellout Sunday. Folks just don't seem too excited to plunk down a few hundred bones to see the likes of Tavaris Jackson and the optically challenged Troy Williamson (Remember him, the #7 overall pick?). What's Tom Clancy's phone number?

To read the entire state fair poll results, click here:

<http://www.house.leg.state.mn.us/hinfo/Fair/2007Results.pdf>

4. Northstar's "Early" Promise.

If you live in Anoka County, the Northstar rail project can be an embarrassment. Kind of like that uncle who always has toilet paper stuck to his shoe or has his fly down at a public function. You just don't want to admit you're stuck with him or it.

The latest embarrassment stems from the County's "offer" to accelerate the project to relieve traffic congestion caused by the bridge collapse. Northstar officials breathlessly told the Star Tribune that Northstar could be running by October of 2008.

Just one problem with that speed-of-light timetable. The RFP for the 35W bridge rebuild project calls for the new bridge to open in September of 2008. If Northstar buffs get out their 2008 calendars, you can see that the new bridge is scheduled to open BEFORE the accelerated rail project.

<http://www.timeanddate.com/calendar/index.html?year=2008&country=1>

Try as he might, even Dan Erhart can't make October come before September.

Even if the project could open by October 2008 (you stop laughing now), the train will carry a meager 2,500 people each rush hour. The bridge carried approximately 140,000 cars per day. That translates into well over 200,000 people each day. Only Anoka County could get excited about relieving traffic congestion by 2.5%.

Now, if we at the Watchdog were cynical, we would point out that this accelerated plan scheme is nothing more than an attempt to bypass the regular cost-benefit systems that Northstar may fail, thus nixing desperately needed federal funding. But since we're not cynical, we won't mention it.

5. Primary Election.

What do you call a resident of Blaine? Blaineites? Blainers? How about Coon Rapids? Coon Rapidians? In all seriousness, some of you good folks have an election next Tuesday, September the 11th. District 2 of the Anoka-Hennepin School Board has three candidates, thus necessitating a primary to narrow the field to two candidates for the November election.

For information on voting, call Anoka County at 763-323-5275.

For some information on the candidates, click here:

http://abcnewspapers.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=309&Itemid=

1

E-mail Update 9/14/07

In This Issue:

1. A Blow-Out Bash.
2. What the %&*# is Wrong with Ken Tschumper?
3. A Nice Parting Gift.
4. Voter Alert for Fridley.
5. A Pathetic Turn-out.

1. A Blow-Out Bash.

If you weren't at the Dog's Second Birthday Blow-Out, you missed a great time.

Having said that, you may not have been able to get in anyway, with the room being packed to standing-room-only capacity. Staff had to bring in extra chairs and tables to accommodate the raucous crowd.

The food was great and the speakers even better as David Strom (Minnesota Free Market Institute) and state Rep. Marty Seifert (House GOP leader) entertained the assembled with their insightful thoughts and observations on the important issues of the day.

Things got exciting when infamous gadfly Leslie Davis showed up with a Bride of Frankenstein lady friend and the two began to heckle Marty Seifert. The crowd shouted down Davis and friend with such ferocity that Davis beat an uncharacteristic retreat. Don't mess with the Dog, Les!

You can check out party photos at:

<http://www.anokacountywatchdog.com/photos/photos.htm>

If you are waiting for a Watchdog t-shirt, please be patient. We have blown through our fifth printing and are ordering a sixth.

2. What the %&*# is Wrong with Ken Tschumper?

It's obvious that freshman state Rep. Ken Tschumper (DFL- La Crescent) didn't attend charm school. Within one week, he managed to pull not one, but two juvenile, smart mouth stunts.

First, he went postal at the Taxpayers League of Minnesota (TLM) state fair booth. As reported in the TLM's weekly email update, Tschumper and his wife got belligerent with

a League volunteer working the booth. TLM employee Mark Giga summed up the encounter by writing that “He (and his less-than-lovely-sounding wife) capped off the tag-team diatribe with the incredibly diplomatic ‘Don’t you &^\$% ever set foot in my district!’”

Maybe Tschumper and wife can double date with Leslie Davis and his squeeze.

Visit Krazy Ken’s taxpayer-financed web site here:

<http://www.house.leg.state.mn.us/members/members.asp?district=31B>

Visit the TLM web site here: <http://www.taxpayersleague.org>

Tschumper then capped off the week by sending a snotty, cynical letter to the Governor regarding a special session for flood relief, since Tschumper represents a district affected by the flooding.

Having never read “How to Win Friends and Influence People”, Tschumper sent a decidedly undiplomatic letter riddled with typos to the one man in Minnesota with the power to call the special session Tschumper so badly wanted.

That DFL wave was mighty big in 06. Big enough to get even this guy elected.

Read the letter here:

<http://www.anokacountywatchdog.com/mngovt/2007/09.07/Letter%20to%20Governor%209-4-07.pdf>

3. A Nice Parting Gift.

Oh, those over-worked and under-paid public servants. To hear them tell it, it’s a real trial to bear the cross of bureaucratic employment here in Minnesota. On the other side, their employers at city hall and the county courthouse raise our property taxes time and again while pleading poverty as core functions like roads and bridges suffer.

So here comes a little gem that ought to make taxpayer blood boil. If you live in Blaine, please consult your physician before reading further.

According to the Blaine Banner, the city recently accepted the resignation of city manager Ron Wood (NOT this Ron Wood http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ron_Wood).

The city council unanimously accepted a severance package worth over \$97,000. The agreement is broken down as follows:

- \$69,909 for six months of work never done;
- \$13,000 in salary and benefits as paid leave;
- \$10,000 in accrued and unused sick and vacation leave;
- \$4,500 for sixth month's of health insurance;

That's a nice little parting gift for a humble public servant.

You can contact the Blaine city fathers here: <http://www.ci.blaine.mn.us>.

If you access the city council minutes, you'll notice that the council pulled a familiar trick and put the consideration of the separation agreement last on the agenda, after media and citizens have mostly gone home.

Editor's Note: This item was based upon an article in the Blaine Banner. The Banner is not online, so we can't link the article. You can pick up the Banner at many locations throughout Blaine – Free! Email bbanner@visi.com for details.

4. Voter Alert for Fridley.

Speaking of stunts, the City of Fridley has cooked up one for their taxpayers. Currently, the city charter caps utility tax increases at 5% annually.

The Fridley City Council didn't like the idea of a cap, so they voted to get rid of it at a council meeting in June.

Angry voters grabbed their pitchforks and presented a petition to the council in August that would force the cap elimination to be voted upon in a referendum, giving voters a direct voice in the matter.

This past Monday, the Fridley council certified the petition and called the election for November 20. Never mind the fact that the taxpayers will already be paying to run an election on November 6. So Fridley voters will get to pay for two elections this November with another one coming in 2008.

Mark your calendar, good citizens of Fridley. You get a chance to vote on a tax increase NOVEMBER 20! For more information, check city hall here: <http://www.ci.fridley.mn.us/>

Read an article on the issue here:

<http://www.mnsun.com/articles/2007/09/13/news/fo13fridleypetition.txt>

5. A Pathetic Turn-out.

This item truly makes the Watchdog's point that odd-year and other special elections are a waste of taxpayer money and are rarely a reflection of the popular will of the people.

Current law mandates that school board elections hold a primary whenever more than two people file for a school board seat.

That was the case in Anoka-Hennepin school district two this week when voters went to the polls to select from three candidates for that board seat.

A grand total of 214 people showed up to vote. That's not a typo – 214. It's hard for an elected official to have credibility when they win an election with less than 100 votes. It's hard to see an election as legitimate when less than 5% of eligible voters bother to show up.

It's high time to limit school board and other local elections (and school levies!) to elections on the second Tuesday after the first Monday in November of each even-numbered year.

Read an article here:

http://abcnewspapers.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=334&Itemid=

1

E-mail Update 9/21/07

In This Issue:

1. Tour de Farce. We Have a Winner.
2. Congressman Ramstad Calls it Quits.
3. Monopolies are Garbage.
4. MnDOT Frequent Flier.
5. Levy Factoid.

1. Tour de Farce. We Have a Winner.

Loyal readers know the Watchdog has been hosting the “Tour de Farce” for the past seven weeks. Based on the Tour de France, this race is one between Congressman Jim Oberstar and lobbyist GOB Elwyn Tinklenberg to see who can best cynically exploit the 35W tragedy.

Oberstar, the bike enthusiast, wins going away. It was no contest, really, with Oberstar commanding the chairmanship of the House Transportation Committee and all the porcine benefits it bestows.

This past week, the Senate passed a transportation bill that included \$1 billion for bridge repair – obviously a good thing. That’s where the good news ends.

The bill also contained 843 pork-barrel ear marks totaling \$2.5 billion. The ear marks include funding for North Dakota’s Peace Garden and a minor league baseball stadium in Billings, Montana.

The House version of the bill is just as bad, with 1,400 earmarks totaling \$2.2 billion. The House version includes ear mark funding for things like the California Mule and Packers Museum.

As you may have guessed, Jim Oberstar got his share as well, securing \$250,000 for a walking path in Isanti County.

Far from being shamed, Oberstar defended his continued addiction to pork, calling the path “economic development.”

Wake up, folks. This money comes from raiding the federal gas tax fund. You know, the tax Oberstar wants to raise to fix bridges. He believes it is smarter to spend on pork and raise taxes than it is to live within a budget – like families and businesses must.

Congratulations, Rep. Oberstar. Your constituents must be proud. They're the ones who keep returning you to Washington.

Read an article on the subject here: <http://www.startribune.com/587/story/1421821.html>

2. Congressman Ramstad Calls it Quits.

Third District Congressman Jim Ramstad this week announced he will not seek a 10th term in the U.S. House. The district, which includes portions of Anoka County, leans Republican but is certainly winnable by the DFL, as evidenced by inroads made by the DFL at the legislative level in the district.

While Ramstad was certainly a man of integrity, he was not any kind of conservative. More like conservative light. He was truly the margarine of conservatism.

This open seat represents an opportunity for a true conservative to represent the district and work to clean up the outrageous mess made by quasi-conservative Republicans and the always-spending-like-fools Democrats.

Those who think that only a “moderate” Republican can win the seat are mistaken. The results of the last election proved that voters are sick and tired of Washington's out of control ways. The only mistake voters made was believing that Democrats would actually have the courage to implement meaningful, lasting reform (see item above).

Republicans rumored to be interested:

State Senator Geoff Michel;

State Rep. Erik Paulsen;

State Rep. Joyce Peppin;

Republican activist and donor Brian Sullivan.

On the DFL side, our very own state Rep. Meli\$\$\$a Hortman is rumored to be interested. Stop laughing, the rumor seems to be true, as reported by liberal bloggers with reliable sources within the DFL establishment.

While the Watchdog isn't in the business of dispensing political advice, keep this in mind, Rep. Hortman: It is much harder to masquerade as a moderate while running for

Congress than it is while running for the legislature. Those phony “Taxpayers for Hortman” signs just won’t cut it in a federal race.

Check a conservative blog here: <http://www.minnesotademocratsexposed.com/>

Check a liberal blog here: <http://mnpublius.com/>

3. Monopolies are Garbage.

If nothing else, the Watchdog takes great pains to educate our readers regarding the inherent advantages of a free market economy. Open competition and consumer choice result in the best possible commodity at the best possible price. In short, free markets equal free men (yes, we mean the ladies as well!).

As such the Watchdog is here to report on a most decidedly anti-free market scheme under consideration by the Coon Rapids City Council. The Council is considering moving to a single-sourced garbage hauler. Simply put, one and only one garbage hauler will be given a license to haul trash in the city. By government edict, one private business will be given 100% market share within the city and the others will be reduced to zero.

Does the Dog really need to point out the problem with this scenario? Monopolies are first and foremost unresponsive to consumers. Don’t like the service you’re receiving? Instead of contracting with a different hauler, you get to call a government bureaucrat or fill out some form in triplicate and then pray government comes through on your behalf. Don’t like the price? Too bad, call city hall. There is also the danger that the winning hauler will get too cozy with city officials, making it even harder for the city to be objective in grading the performance of the monopoly hauler.

These monopolies do nothing more than deprive the consumer of all power in the business relationship while empowering the government and its favored trash hauler. Government wins, consumers lose.

Contact your Coon Rapids council member here:
<http://www.ci.coon-rapids.mn.us/council/councilmembers.htm>

Read what the city has to say here:
<http://www.ci.coon-rapids.mn.us/information/OrganizedGarbageCollection.htm>

Visit a pro-free market web site here: <http://www.coonrapidschoice.com> Editor's Note: The Anoka County Watchdog has no affiliation with this web site or the people behind it.

4. MnDOT Frequent Flier.

Is it just us or do you get the feeling things are just a tad out of control over at the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT)? Maybe it's the obsessive focus on goofy projects like Northstar rail. Maybe it's the nature of the beast in a massive bureaucracy where accountability is frequently hard to establish, thanks to unworkable civil service regulations and decades of union job protections.

In the wake of the 35W bridge collapse, we find out that MnDOT's director for the Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Management was on the East Coast on the day of bridge collapse. Amazingly, she didn't bother to return to the Twin Cities until August 11th, ten days after the collapse.

The director, Sonya Kay Morphew Pitt, apparently believes junkets are a central part of her duty description. Since July 2006, Pitt has accumulated a taxpayer-funded travel log that would make Anoka County Commissioner Dan Erhart blush. Since that time, Pitt has taken 17 out-of-state trips, many with insufficient documentation to establish the benefit to the taxpayers of taking such a trip.

Moreover, Pitt apparently has few qualifications for the job. Before assuming the director's title, Pitt held a number of state jobs in the field of "publicity."

Your taxdollars at work, Watchdogs.

Read an article here: <http://www.startribune.com/462/story/1431652.html>

5. Levy Factoid.

\$336. That's what a taxpayer who owns a home assessed at \$250,000 will pay per year if voters in the Anoka-Hennepin School District approve all four levy questions on November 6th.

E-mail Update 9/28/07

WATCHDOG EMAIL SPECIAL: DFL FLOPHOUSE OR COUNTY GOVERNMENT?

A large number of DFL candidates and current or former elected officials are on the county payroll. Why?

1. DFL Flophouse or County Government?

County government is supposed to be low key and free from partisan politics. In fact, county-level candidates for elective office run without partisan ballot designation. In concept, county government in Minnesota is supposed to be little more than an administrative arm of state government, implementing state and federal programs.

Of course, the three-ring circus Anoka County runs bears little resemblance to this mandate. Whether it's a tourist train to Duluth or a football stadium in Blaine, Anoka County is always running around chasing headlines while core functions suffer.

And that's not all. Far from being non-partisan and apolitical, it appears that the county has become something of a feedlot for DFL candidates and politicians.

A search of public records indicates that the following DFL partisans have current employment with the county or have had recent employment with the county.

Andrew Borene

Borene, who lives in Edina, was the DFL-endorsed candidate for Senate District 41 in 2006. Borene withdrew his candidacy after he was charged with three misdemeanor counts in connection with a domestic assault incident involving his wife.

Ironically, Borene now works as a prosecutor in the county attorney's office.

Related links:

<http://www.cfboard.state.mn.us/campfin/rpdetail/rp16253.html>

<http://www.linkedin.com/pub/0/076/017>

<http://www.mnsun.com/articles/2006/09/30/news/dw28borene.txt>

Leo Foley

Nearly 80, Foley currently represents the District 47 in the state Senate. He has been in office since 1996. Like Borene, Foley works in the county attorney's office.

Related documents:

http://www.senate.leg.state.mn.us/members/member_bio.php?district=47
http://www.cfboard.state.mn.us/eis/rpdetail/rp601_3422.html

Dan Larson

Larson is a current state Senator who represents the Bloomington area. Prior to Senate service, Larson served in the House. Watchdog sources indicate that Larson works on transportation issues for the county.

Related documents:

http://www.senate.leg.state.mn.us/members/member_bio.php?mem_id=1150&ls=85
http://www.cfboard.state.mn.us/eis/rpdetail/rp601_5396.html

Steve Novak

Novak is well known to Watchdogs for his frequent role as point man on county boondoggles like the football stadium and Duluth tourist train.

Novak is also a former state Representative and state Senator who mounted a failed bid to succeed Bruce Vento in Congress.

Related documents:

<http://www.leg.state.mn.us/legdb/fulldetail.asp?ID=10471>
<http://www.cfboard.state.mn.us/lobby/lbdetail/lb701.html>

Lona Schreiber

Then known as Lona Minne, Schreiber is a former state Representative representing the Hibbing area.

Schreiber is now a lobbyist for the county.

Related documents:

<http://www.leg.state.mn.us/legdb/fulldetail.asp?ID=10432>
<http://www.cfboard.state.mn.us/lobby/lbdetail/lb8266.html>

Dave Johnson

A former state Senator and colleague of Steve Novak, Johnson is a contract lobbyist who represents Anoka County on specific issues.

Related documents:

<http://www.leg.state.mn.us/legdb/fulldetail.asp?ID=10285>
<http://www.cfboard.state.mn.us/lobby/lbdetail/lb9100.html>

Paul McCarron

This one is a two-fer. McCarron is a former legislator AND a former county commissioner. McCarron is the beneficiary of consulting contracts, primarily to shill for the Northstar rail project (and likely the Duluth train after that).

Related documents:

<http://www.leg.state.mn.us/legdb/fulldetail.asp?ID=10405>

<http://www.cfboard.state.mn.us/lobby/lbdetail/lb1332.html>

Elwyn Tinklenberg

Former Transportation Commissioner Tinklenberg sought the DFL endorsement for Congress in 2006 but was kicked to the curb by Patty Wetterling. He has mused aloud about a 2008 candidacy against Michele Bachmann.

Tinklenberg has also been the beneficiary of various consulting contracts.

Related documents:

<http://www.cfboard.state.mn.us/lobby/lbdetail/lb3835.html>

http://news.minnesota.publicradio.org/features/2005/06/14_scheck_tinklenberg/

<http://kstp.com/article/stories/S194052.shtml?cat=89>

Isn't this just typical of Anoka County? At best, this situation creates the appearance that the county payroll is being used and abused as a financial parachute for current and former DFLers, based primarily on the employee's political affiliation. At worst, it's absolutely true.

Moreover, are these jobs being filled with current elected officials in order to make them more supportive of the county agenda down at the Capitol?

Taxpayers should rightly ask the county board for a full accounting of these employment matters. There is the appearance of impropriety and the county needs to act quickly to reassure taxpayers that only the most qualified applicants are being hired without regard to political affiliation.

The county also needs to reassure taxpayers that positions held by DFLers are vital to the county's core mission. The county's plan for the next budget cycle is to leave 80 positions vacant in 2008, according to the county's public information manager (yes, they have one). Are critical jobs in law enforcement and child protection being left

unfilled while DFLers enjoy employment in non-essential jobs like lobbying and consulting?

Taxpayers may contact their county elected officials here:
<http://www.co.anoka.mn.us/officials/index.asp>

DFL office holders may submit their resume here:
http://www.co.anoka.mn.us/v3_jobs/how-to-apply.html

E-mail Update 10/5/07

In This Issue:

1. Pay the Choo-Choo Man.
2. A Good Ol' Boy Overreaches – Again.
3. Hennepin County Tongue Tied.
4. Zygi Comes for the Money.
5. Anoka-Hennepin Factoid.

1. Pay the Choo-Choo Man.

It's that painful time of year when local governments set preliminary property tax levies for 2008. Among the more interesting proposed levies was the 2008 proposal from the Anoka County Regional Rail Authority, the folks who pick your pocket to pay for Northstar rail and the proposed tourist train to Duluth. These funds also keep former politicians out of the bread line as they toil away under "consulting" contracts.

According to the Coon Rapids Herald, the proposed 2008 levy will double from approximately \$4 million in 2007 to over \$8 million in 2008.

Among the reasons for the increase were:

- Increased costs of the Northstar train (that has yet to carry a person);
- Money for the tourist train to Duluth (even Amtrak dumped that loser);
- Increased costs for "professional and legal services."

Kudos to Commissioners Rhonda Sivarajah and Robyn West for their efforts, though unsuccessful, to strip out some of the wasteful spending. They should also be congratulated as the only two commissioners to have the courage to vote against the entire proposal.

The Watchdog says, "A woman's place is on the county board!"

Read the article here:

http://abcnewspapers.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=414&Itemid=28

2. A Good Ol' Boy Overreaches – Again.

Good Ol' Boy Elywn Tinklenberg (GOBET) is at it again. After failing miserably to even garner the DFL endorsement for Congress in 2006, he's decided to run again.

Contrary to what you might think, the Watchdog is pleased that GOBET has thrown his hat in the ring. A GOBET campaign promises to provide relief to overworked Watchdog staff by providing months upon months of material for the web site and email updates.

Take this week's events, for example.

Start with the fact that a mere six months ago, GOBET announced that he would NOT be a candidate for Congress in 2008.

According to an interview with the Saint Cloud Times, GOBET said "I just came to the conclusion that it wasn't going to be possible for me to do that again this soon after the last campaign." (<http://stcloud.planetdiscover.com/sp?aff=100&keywords=tinklenberg>)

This flip-flop is not at all surprising. For a GOB, Washington must hold a strong allure, what with all the wasteful spending to be had. In fact, GOBET's campaign slogan could be something like "Commuter rail for all!"

At his press conference, he noted that he was motivated to enter the race because of the 35W bridge collapse. "I knew at that moment I couldn't sit by and allow this inattentiveness to continue." Uh, Elywn, it was your mismanagement as MnDOT chief that contributed to the current mess. Maybe you should have focused a bit more on bridges and a lot less on light rail as Transportation Commissioner.

Finally, GOBET capped off his hit parade of amusing and puzzling quotes by claiming that he doesn't think the 6th District "is a red district."

Oh, really?

Check election results for the 6th district here and see how wrong he is:

<http://www.sos.state.mn.us/home/index.asp?page=137>

Read more here: <http://www.startribune.com/10218/story/1457445.html>.

3. Hennepin County Tongue Tied.

The Anoka County Watchdog can't help but feel for our taxpaying brothers and sisters across the Mighty Mississippi.

This week, it was revealed that Hennepin County has hired an outside public relations firm to spin the public regarding the Twins stadium land debacle. You know, the one where the government picked out a stadium site without having any kind of option to buy the land beforehand.

The huge kick in the crotch to taxpayers is that the county already has a staff of 16 (yes, SIXTEEN) in their public relations department and an annual budget of \$2 million.

In this case, the Watchdog is pleased to live on the east side of that mighty river!

Read an article here: <http://www.startribune.com/509/story/1443450.html>.

4. Zygi Comes for the Money.

C'mon, you knew it would happen. You knew that Zygmunt Wilf and sidekick Lester Bagley would be coming after public money for a football stadium this coming legislative session. After all, Red McCombs suckered Wilf into paying a "new stadium" value for the team, just as a used car salesman is want to do.

But you see, coming for a football field can be a bit complicated when inconvenient core government functions like transportation and education get in the way.

Such circumstances call for some big-time BS. An article in the Star Tribune this week started to give form to the whopper the 1-3 Vikes will tell the taxpayers come February of next year.

Zygi is going to tell you two things. First, all the cool cities have big league football and if we don't have it, we won't be cool anymore, thus risking our collective chances for a good prom date or a choice seat at the lunch table. Heck, we may even end up with poor grades, the wrong friends, and an occasional wedgie, nuggie, or swirlie from the cool cities.

Second, Zygi will tell you that he won't even make a penny off the new stadium. He's just trying to provide a "game day experience" for the few folks who can actually afford to attend a pro football game these days. It may behoove legislators to ask him to how

much he expects the value of the team to rise with a new stadium or what kind of profit he can expect from nearby developments he will undoubtedly own.

Stay tuned, Watchdogs, this one ain't over.

<http://www.startribune.com/510/story/1460987.html>

5. Anoka-Hennepin Factoid.

A teacher in the Anoka-Hennepin district at the top of the pay scale makes nearly \$75,000 per year. That same teacher works a mere 187 days per year. This works out to over \$50 per hour for salary alone. Don't forget that teachers also receive employer-subsidized health insurance premiums and a solid gold defined-benefit retirement package.

Read the contract here: <http://www.ahem.org/pages/contract.html#Anchor-33870>.

10/5/07 AnokaCountyWatchdog.com

E-mail Update 10/12/07

IN THIS ISSUE:

1. Economics 101 – Lesson 1;
2. Economics 101 – Lesson 2;
3. MetroNorth Love-In;
4. Quote of the Week;
5. Anoka-Hennepin Levy Factoid.

1. Economics 101 – Lesson 1.

As free market missionaries, we at the Watchdog are committed to educating an often un-educated public with respect to basic economic concepts. Unfortunately, government-sponsored boobery and buffoonery frequently provide good case studies.

Take the problems now confronting the ethanol industry. Overbuilding of ethanol plants combined with high input costs (e.g. corn) has caused a glut of ethanol on the market that is hurting, not helping, the economy.

In a capitalist system, price acts as a signal, telling producers and consumers how much of a product should be made by producers and consumed by the market. If the market price is left unmolested, the price will move until equilibrium is reached. Thus, resources will be allocated in the most efficient manner. This is critical because all resources are limited.

When government starts interfering with price, markets become distorted, resulting in either product gluts or shortages. In this case, government subsidies provided an artificial incentive for producers to enter the market and produce more ethanol than what was needed, thus wasting ethanol inputs like corn, water, and capital infrastructure.

The bottom line is that price is a critical market signal. When that signal is jammed, economic chaos results.

Don't forget the political impact of ethanol subsidies, either. Many scientists believe corn-based ethanol is not an ideal alternative fuel. Better, more efficient alternatives are on the near horizon. Massive ethanol subsidies have created a powerful special-interest coalition that will fight to maintain these subsidies, even if far better alternatives become viable.

<http://www.startribune.com/535/story/1474846.html>

2. Economics 101 – Lesson 2.

One of Minnesota's most successful companies, 3M, announced this week that it will move some manufacturing operations overseas. This move would save the company an estimated \$1 billion over six years, primarily from labor costs and a lower tax burden. Before the usual cast of Lefties chimes in with accusations of “outsourcing” and “unconscionable profits”, the Watchdog will inject a dose of economic reality.

First, corporations exist to maximize profits. Profits drive innovation and efficiency. Profits create the wealth that government taxes and spends. Profits also create the prosperity we enjoy. When government gets unreasonable, job creators have no choice but to flee to more reasonable environments.

Take what's happening in Minnesota. The first thing the DFL did when they took over the legislature was propose some \$5.5 billion in tax increases, including a move to the highest income tax bracket in America. This tax bracket, by the way, is occupied by many small businesses and even some farms.

Moreover, Minnesota is already hostile to business, with some of the highest commercial property tax rates in the country and some of the most expensive health care mandates. The government-imposed costs kill jobs. While Minnesota should not become the low-cost labor capital of the world, the already-high tax burdens should not be increased. With government threatening more harm to businesses, it is not surprising that many job creators are reluctant to make a long-term investment in Minnesota. Not even 3M.

<http://www.startribune.com/535/story/1474664.html>

<http://www.mnchamber.com/priorities/imposedcosts.cfm>

http://www.naiopmn.org/pdfs/policy/NAIOP_Talking_Points_Card_07.pdf

3. MetroNorth Love-In.

It's Déjà vu all over again, as Yogi Berra was fond of saying. Tom Snell and the MetroNorth Chamber of Commerce once again this week danced like a puppet on a string for puppeteer Dan Erhart and his band of Good Ol' Boys.

The event was styled as a federal update from Senator Norm Coleman. Instead, the event was nothing more than a cheerleading session and love-in for Northstar commuter rail. Luckily, medical personnel were on hand as the assembled politicians were treated for back pain from all the self-congratulatory back slapping over Northstar. One Watchdog in attendance described the affair as “disgusting” and “a bunch of puking pabulum” as he watched Erhart and Coleman engage in some serious mutual a\$\$ kissing.

No business owner committed to free markets and limited government should waste their money on the organization. The MetroNorth Chamber supports commuter rail, the Vikings stadium, and the 2002 Anoka-Hennepin School Levy. All of these entailed large tax increases. Look, you don't have to spend your own money to hire people who want to tax your business. Government does that already. Is there a pro-free market organization in the house?

4. Quote of the Week.

“This makes it official: Every word uttered by Wilf concerning his football business should be taken as obfuscation, at best, or a big fat lie, at worst.”

Star Tribune sports writer Patrick Reusse in a column dated 10/6/07.

<http://www.startribune.com/reusse/story/1467744.html>

5. Anoka-Hennepin Levy Factoid.

Only 32% of Anoka-Hennepin high school students tested scored at or above grade level on the most recent Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment tests.

The school district shouldn't come asking for more money when two out three high school students test below their grade level. What do our tax dollars really buy?

E-mail Update 10/19/07

In This Issue:

1. Take the Watchdog Challenge;
2. Pass the Per Diem, Please;
3. Don't Forget the School Board Races;
4. Gas Tax Goes Over Like Lead Balloon;
5. Duluth Train Fantasies.

1. Take the Watchdog Challenge.

Fighting the good fight is what life is all about. Despite long odds, the Watchdog has always questioned Northstar rail, despite the fact that the fight was always an uphill battle. With federal approval imminent, Northstar moves a large step closer to a very expensive reality.

The basis of Northstar skepticism has always been the fact that no elected official or bureaucrat has ever produced a piece of empirical data to demonstrate that rail would do more to relieve traffic congestion or move the most amount of people in the most efficient manner compared to, say, building more lane miles on Highway 10.

In fact, most politicians declared in public that the studies did in fact exist and would be provided to the Watchdog or any other taxpayer. Senator Norm Coleman was one of the most recent to claim to have the data. After telling Harold Hamilton at a January 2006 that he would provide the data, Hamilton is still waiting.

Enough is enough. If ethical and professional obligations aren't enough to spur action, how about some cold hard cash?

Harold Hamilton officially offers the following reward: \$1,000 CASH to the first person to provide the Watchdog with credible empirical data that demonstrates that rail will do a better job than extra lane miles on Highway 10 to relieve traffic congestion and move the most people in the most cost-effective manner.

Show us the study, we'll show you the cash.

2. Pass the Per Diem, Please.

In an amazing display of chutzpah, one of the first items on the DFL's agenda after taking control of the Minnesota legislature this year was to give themselves a raise. A backdoor raise, that is. Too cowardly to have a public vote on a salary increase, the DFL majority instead jacked up "per diem" payments and gave themselves year-round paid housing (prior to that, House members only received lodging during the session). Also note that these payments are not reimbursements. They are given out without any required documentation. Thus, it is little more than a salary supplement.

The feeding frenzy at the per diem trough has become so outrageous that some legislators are now collecting more in these "backdoor" payments than they receive in salary.

Government always gets in trouble when it lives better than those who fund government. Most folks in the real world must provide strict documentation of expenses in order to get reimbursed. In fact, many pay for these things out of own their salaries.

3. Don't Forget the School Board Races.

A great deal of attention has been rightly focused on the big tax grabs, er, school levies on the ballot. However, Watchdogs shouldn't forget that there are a number of school board races on the ballot as well. These races are obviously important as the school board sets the agenda and the policies for our local schools. Leave it to the Watchdog to give you information others don't.

In the Anoka-Hennepin School District, two races are contested, while one is not.

In District 1, Tom Heidemann is unopposed.

In District 2, incumbent Dan Cook faces challenger Marci Anderson. Cook is NOT endorsed by the teachers union while Anderson IS endorsed by that group.

Cook's web site is <http://cooks.acesusa.com/>.

To the Watchdog's knowledge, Anderson has no web address.

In District 5, incumbent Scott Wenzel faces challenger Warren Harder.

Wenzel is NOT endorsed by the teachers union while Harder IS endorsed.

In fact, Harder, a union employee, appears to have the backing of a coalition of Left-wing groups.

<http://www.progressivemajority.org/candidates/bystate-2007Fall/>

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

Visit Wenzel's site here: <http://scottwenzel.org/>

4. Gas Tax Goes Over Like Lead Balloon.

The Watchdog has always observed that voters are generally a smart bunch who don't get suckered in by "experts" and "opinion leaders."

A recent Star Tribune poll confirms that analysis, proving once again that the Dog is correct 99.9% of the time.

Despite a constant drumbeat of support for a gas tax increase, the public is still opposed. Despite the chest thumping and bombast from windbags like Dan Erhart, Jim Oberstar, Elwyn Tinklenberg, and Melissa Hortman, the public knows better. They know that our roads and bridges need more money. But they also know that government already has the money to do the job. Opposition to a gas tax increase tells the politicians that they need cut out the pork and focus on priorities. Will Tinklenberg his ilk get the message? Probably not, until the message is delivered directly at the polls.

5. Duluth Train Fantasies.

It must be nice to be in government. When you spend money you didn't earn, it allows for a good deal of foolish pleasure and outlandish fantasies.

As if a tourist train to Duluth wasn't fantasy enough, the imagination of bureaucrats has grown to include thoughts of 125 mph "bullet" trains speeding up and down the line. Of course, there isn't any empirical data to suggest that this freight line could accommodate those speeds. Instead, GOB Dan Erhart relies on an economic study that says the line would be more economically efficient at higher speeds. That's great, but economic studies don't analyze the scientific realities of the subject.

Let's see what happens when engineers actually study the physics of matching a 125 mph fantasy to the reality of real rails and roadbed. Someone will do such a study,

right? We're sure they will. After all, look at all the science the County put into Northstar rail.

Your tax dollars at work.

E-mail Update 10/26/07

In This Issue:

1. Government DOES Create Jobs.
2. Pedophiles in the Classroom.
3. Anoka-Hennepin School District Factoid.
4. When is a “Renewal” not a “Renewal”?
5. Give Us the Money... or Else!

1. Government DOES Create Jobs.

The media hasn't noticed that the state legislature recently turned 201 part-time jobs into full-time jobs. Moreover, these jobs are all indoor work with no heavy lifting plus great benefits, including health care and a defined-benefit retirement package.

The wonder of it all is that the job is available to nearly every Minnesotan. Just get yourself elected to the legislature! For the past 150-years, the state legislature has been a part-time affair, including many years where the legislature only met once every two years (can we get back to that, please?). Even when the legislature started meeting every year, legislators treated the interim as a time to get back home to family and the “real” job, be it farmer, doctor, mechanic, or accountant.

Not so this year. After the DFL majority took control, they have continued to run the legislature nearly full-time, holding scores of “interim” hearings with per diem and mileage reimbursement for legislators.

Since the legislature adjourned in May, the DFL House (not including Senate hearings) has scheduled or held over 130 hearings. By contrast, the GOP House in 2005 held about 30 interim hearings.

The Watchdog predicts that the regular legislature in 2008 will get no more work done or get done any earlier because of this four-fold increase in interim hearings.

http://hometownsource.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=2749&Itemid=29.

2. Pedophiles in the Classroom.

The Pioneer Press this week published a disturbing article that exposed teachers caught in inappropriate situations with their students who are still in the classroom.

In one instance, a teacher wrote a note to a student in which he remarked, "I like thinking about your body, I just like thinking about you." The teacher, Patrick Holm, is still teaching today.

This sad state of affairs is all the more relevant because an Anoka-Hennepin employee who coaches girl's basketball was recently arrested after allegedly fleeing police and resisting arrest.

http://abcnewspapers.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=744&Itemid=1

As far as the Watchdog can tell, the Anoka-Hennepin School District hasn't fenced off any of the levy money for increased background checks to weed out unsavory characters who have no business teaching our kids.

Visit the Watchdog web site for two additional articles on the subject.

3. Anoka-Hennepin School District Factoid.

History is an excellent guide to assist society in making decisions and, hopefully, avoiding the mistakes of the past. For example, take a look at the three quantifiable aspects of the Anoka-Hennepin School District over the past five years.

In the 2003-2004 school year, the District had a total budget of roughly \$391 million dollars and an enrollment of roughly 41,000 students.

This school year, the District has a total budget of roughly \$469 million and an enrollment of roughly 40,000 students.

Thus, in 03-04, the District spent \$9,537 per student.

This school year, the District will spend \$11,725 per student. This is an increase of 22%.

During that time, test scores in the District have been nothing to brag about, with large, vast segments of the student population failing to make the grade on standardized tests.

So, let's get this straight. The Anoka-Hennepin District wants you to go to the polls on November 6th to authorize a large tax increase to further boost spending for a school district that has declining enrollment and test scores that are far from exemplary.

<http://abcnewspapers.com/2007/june/28dist11budget.html>

<http://www.anoka.k12.mn.us/education/components/scrapbook/default.php?sectionid=29753>

http://www.anoka.k12.mn.us/education/components/docmgr/default.php?sectiondetailid=233661&sc_id=1193251667

4. When is a “Renewal” not a “Renewal”?

Proponents of the November 6th school levy have been framing the first question of the four-question ballot as “renewing” the levy that passed in 2002. The use of the word “renew” implies that the question raises only the same amount of raw dollars as was raised by the 2002 levy. Not true!

Question #1 does “renew” the 2002 levy but also includes inflation escalators that will increase this aspect of the levy over the 2002 amount. So, even if your house has the same assessed value as it did back then, you will pay more in property taxes if question 1 passes. It is more than simply a “renewal.”

5. Give Us the Money... or Else!

While the numbers, facts, and figures surrounding the Anoka-Hennepin levy are crucial to understand, the philosophy underlying the numbers also merits scrutiny. Item # 4 above laid out the basic spending, enrollment, and test numbers for your edification.

But take a look at the philosophy put forth by the school board for supporting this tax increase. The Board has essentially told taxpayers that they must approve this tax increase or else the Board will engage in a “scorched earth” policy of school closings, layoffs, and program cuts.

To the Watchdog's knowledge, the Board has not articulated any kind of quantifiable increase in results, including test scores, that taxpayers can expect if the levy is successful.

This type of mentality sets reality on its head. In the business world, a company must demonstrate a reasonable, measurable prospect of quantifiable improvements before any investor will write a check. In the business world, a company will not increase funding for a department or program unless those seeking the increase show a reasonable prospect of improved results.

Instead of threatening voters, the Board ought to tell them what improved results can be expected from increased spending. But then again, increased spending has no bearing on results. Just take a look at the test scores.

E-mail Update 11/2/07

In This Issue:

1. Time to Vote!
2. Information Sources for School Issues.
3. Hortman Strikes Again.
4. Levies – They're for the Teachers Union.
5. Speaking of Tax Increases...

1. Time to Vote!

This is the last email update before next Tuesday's elections. While it's an off-year election, plenty is at stake. Approximately 1/3 of Minnesota's school districts are seeking to raise your property taxes through excess levies. Moreover, there are a number of school board seats on the ballot as well.

These kinds of elections have a history of very low turnout, so your vote is indeed important.

Watchdogs, it also important to confirm your polling location! Because this is an off-year, you may be voting at a different location than where you normally vote. Don't presume that you will be voting at your normal location.

In Anoka County, call 763-323-5275 or visit http://www.co.anoka.mn.us/v2_dept/elections/anoka-polling.aspx

In Hennepin County, call 612-348-5151 or visit <http://pollfinder.sos.state.mn.us/> (This web site will work for all voting locations).

2. Information Sources for School Issues.

Of course, being an informed voter is important. To that end, our email updates of late have been exploring school levy and election issues. Before you vote, you may want to take some time to re-visit important information sources. Because it is the largest school district in the North Metro (and the state), the Watchdog has focused on Anoka-Hennepin ISD #11. Don't forget that nearly every district in the state will have some type of election next week.

Watchdog email updates:

http://www.anokacountywatchdog.com/email/email_updates.htm

MN Department of Education: <http://education.state.mn.us/mde/index.html>

Anoka-Hennepin budget and demographic data:

http://www.anoka.k12.mn.us/education/components/docmgr/default.php?sectiondetailid=233624&sc_id=1193857515

http://www.anoka.k12.mn.us/education/components/docmgr/default.php?sectiondetailid=233628&sc_id=1193857520

http://www.anoka.k12.mn.us/education/components/docmgr/default.php?sectiondetailid=233627&sc_id=1193857545

http://www.anoka.k12.mn.us/education/components/docmgr/default.php?sectiondetailid=233661&sc_id=1193857587

Anoka-Hennepin School Board Races:

<http://mpls.startribune.com/news/metro/elections/returns/skusm.html>

District 2:

Daniel Cook: <http://cooksb.com/>

Marci Anderson: No Web Site Listed.

District 5:

Scott Wenzel: <http://scottwenzel.org/>

Warren Harder: <http://www.warrenharder.org/>

District 1: Tom Heidemann is unopposed.

3. Hortman Strikes Again.

The Watchdog board of directors recently held a meeting to consider changing the name of the organization to the "Melissa Hortman Watchdog." Keeping up with Meli\$\$a is a full-time job.

The most recent example was a press release Hortman placed on her legislative web site supporting the Anoka-Hennepin school levy.

First, the taxpayers of the state funded a web site for Rep. Hortman to communicate with them regarding state issues at the Capitol. It is an abuse of tax dollars to use that web site to shill for a local tax increase.

The press release itself contains some real gems as well. Hortman proclaims that the district “has found ways to help its students achieve commendable test scores and get a good start on their future in a globally competitive marketplace.” Recent test scores show that many students in the district don’t even test to their grade level in math and reading. Moreover, the United States lags far behind other industrialized nations in math and science test scores, indicating that we aren’t preparing kids for a future in the global economy. Even socialist Sweden recognizes that competition is the key to a quality education, something the teachers union (which supports Hortman) here in America fights tooth and nail.

Next, Hortman argues that the “renewal” portion of the levy is a “minimal” cost to taxpayers since it “mostly” replaces the 2002 levy. That’s not a minimal cost, Meli\$\$a. It’s an on-going cost, if passed. The fact that taxpayers have been paying it for five years doesn’t make it “minimal.” Also, it is just one question of four to be decided next week. If all four pass, property tax payers will pay hundreds of dollars in increased property taxes.

Finally, leave it to the Watchdog to point out Hortman’s rank hypocrisy. Anoka-Hennepin School Board members have stated on numerous occasions that question #2 on the ballot is a direct response to the education funding bill that the legislature passed this year. Led by legislators from Minneapolis, the legislature passed a bill that was harmful to suburban schools. The bill was so bad, DFLer and former Anoka-Hennepin Board member Denise Dittrich voted against her own party and joined Anoka County Republican legislators in opposing the bill. And Meli\$\$a? She voted for the bill, scoring brownie points with legislative leadership while voting against the schools she’s supposed to represent.

<http://www.house.leg.state.mn.us/members/members.asp?district=47B>

http://www.house.leg.state.mn.us/votes/votes.asp?ls_year=85&session_number=0&year=2007&id=735

4. Levies – They’re for the Teachers Union.

Kudos to Taxpayers League of Minnesota president Phil Krinkie on an excellent OpEd piece explaining the reasons why our public education budget has become a voracious Leviathan, consuming more and more tax dollars while educating fewer students.

Krinkie correctly notes that unchecked labor costs are the primary cost driver in our public schools. Like other legacy industries such as auto makers and airlines, the education industrial complex is experiencing labor costs that are fast becoming unsustainable. The only thing that has prevented any reform of these labor costs is the fact that public education is a monopoly better insulated from competitive pressures than private sector industries that must reform or disappear.

Read the column here: <http://www.taxpayersleague.org>

By the way, check out the snazzy new Taxpayers League web site. Nice job, guys!

5. Speaking of Tax Increases...

In Minnesota, the burden of property taxes falls disproportionately on commercial and industrial property. You know, the buildings that house our wealth creating businesses and tax-paying jobs.

Of course, passing school levies means increasing this burden even more. Minnesota already has a poor ranking regarding its business climate. Passing these levies will only make things worse. The Tax Foundation's 2008 business rankings places Minnesota a dismal 42nd.

Speaking locally, Micro Control Company (Harold Hamilton's company) calculates that for payable 2007, the company will surrender 54 cents of every dollar of revenue to federal, state, and local taxing authorities. That's money unavailable for employee pay, training, and benefits. Enough is enough.

<http://www.taxfoundation.org/news/show/22660.html>
www.microcontrol.com

E-mail Update 11/9/07

In This Issue:

1. Spinning the Vote.
2. Don't Let the Dorr Hit You.
3. Andover: Union Town.
4. Coleman Under-whelms His Base.
5. Blaine: Saint Louis of the North?

1. Spinning the Vote.

Election Day 2007 has come and gone and another exercise in democracy is in the books. As guardians of civic responsibility, the Watchdog is pleased with the exceptionally high turnout.

Not surprisingly, some levy questions here in the North Metro passed, particularly the first two questions in the Anoka-Hennepin District. Now that the school board has its tax increase, taxpayers in the district are now entitled to the significant test score increases that this significant tax increase should produce. After all, we've been told for years that more money equals a better education.

Also not surprising was the spin the mainstream media put on the vote results. The results were cast as an overwhelming referendum in favor of higher school taxes. Situations where voters rejected levies were cast as insignificant. One television station labeled the rejection of Anoka-Hennepin questions 3&4 as "gravy." Question 3 was a \$20 million annual tax increase. Question 4 was a \$14 million bond, to be repaid with interest. Gravy? Perhaps only to a television talking head.

Leave it to the Watchdog to point us back to the facts. In the North Metro, a total of 27 ballot questions were offered in the following districts: Anoka-Hennepin, Big Lake, Brooklyn Center, Buffalo, Chisago Lakes, Elk River, Monticello, Osseo-Maple Grove, Princeton, Robbinsdale, Saint Francis, and White Bear Lake.

Only 6 of the 27 questions were approved – less than ¼ of the total. Don't let the media fool you. Taxpayers are fed up with high taxes and that hasn't changed.

<http://mpls.startribune.com/news/metro/elections/returns/sklsm.html>

http://abcnewspapers.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=893&Itemid=

2. Don't Let the Dorr Hit You.

As reported above, the Robbinsdale district was rebuked at the polls Tuesday. The Robbinsdale race was interesting because the anti-levy group in the area hired Paul Dorr, a nationally known anti-levy consultant, to coordinate their effort. Dorr's company, Copperhead Consulting, claims they have defeated levies in 46 of 54 races.

Dorr can now claim success in 47 of 55 races with the defeat of the Robbinsdale levy.

Superintendent Stan Mack exhibited a fair amount of sour grapes when he fulminated that Dorr was "blatantly lying to the public" during the campaign.

Well, Mr. Mack, put your money where your mouth is. Minnesota has a law against lying in campaign literature. If you believe Dorr lied, take him to court, get a judgment against him, vindicate your position and forever taint Dorr's reputation in Minnesota.

The Watchdog says that Dorr will become more and more familiar in Minnesota in coming years and Robbinsdale won't do squat other than continue to whine. And, of course, go out for another levy within the next 12 months.

Editor's Note: The Watchdog has no affiliation with Dorr or his organization.

<http://www.startribune.com/10224/story/1531589.html>

<http://www.oah.state.mn.us/faircampaign/faircampaign.html>

3. Andover: Union Town.

Out of the fair town of Andover comes a cautionary tale about paying attention to your local government officials.

At Tuesday night's council meeting, the council unanimously voted in favor of an ordinance to impose prevailing wages on certain city projects. Prevailing wages are favored by labor unions because they tend to increase wages paid on jobs. Of course, this means taxpayers shell out more than they otherwise would to get that government building built. (Click here for a primer on prevailing wages: http://www.doli.state.mn.us/pw_rates.html).

There are two primary lessons for Watchdogs to take away from vote. First, know who you are electing to office. The facts demonstrate that Andover is a "red" Republican

area. Republican candidates have dominated the area for over twenty years. What can happen is that left-leaning candidates will flock to local races where they can run without a partisan designation and push for their agenda at a level of government that often escapes public scrutiny.

How many Andover voters remember that Mayor Mike Gamache was recently a DFL candidate for the legislature (He lost.)? How many know that he is co-hosting an upcoming DFL fundraiser? How many know that Ham Lake Mayor Paul Meunier is a partisan DFLer? How about the DFL affiliation of Commissioner Dick Lang? Funny, these candidates don't disclose their affiliation on the campaign trail. The point is simple: local candidates ought to have the courage to reveal their partisan affiliations, even if it means losing at the polls.

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

The second lesson is that local units of government too often hide the ball from taxpayers. Imposing prevailing wages is a big issue. What did Andover do to inform the public that a vote was upcoming? What did Andover do to generate public input? If their posted council agenda is any indication, not much.

<ftp://ftp.andovermn.net/pdfs/Admin/Agendas/CC/2007/CC-110607.pdf>

Notice how this important issue is a one-sentence "consent" agenda item.

4. Coleman Under-whelms His Base.

Senator Norm Coleman is in a real dogfight for re-election. To win, he's going to need to fire up his base – the folks who will walk in parades, pound lawn signs, and hand out literature.

So far, he's not doing much to inspire. The Club for Growth is the nation's premier taxpayer watchdog in Washington. Their most recent scorecard gives Coleman a dismal 33% approval rating. Republicans were given a host of messages via the 2006 elections. One of them was that the base is weary of candidates who find it difficult to vigorously pursue an agenda of limited government.

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

5. Blaine: Saint Louis of the North?

Blaine has certainly gotten a big head. Yes, the city has experienced some wonderful growth since its days as a sod farm/ double-wide haven. But the city's latest claim is the kind of chutzpah normally reserved for power mongers like presidential candidates.

The Star Tribune ran an article this week profiling the city's search for a new city manager. Minnesota law imposes a salary cap on these types of positions. In addition to the expected whining about the "meager" \$140,000 salary limitation for the city, Mayor Tom Ryan also opined that Saint Louis is considered a "competitor" city.

Blaine has a population of 55,000. Saint Louis has 347,000 souls. Blaine's city budget is \$35 million (2005). Saint Louis spends \$269 million (2005). Saint Louis employs nearly 8,000 people while Blaine employs less than 200. Give us a break, mayor.

You can find a city manager for \$140,000.

<http://www.startribune.com/142/story/1533023.html>

E-mail Update 11/16/07

In This Issue:

1. Benton County Stops the Bleeding.
2. Land of Confusion.
3. Andover: Union Town Part II.
4. What Media Bias?
5. We Don't Need No Stinkin' Governmental Services Division Manager!

1. Benton County Stops the Bleeding.

Taxpayers in Benton County broke into celebration this week as their county board embraced fiscal sanity in a tight bear hug by opting out of the Northstar Corridor Development Authority (NCDA).

As Watchdogs know, the NCDA is a consortium of counties that funnel county tax dollars into Northstar rail through "dues" paid by property taxes. Benton County has been a member of the NCDA for over ten years, paying dues of over \$500,000 in total.

In a close 3-2 vote, the board got wise and realized that there won't be any commuter rail coming to Benton County. Commissioner Joe Wollak, summed up the majority sentiment by observing that after ten years and a half million dollars, Benton County has "nothing to show for it." No word on what the two commissioners who voted to keep dumping money into the NCDA were thinking. Rumor has it they were unavailable as they were looking into buying some oceanfront property in Iowa at the time.

Some commissioners in NCDA member counties north of Big Lake keep holding out hope that "phase II" of Northstar will bring the line up to Saint Cloud. "Phase II" just may be the biggest scam to ever come out of local government. There is absolutely no timeframe, budget, or other meaningful activity regarding "phase II." In other words, it doesn't exist. The people of the Saint Cloud area will likely commute on magic carpets before they see commuter rail. The only thing the mirage of "phase II" has accomplished is to allow GOB Dan Erhart to fool these counties into helping pay for Anoka County's commuter rail line while Erhart patronizes these suckers with promises of a rail line – someday.

Hats off to the three Benton County wise men, who are truly taxpayer heroes.

<http://www.startribune.com/462/story/1535584.html>

2. Land of Confusion.

The Watchdog has published a number of updates of late regarding the exponential increase in committee activity at the legislature in Saint Paul, complete with per diem payments, mileage reimbursement, and other perks that in some cases earn a legislator more than he takes home in salary.

GOP House Minority Leader Marty Seifert (R-Marshall) held a press conference this week in which he presented a stunning visual presentation regarding just how bureaucratic, convoluted, and downright confusing the committee structure in Minnesota House has become.

According to Seifert, there are over 80 different committees, sub-committees, and working groups generating ideas to raise your taxes and diminish your freedom. The budget to support these committees is nearly double what it was when the GOP controlled the House.

Seifert summed up the situation when he noted dryly that Democrats are “too busy mopping the floor to turn off the faucet.”

<http://www.house.leg.state.mn.us/gop/welcome.asp>

<http://www.house.leg.state.mn.us/goppdf/l85/1029committeeschart.pdf>

3. Andover: Union Town Part II.

The Watchdog received a fair amount of feedback regarding the City of Andover’s unanimous adoption of “prevailing wage” rates on certain city building projects.

One dedicated reader pointed out that two of the current council members, Don Jacobson, and Mike Knight, actively sought out the Republican endorsement the last time both ran for office (Jacobson for mayor, Knight for re-election to the council). Both received the Republican endorsement. According to our reader, who is active in the local GOP, that endorsement is unlikely to happen again. “These guys represented to us that they were fiscal conservatives. This vote puts the lie to that argument,” fumed the activist.

According to Section 1, Paragraph “K” of the 2006 Minnesota Republican Party Platform, the party favors “The repeal of state and federal legislation that imposes mandated wage rates on government and school district projects.”

<http://www.mngop.com/documents/mngop2006platform.pdf>

Andover city council contact information:

http://www.ci.andover.mn.us/index.asp?Type=B_BASIC&SEC={D57555B9-DCFC-4778-B4EA-62E8B4CF8092}

4. What Media Bias?

For years, a debate raged over whether or not there was a liberal bias in the mainstream media (MSM).

That debate has been settled in the affirmative, especially as it concerns the Star Tribune. The blog Truth v. The Machine (<http://www.truthvmachine.com/>) recently offered an excellent post exploring the number of former Star Tribune employees who have been “outed” by finding subsequent employment with liberal organizations.

- Dane Smith: Growth and Justice (sounds liberal, doesn't it?);
- Eric Black: Minnesota Monitor blog (tied to George Soros);
- Conrad Defiebre: Minnesota 2020 (led by Matt Entenza);
- Dave Hage: Senator Amy Klobuchar.

Enough said.

Read the entire post here: <http://www.truthvmachine.com/?p=5198>

5. We Don't Need No Stinkin' Governmental Services Division Manager!

The Watchdog will forgive readers if they have never heard of the Anoka County Governmental Services Division Manager. The Watchdog is certain, however, that readers are familiar with Steve Novak, the man who holds the title. From leading the failed attempt to land a football stadium to moonlighting as a private lobbyist, Novak is somewhat emblematic of what is wrong with Anoka County government.

That may all change. Don't be surprised if a move is made at some point to eliminate the Governmental Services Division Manager position and re-allocate the savings to another area of county government, like hiring more sheriff deputies or child protection workers.

The Watchdog, however, would be surprised. That kind of move makes too much sense to ever be adopted by a governmental body that spends big on boondoggles like commuter rail and football stadiums.

E-mail Update 11/23/07

THANKSGIVING EDITION!

In This Issue:

1. We Told You So.
2. Fridley's Thanksgiving Turkey.
3. Excuse Me, Your Pants are on Fire.
4. Who Needs Turkey When You've Got a Roast!
5. What Media Bias (Lesson 434)?

1. We Told You So.

We really do hate to say it, but we did warn you. Way back on October 5th, to be exact. Perhaps you weren't paying attention. Perhaps you didn't believe the Dog. Perhaps you had yet to discover the North Metro's leading source of credible news and information.

In any case, the Watchdog received more than a few emails this week from taxpayers surprised and irate over the 100% increase in the Anoka County Regional Rail Authority tax levy. Many thought these tax increases would wane now that the Northstar boondoggle is getting closer to reality.

No, sir. This is just the beginning. Don't forget that Northstar will rely on property taxes to subsidize operating costs for as long as the train runs. On top of that, we now have the Duluth tourist train to fund.

What's really ironic is that you never hear the GOBs like Dan Erhart and Dennis Berg complain that rail relies on property taxes. They leave that criticism for roads alone (which is wrong anyway).

Believe this, Watchdogs. You have a chance to sound off and be heard. Attend the county's Truth in Taxation hearing on December 6th at 7pm at the county courthouse.

Of course, the county's web site won't tell you about this. Instead, the page is filled with critical information like the Freedom to Breathe Act and a link to Northstar rail. <http://www.co.anoka.mn.us/>

If you can't make the hearing or can't wait to send your message, contact the Board of Commissioners here:

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

2. Fridley's Thanksgiving Turkey.

No doubt about it, life slows down a bit around the Thanksgiving holiday. Thoughts turn to family and friends as millions travel or host loved ones home for the holidays.

So what does Fridley government have going on? Nothing except a tax increase vote.

Fridley is a charter city. Fridley used to have a cap on the increase in electricity taxes. The council adopted an amendment to lift the cap. Outraged taxpayers gathered sufficient petitions to put the issue to a vote.

Fridley conveniently scheduled the vote for November 20, two days before Thanksgiving.

This is one of the oldest plays in the Big Government handbook. Schedule referenda at odd and inconvenient times.

In a city of over 27,000 residents, only 2,541 folks cast ballots.

The only fix for these kinds of antics is at the ballot box – next time.

<http://www.ci.fridley.mn.us/>

<http://www.ci.fridley.mn.us/citygovt/emailcouncil.htm>

3. Excuse Me, Your Pants are on Fire.

Liar, liar, pants on fire. Who knew that old playground saw would be so relevant to the adult world, especially politics?

Yes, politics is filled with whoppers, tall tales, half-truths, and outright bull s**t lies. But this week we've got one that is nothing short of a bald-faced lie. The kind that exposes a true lack of integrity and rightfully diminishes the liar's reputation and standing in the community at large. It's the kind of Clintonian whopper that dredges up nightmarish memories of cigars, a missing dress, and existential arguments over the meaning of "is."

Minnesota's own Secretary of State (SOS), Mark Ritchie, has been enveloped by a scandal that centers on how his political campaign got its hands on information that was collected by the Office of the Secretary of State.

The Star Tribune has been following this issue for some weeks. Essentially, two participants in a civic engagement program sponsored by the SOS office later received a campaign solicitation via email. This after they put their email addresses on a sign-in sheet at the event.

In an October 29, 2007 interview with the Star Tribune, Secretary Ritchie was asked directly how his campaign came into possession of the email addresses of the two participants. Ritchie responded, "Well, I don't know about that."

<http://www.startribune.com/10220/story/1516478.html>

Today, Ritchie reversed course and admitted that he personally provided the list to his campaign. In less than a month's time, our Secretary of State has gone from denying any knowledge of how his campaign got information from a public office to admitting that he himself was the one who transferred the data. It's hard to call his October 30 denial anything other than a lie.

<http://www.startribune.com/10220/story/1564555.html>

<http://www.startribune.com/10220/story/1565431.html>

Behavior of this sort is troubling from any elected official. But the behavior becomes especially worrisome when that elected official is responsible for safeguarding the integrity and fairness of our elections. Ritchie is the one person in Minnesota most responsible for fair and honest elections. After this incident, it is hard to see how he can fulfill his duties, especially as they relate to elections.

4. Who Needs Turkey When You've Got a Roast!

The Taxpayer's League of Minnesota (TLM) celebrated its ten-year anniversary Sunday night with good food, good cheer, and an excellent selection of fine wine. TLM founder and Board Chairman Mike Wigley was roasted by an all-star cast of conservatives including Rep. Michelle Bachmann and Rep. John Kline.

The Anoka County Watchdog was well represented, as was Anoka County in general. In addition to Watchdog founder Harold Hamilton, we spied the following Anoka County politicians in attendance: Congresswoman Michele Bachmann, state Representative Chris DeLaForest, county commissioner Rhonda Sivarajah, and Ham Lake city council members Gary Kirkeide, Joey Erikson, and Julie Braastad (we guess this is equal time

after Mayor Muenier hosted a DFL fundraiser last week). Current TLM president and former state Rep. Phil Krinkie (Lino Lakes) emceed.

<http://www.taxpayersleague.org>

5. What Media Bias (Lesson 434)?

Last week, we reported on local media bias, with canned Star Tribune employees taking up residence in left-leaning camps.

This week we get a lesson in national media bias, with former ABC news anchor Carole Simpson endorsing Hillary Clinton.

This is actually good news. The outing of these folks has exposed the truth and virtually annihilated the mainstream media's credibility. Take a look at newspaper circulation and TV news ratings. These biased folks are their own worst enemy.

http://www.boston.com/news/local/articles/2007/11/19/professor_takes_heat_for_nod_to_clinton/

Happy Thanksgiving, Watchdogs!

E-mail Update 11/30/07

In This Issue:

1. Score One for the Taxpayer.
2. Digging Yourself a Hole.
3. How Bad was She?
4. Good Ol' Boys in the News.

1. Score One for the Taxpayer.

It was a good week for the taxpayers, at least in one respect. And would you believe the good cheer comes from the Belly of the Beast, Anoka County?

On a close 4-3 vote, the county board voted to terminate the contract of lobbyist Ron Jerich, saving the taxpayers \$41,000. The move was one of pure common sense, which makes it all the more amazing that it actually passed. Anoka County already has lobbyists on the payroll. Moreover, there is no reason why commissioners themselves, earning a full-time salary already, can't get off their duffs and go down to the legislature themselves.

The termination of the Jerich contract is all the sweeter because Mr. Jerich is buddies with King GOB Dan Erhart. Killing the Jerich contract was yet another repudiation of Dan Erhart and his heavy-handed ways.

For you anti-tobacco fanatics, you should also take heart that your tax dollars no longer support a lobbyist who also works for Big Tobacco.

A Watchdog source at the meeting reported that Erhart ran from the room immediately after the vote. C'mon Dan. It's 2007 and it's okay to cry in front of other men.

Those voting to terminate: Sivarajah, West, Lang, Kordiak

Those voting against termination: Erhart, Berg, LeDoux

<http://www.cfboard.state.mn.us/lobby/lbdetail/lb6769.html>

2. Digging Yourself a Hole.

The Anoka County Regional Rail Authority tax levy has been the subject of a great deal of taxpayer angst lately. The Authority, which levies property taxes to fund rail in the County, recently doubled its tax levy for 2008.

The Watchdog noted that one reason was the funding of studies for a tourist train from Minneapolis to Duluth, creating yet another money pot for GOB Dan Erhart to dispense some allowance money to El Tinklenberg while he runs for congress.

Taxpayers also learned this week that the Authority is taxing more because it has decided to fund a \$1.6 million tunnel under the Fridley rail station. Never mind the fact that the Fridley station has been cancelled for a lack funds. Moreover, there is no realistic plan for getting the station built, other than the old saw about asking the state or the feds to come up with the money (remember that the state's revenue forecast comes out today and the news looks bleak).

Talk about gambling recklessly with tax dollars. The County is now rolling the \$1.6 million dice in the hopes that a station will one day be built in Fridley. If not, Anoka County taxpayers will be the owners of a \$1.6 million hole in the ground. Your tax dollars at work.

http://abcnewspapers.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1052&Itemid=1

3. How Bad was She?

It sounds like something you would hear at the comedy improv: "There was a state employee who was soooo bad. How bad was she? She was so bad, she actually got fired!"

This week, the Office of the Legislative Auditor (OLA) released its investigation of Sonia Pitt, the MnDOT executive who was fired November 9th after she failed to return from an East Coast junket to deal with the 35W bridge collapse. (The OLA is the state's internal watchdog, investigating allegations of waste, fraud and abuse by state agencies of employees).

Since the story first broke with a Star Tribune article, Watchdogs were outraged by the alleged behavior of this career bureaucrat.

Sadly, the truth is more outrageous than the allegations.

Among the OLA's findings:

- 65% of the calls made on Pitt's state-funded cell phone were personal;
- Pitt inflated mileage reimbursement claims;
- Pitt claimed work time that should have been vacation time;
- She attended a meeting in New Jersey only for Northeast states;
- She claimed reimbursement for training in St. Cloud that was cancelled;

In all, The OLA identified over \$26,000 of taxpayer money Pitt wrongly received.

Worst of all, the OLA concluded that Pitt "showed intent to obtain personal benefit at the public's expense."

In addition to being fired, Pitt also faces possible criminal charges.

She ought spend some time in jail.

Now that Pitt is out of work, the rumor is that Pitt will be hired to work for Anoka County (just kidding....we hope!).

Many DFL legislators have rightly decried Pitt's violation of the public trust.

We'll see if that's still the case when the OLA releases its investigation of Secretary of State Mark Ritchie.

<http://www.auditor.leg.state.mn.us/>

<http://www.auditor.leg.state.mn.us/fad/2007/fad07-32.htm>

<http://www.startribune.com/462/story/1578498.html>

4. Good Ol' Boys in the News.

KARE 11 ran a story this week about the chronic under-funding of Minnesota's roads and bridges. Not surprisingly, the story was extremely biased, featuring only "transportation experts" who called for tax increases.

Jason Lewis did a great job on his program this week debunking the story. He also schooled reporter Rick Kupchella, the man who produced the piece.

What KARE 11 failed to reveal and Lewis failed to uncover was the financial interests of one of the three “transportation experts” interviewed, one Bill Schreiber.

Schreiber was introduced to viewers as a Republican. True, Schreiber was decades ago a GOP legislator from Brooklyn Park. Of course, Schreiber was presented as the conservative viewpoint even as he advocated for tax increases.

The truth is that Bill Schreiber is a registered lobbyist who earns a living representing, among others, groups that support and seek transportation tax increases. This very relevant fact should have been presented to viewers.

Schreiber is connected to the GOB network because he also lobbies for Anoka County. In addition, his wife is an Anoka County employee who also lobbies.

http://www.kare11.com/news/investigative/extras/extras_article.aspx?storyid=270360

<http://www.ktlkfm.com/cc-common/podcast.html>

<http://www.cfboard.state.mn.us/lobby/lbdetail/lb419.html>

<http://www.leg.mn/legdb/fulldetail.asp?ID=10592>

E-mail Update 12/7/07

In This Issue:

1. A Turning Tide?
2. Are Roads and Bridges a Priority?
3. The DFL Worldview.
4. A "surprise" from Zygi Wilf.
5. American Education: More Money, Same Results.

1. A Turning Tide?

The Watchdog scooped the media world last week in reporting that the County axed contract lobbyist Ron Jerich. Dave Orrick of the Pioneer Press was a close second, writing an outstanding piece the following Monday that explored the ramifications of Jerich's termination, which run far beyond mere dollars and cents.

Orrick's headline correctly observed that the termination was yet another decisive signal that the County Board is undergoing change and looking to a future that increasingly doesn't include the negative influence of Dan Erhart.

Besides being good public policy, there is no doubt that last week's vote was a repudiation of Erhart himself. Jerich and Erhart are admittedly good buddies and part of the dying Good Ol' Boys network in the County.

There is no doubt that this development is an unqualified good. The bullying, slash and burn, backroom politics of Erhart are slowly being replaced by the open and transparent style of newcomers Rhonda Sivarajah and Robyn West.

Sivarajah and West represent the bright future of Anoka County leadership while Erhart has become little more than an embarrassing reminder of what used to be.

While cleaning up the mess in Anoka County will take time, last week's vote was a clarion call of reform heard loud and clear. The future is here.

Read the Pioneer Press article below:

http://www.twincities.com/ci_7619958?IADID=Search-www.twincities.com-www.twincities.com&nlick_check=1

2. Are Roads and Bridges a Priority?

Some Anoka County commissioners constantly tell the taxpayers that roads and bridges are a high priority for them. This claim is usually made within the context of bashing the governor for refusing to increase taxes on an already highly taxed citizenry.

2008 will be a bonding year for the legislature. By all accounts, legislators will fashion a borrowing package that could approach \$1 billion. Bonding dollars can be used for many road and bridge projects.

So what does Anoka County want to see in a bonding bill? The Watchdog has obtained an email from county lobbyist Lona Schreiber to House Republicans with three requests:

- A forensic crime lab;
- A bike trail in Lino Lakes;
- The Fridley rail station that the county can't afford.

Huh? Our roads and bridges are crumbling and the county wants a bike trail and a train station? While the crime lab has some merit, these other two are just ridiculous compared to the needs regarding roads and bridges.

The Watchdog will have the email posted on the web site soon.

3. The DFL Worldview.

Last week's news that the state faces a \$373 million dollar deficit (a mere 1% of the state budget) put the DFL worldview on full display for taxpayers to see.

In response to the news, DFL leadership immediately called for a special session to put hundreds of millions on the state's credit card (bonding) to "create jobs" and "stimulate the economy."

Pardon the Dog while we fetch a barf bag.

First, Minnesotans will be just fine WITHOUT you people in session passing laws. In fact, we're better off when the gates of the House and Senate chamber are locked tight. The response to every situation is a special session, according to the DFL. The legislature will be back in about 10 weeks. Give us taxpayers another 10 weeks of reprieve – please!

When the legislature does get back, its first priority ought to be finding 1% of fat to cut from the general fund – and not increasing taxes.

Second, government doesn't create jobs. Government doesn't create jobs because government doesn't create wealth. Government merely confiscates wealth and spreads it around to various favored interest groups – like labor and teacher unions. It is a zero sum game in which government can give only what it has already taken away.

<http://www.governor.state.mn.us/mediacenter/pressreleases/PROD008496>

4. A “surprise” from Zygi Wilf.

The names change but the song remains the same. In fact, there's nothing new in the “Great Stadium Game” cities around the country have played so often in recent decades.

Like the flu, Zygi Wilf's stadium show arrived in town recently to hype legislative leaders and the governor on the importance of solving the state's “stadium problem.” (Note how the Vikings are calling it our problem and not theirs.)

After being shown the door by GOP and DFL leadership alike, Zygi has started to rattle his saber. Wilf stated in a not-so-subtle way that the stadium issue needs to be solved “in the near future.” This, of course, is a prelude to the full-on threat that the team will be moved if a new stadium isn't forthcoming.

What a surprise. These NFL owners, much like mafia dons, are mellow and congenial – as long as they're getting what they want. But as soon as they face some resistance, the faint glint of gun steel is shown as a promise of the bare-knuckle extortion to come.

Good luck extorting that \$750 million, Zyg. You're going to need it.

<http://www.startribune.com/sports/vikings/12132906.html>

5. American Education: More Money, Same Results.

The modern history of education in America has been one of exponentially increasing budgets and static results. A recent report on international test results for math and science has added to this well-settled observation.

The Program for International Student Assessment tested 15 year-olds from 30 industrialized nations. Average scores for American students were lower than the average scores for the group as a whole.

Less than a month after Anoka-Hennepin School District voters voted a huge tax increase to “maintain quality”, we see yet another example of what the school board means by “quality.” We need to do better than accept mediocrity and call it “quality.”

<http://www.startribune.com/nation/12110601.html>

E-mail Update 12/14/07

In This Issue:

1. Energy Blues.
2. Sloppy Joe Journalism.
3. The Busybodies Ain't Done.
4. Express Your Thoughts on the Train.

1. Energy Blues.

As we Minnesotans experience the annual rite of butt-freezing known as winter, let's take a moment to reflect upon our ridiculous energy policies. Thanks to the global warming hysteria, politicians from both parties have chucked logic out the window in a mad rush to join the mob of know-nothings peddling the madness.

Above all, energy enhances our quality life. Any rational energy policy should seek energy that is to the greatest extent possible: inexpensive, abundant, reliable, and domestically produced. Now examine recent law changes within the context of these goals.

Energy should be inexpensive because costs are very regressive. Rich or poor, you need heat for your home. Rich or poor, you need lights to see. Rich or poor, you need to heat your water and cool your food. Thus, expensive energy hits the poor hard.

Coal. Coal is cheap, abundant, and domestically produced. Minnesota's recent energy bill has made it harder to use coal, especially to produce electricity. Moreover, Minnesota will be needing more power plants in the near future to meet basic (known as "base load") needs. Coal-fired plants won't meet those needs. Get ready for California-style rolling black outs and brown outs.

Nuclear. Minnesota has a ban on new nuclear power plants. Again, nuclear power is cheap, abundant, clean, and is domestically produced. Hell, even the French are okay with nuclear power.

Wind. Wind power has the advantage of being domestically produced. Other than that, it is expensive and unreliable. Wind power mandates will no doubt make energy more expensive, especially as the extremists hail wind power as a savior.

Ethanol. Ethanol is a bigger boondoggle than wind. Ethanol is energy negative, meaning it takes more power to produce than what it gives back. The production of ethanol requires gasoline that often comes from foreign sources. Ethanol hurts the environment by sucking up huge amounts of water, especially in corn growing areas that have precious little water to begin with (SW Minnesota). Ethanol has immature and inefficient distribution channels that burn tons of fuel for delivery (check to see how ethanol gets to the east coast, for example). Finally, ethanol drives up the price of food, another regressive cost that hits the poor hard.

Taxes. On top of this, government taxes energy more and more. Fridley recently abolished a cap on electricity taxes. Micro Control Company of Fridley already pays \$170,000 per year for electricity. Now, that cost will go up, making it harder for that manufacturing company to compete in the global market place. Throw on top of that recycling mandates, gas taxes, and a host of proposed “carbon footprint” taxes, and you have a formula for an impending disaster. These environmentalists, are above all else, Luddites who want to reduce your quality of life by making energy more and more expensive.

<http://www.schoolhouserock.tv/Energy.html>

2. Sloppy Joe Journalism.

The slide in quality at the Star Tribune has been well documented since their new ownership has embarked on a scorched earth cost-cutting binge.

This week’s coverage of the Northstar rail pep rally by Paul Levy of the Strib was sloppy to say the least.

First, the article offered the opinions of only Northstar advocates. The voice of skeptics was nowhere to be found, despite an abundance of those voices (Paul, perhaps now is the time to get to know Commissioner Rhonda Sivarajah).

Next, the article failed to critically examine the claims of Northstar cheerleaders, primarily one Jill Brown, a “spokesperson” for the project (gotta have one of those).

Brown claimed that Fridley will benefit from Northstar. That’s odd. Fridley has been crying bloody murder for months, ever since it was announced that the Fridley station has been cancelled. A curious comment like that begged for the question to be asked regarding just how Fridley would benefit from a train that won’t be stopping there.

And of course there was the usual chorus of commuter rail canards that were dutifully reported without questions, including the old saw about 5,200 commuters per day and the promise of a reduction in traffic congestion on HWY 10. Levy could have pointed out that 5,200 per day is the projected ridership in the year 2025 but that opening day ridership is 25% less than that. Loyal Watchdog readers also know that MnDOT studies have concluded that Northstar will do nothing to meaningfully reduce traffic congestion on HWY 10.

It's articles like this one that reduce Star Tribune circulation.

<http://www.startribune.com/local/north/12339686.html>

3. The Busybodies Ain't Done.

While the global warming Gestapo is hard at work trying to control our use of energy, we shouldn't lose sight of another group of busybodies who have already intruded into our lives and haven't stopped. Just like their Prohibition Era forefathers, the anti-smoking zealots are still at work sticking their collective noses into the lives of others.

Now, you would think that this group would have gone away once they were successful in persuading the legislature to force businesses to go smoke free. They haven't gone away because they aren't done. Like any special interest group, it seeks to stay employed by always taking the next step by manufacturing a new crisis. A push for smoking bans in apartment buildings, cars, and private homes will be next. You heard it hear first.

In Anoka County, the cause is led by the Anoka County Smoke-Free Partnership. Their web site features an essay contest that invites writers to wax emotionally about the dangers of second-hand smoke. You can also visit a web page that allows "victims" to cathartically bear their soul as they recall the horrors of personal exposure to second-hand smoke.

Like many other Anoka County organizations, this one is also a resting place for failed DFL partisans (surprise, surprise).

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

<http://www.cfboard.state.mn.us/campfin/rpdetail/rp15604.html>

<http://www.cfboard.state.mn.us/lobby/lbdetail/lb1807.html>

4. Express Your Thoughts on the Train.

Watchdog readers over the course of the past three years have provided wonderful opinions and insights on the folly of commuter rail. Don't be afraid to share those thoughts with a wider audience!

<http://kstp.com/search.cfm?cat=209&Keyword=northstar>

<http://himlehorner.typepad.com/northstar/2007/12/northstar-commu.html>

E-mail Update 12/21/07

In This Issue

1. Krinkie at the Bat;
2. Speaking of Homer;
3. More Rail Foolishness;
4. From the Meli\$\$a Hortman Unit.

Editor's Note: Since this will be the last update before Christmas, the entire Watchdog staff wishes you and yours a very merry Christmas!

Editor's Note II: The Watchdog never sleeps. We will indeed publish an email update next week. We will review the year that was and, of course, name our 2007 "Taxpayer Zero," the person who did the most damage to the humble taxpayer in the past 12 months.

1. Krinkie at the Bat.

The Watchdog didn't find Taxpayer League of Minnesota president Phil Krinkie listed in the Major League Baseball steroid report, but the man has got to be on the Juice. This week, Krinkie smashed one out of the Taxpayer Park with a hilarious, satirical look at GOB Dan Erhart and his maniacal quest in pursuit of the Northstar train.

Using the musical "The Music Man", Krinkie draws a witty comparison between "Music Man" con artist Harold Hill and con artist GOB Dan Erhart. In the musical, citizens are conned by a man promising musical glory. In real life, we've been swindled by a man who promised an 80-mile, \$160 million rail project that is now costs twice that amount and travels just half as far.

Good satire is indeed based upon observations of the more absurd aspects of real life. Northstar rail? Nah, just call it Erhart's Folly.

<http://www.taxpayersleague.org>

<http://www.theatrehistory.com/american/musical004.html>

2. Speaking of Homer.

While the “Music Man” analogy was an excellent piece of work, let’s acknowledge that the younger crowd is probably unfamiliar with this work, thus leaving many readers without a foundation to understand Krinkie’s satire.

The younger, hipper taxpayer will certainly recall the famous “Simpson’s” episode “Marge vs. the Monorail.” Written by famous comedian Conan O’Brien, the episode is based upon the “Music Man” but set in a light rail plot line. Instead of conning the citizens by promising music, the good people of Springfield are conned into paying for a monorail.

The analogy is more appropriate and the humor is outstanding. Many television critics have hailed “Marge vs. the Monorail” as one of the best episodes of television satire ever.

The primary scene takes place in a public meeting where citizens are discussing what to do with a \$3 million windfall the town has received.

Con man Lyle Lanley comes in with a slick song and dance performance that induces the crowd to dispense with logic and buy a monorail.

Marge Simpson is lone hold out who continues to question the logic of light rail when the city’s streets are crumbling.

In an all-too-true case of art imitating life, the episode is chock full of quotes and dialogue that could apply to Anoka County, Dan Erhart, and Northstar rail.

Lyle Lanley: “It’s more of a Shelbyville idea.”

Mayor Quimby: “We’re twice as smart as Shelbyville! Tell us your idea and we’ll vote for it!”

Marge Simpson: “Main street is still cracked and broken!”

Bart Simpson: “Sorry, Mom, the mob has spoken.”

Marge Simpson: “I still think we should have spent the money to fix Main Street.”

Homer Simpson: “Then you should have written a song like that guy.”

The mob has spoken, indeed.

<http://deadon.wordpress.com/2007/07/26/the-20-most-cromulent-simpsons-episodes-of-all-time-1/>

<http://www.snpp.com/episodes/9F10.html>

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marge_vs._the_Monorail

3. More Rail Foolishness.

As if Northstar rail wasn't enough taxpayer-funded foolishness for you, you can also start paying attention to the tourist train the county is proposing to run from Minneapolis to Duluth (you know, the same one Amtrak nixed back in 1985).

Anoka County has recently signed on to a joint powers agreement with other local governments to pursue this "forward looking" project. For their share of the costs in 2008, the county will spend \$84,000 of your money.

It's hard to believe, but this project may just be more foolhardy than Northstar. A recent article in the Coon Rapids Herald featured this gem featuring county bureaucrat Steve Novak:

"According to Steve Novak, county division manager of governmental services, the bulk of the 2008 budget will pay for the mandated Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), as well as lobbying costs at the federal and state levels."

Say what? Anoka County already pays Novak more money than the governor to lobby. Moreover, the county also has an employee on staff at \$95,000 per year to lobby. And now money will be spent on additional lobbyists? That's just plain ridiculous – and one reason why your property tax bill for rail doubled this year.

http://abcnewspapers.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1220&Itemid=28

http://abcnewspapers.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1217&Itemid=28

<http://www.osa.state.mn.us/default.aspx?page=rptGid05Lobby>

<http://www.cfboard.state.mn.us/lobby/lbdetail/lb701.html>

<http://www.cfboard.state.mn.us/lobby/lbdetail/lb8266.html>

4. From the Meli\$\$a Hortman Unit.

As noted in a previous e-update, the Watchdog has opened a Melissa Hortman Unit to track the antics state Representative Melissa Hortman. Trying to follow her with existing resources proved to be too great a strain on existing resources.

The Unit's first report concerns yet another letter to the editor penned by Hortman (the most dangerous place in District 47A is that piece of ground between Hortman and a TV camera).

The essence of the letter is to pander to local elected officials by absolving them of any responsibility for property tax increases by claiming that state budget cuts are to blame.

Thank goodness the Dog is here to act as a truth detector whenever Hortman trots out her manure spreader.

Hortman claim: state budget cuts have shifted the responsibility for school funding to school districts.

Fact: On average, the state pays for 80% of public school costs in the Metro. Moreover, Hortman's support of the state 2006 education funding bill drained money away from the suburbs and into the failing schools of Minneapolis and Saint Paul. Source: Minnesota Department of Education.

Hortman Claim: Hortman insinuates that property tax increases have been solely to cover local government aid (LGA) cuts.

Fact: If this were true, property taxes since 2003 would have risen about \$700 million across the state, not \$2.2 billion. Source: Minnesota House Research Office.

Hortman Claim: Cities in Anoka County have been forced to raise property taxes because of LGA cuts.

Fact: These cities should have found ways to absorb the cuts because they never should have had LGA in the first place. Watchdogs, don't forget that LGA is a "welfare for cities" program that was intended to provide poor, struggling rural jurisdictions with aid to cover the provision of basic services like police and fire. Cities like Blaine, Andover, and Coon Rapids are hardly in such a position. They can well afford to provide essential services. If not, maybe they should dump the extras like community centers and golf courses.

Hortman Claim: The 2006 Tax bill the governor vetoed contained property tax relief.

Fact: It can certainly be argued that there was increased aid to cities and counties in the bill. But to believe that it amounted to tax relief requires taxpayers to believe that the savings would have been passed on to them and not result in extra spending on the part of local jurisdictions.

E-mail Update 12/28/07

In This Issue

2007 Year-End Review.

Editor's Note: As 2007 draws to a close, the Watchdog reviews the top 5 stories from the North Metro this past year. Next week, our Taxpayer Zero award.

Story #5: Ramsey Town Center Debacle.

Our number 5 story is still developing but is already on pace to go down as one of the biggest boondoggles in Anoka County history, and certainly the biggest at the municipal level.

The Ramsey Town Center debacle will stand as a cautionary tale to city councils around the nation for years to come. The Ramsey City Council essentially suffered from two major afflictions that helped doom the project.

The first was arrogance. Historically, Ramsey has been an exurb of large residential lots with a fair share of commercial and industrial real estate as well. The character of the city has been one of limited government, low taxes, and a general respect for the privacy of those who chose to live far from the urban core.

In a fit of hubris, the city council attempted to ignore the essence of the city's culture and by fiat create a transit-oriented, high density, mixed use downtown in a city that had never had or wanted such a development.

The transit never came as there is no commuter rail station and the parking garage off Highway 10 is highly underutilized. There will likely never be any real demand for the high-density residential housing because high-density housing is only successful where there is a supporting infrastructure of transportation, retail, and other services within walking distance. Few people want to live in a condo and yet have to drive to buy a gallon of milk or drive 50 miles to work.

The second flaw was a lack of sophistication. While it will probably take years to conclude the investigations and lawsuits, it appears that the city council was taken in by grandiose promises and slick presentations of a new suburban utopia. In short, it looks like Ramsey got in over its head – fast.

Story #4: The Power of the Veto Pen.

There is no doubt that the 2006 elections provided a seismic shift in Minnesota and national politics. The DFL posted large gains in legislature, strengthening their grip on the Senate and in the House wiping away what was once a strong GOP majority.

True to their character, the DFL promptly engaged in a multi-billion dollar tax increase binge despite the fact that the state was sitting on a \$2 billion surplus.

Rediscovering his conservative roots, Governor Pawlenty (who barely survived his own re-election) promptly drew his veto pen and struck down the tax increases so fast Larry Pogemiller's finely sculpted hair lost its composure.

Despite small minorities that could barely uphold a veto, GOP leaders in both houses fostered a strong sense of unity such that the DFL only attempted to override one veto, a transportation tax increase bill, that failed.

The failed override attempt had definite North Metro flavor. State Rep. Meli\$\$a Hortman (Brooklyn Park) stoked no small amount of intrigue when she publicly named GOP House members who she claimed had "committed" to overriding the transportation tax veto. Among the rumored defectors were state Reps. Jim Abeler (Anoka) and Kathy Tingelstad (Andover).

The night of the attempted override, GOB Godfather Dan Erhart was seen roaming the House floor furiously lobbying Anoka County legislators to cross the governor. Ultimately, the override failed, with all GOP legislators standing with governor and leaving Hortman and Erhart with egg on their faces.

Story #3: Northstar Rail – Rising Costs, Shrinking Benefits.

Why is it that Northstar rail (AKA Erhart's Folly) cheerleaders are always trying so hard to convince everyone that the debate is over and we should just accept that Northstar is here to stay? Probably because they are furiously attempting to deflect the much-deserved criticism this white elephant continues to attract.

2007 was no different. Fridley learned that they would not be getting a station. The Anoka County Regional Rail Authority doubled its tax levy on us, in part, to finance a tunnel underneath the same non-existent Fridley station. Finally, the projected cost to build this monstrosity shot up to \$320 million this year.

Looking ahead, 2008 promises to be just as dismal for this ill-fated project. Once the shovels start digging in earnest, there will no doubt be cost overruns. Moreover, there

will have to be some lobbying contracts kicked out for “friends” of certain county commissioners. Finally, there will be no improvements to Highway 10 itself in 2008.

Story #2: The County Board Evolves.

Revolution it probably isn't, but there are definitely changes afoot at the Anoka County courthouse. Like the knuckle-dragging caveman who has become a refined 21st Century human, the Anoka County Board has turned in its Dan Erhart era wooden clubs and animal skins in exchange for top coats and civil discourse.

With respect to the county board, the major story for 2007 was the continued wane of GOB Dan Erhart's influence on his colleagues and in the county. Once his fiefdom, Anoka County has become somewhat unfriendly territory of late. Yes, he got his train after years of futility. But he is no longer board chairman. And he didn't get his football stadium. And his good buddy Ron Jerich had his lobbying contract terminated.

And make no mistake, these changes are a good thing! Like Cuba under Castro, Anoka County taxpayers can now start to think of a day beyond Erhart's heavy-handed ways.

Again, kudos to commissioners Rhonda Sivarajah and Robyn West for demonstrating the courage and commitment to principle that is needed to bring about change, especially on a county board where independent thinking had all but disappeared under Erhart's leadership.

Story #1: Vikings Stadium Fails.

Hands down, the failed Vikings stadium effort was the biggest political story in the North Metro this year. In a classic David-vs-Goliath matchup, regular taxpayers triumphed over Zygi Wilf, Anoka County, and the hoards of special interests that spent millions trying to ram a taxpayer-funded stadium down our throats – without a voter referendum.

Like most Anoka County government mega-projects, the stadium chase was filled with its share of buffoonery and incompetence.

Perhaps most astounding was the fact that the county offered up a piece of real estate for a stadium without ever determining if the land could really support a stadium. Months into the project, the Army Corps of Engineers went public with its concerns about the vast number of wetlands on the site and the need for numerous environmental permits, even if the land itself could support a stadium. The Watchdog is left to surmise that the extent of the county's soil testing was Erhart standing on the land like a pioneer of yore declaring “This is it!”

In addition, while taxpayers dodged a big bullet, there was some harm to them. The county reported that it spent over \$850,000 of their hard earned dollars chasing Zygi.

And then there was hapless bureaucrat Steve Novak leading the charge like Captain Parmenter on "F Troop."

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/F_Troop

But in the end, the humble taxpayer prevailed, making this the feel good story of 2007 and thus our #1 story of the year.

So there you have it, loyal readers. The year that was.

There is no reason to think that 2008 will be any different from a taxpayer's point of view. The Watchdog will be there, living up to its motto, "Always on the Watch!"

PORKER OF THE MONTH**August 2007**[The Porker of the Month Hall of Shame](#)[Nominate a Porker of the Month](#)

Porker of the Month is a dubious honor given to lawmakers, government officials, and political candidates who have shown a blatant disregard for the interests of taxpayers.



Rep. James 'Jim' L. Oberstar
Democrat, Minnesota

DC Office:
Phone: 202-225-6211
Fax: 202-225-0699

<http://www.oberstar.house.gov>
[Email Form](#)

CAGW Names Rep. Oberstar Porker of the Month

Washington, D.C. - Citizens Against Government Waste (CAGW) today named House Transportation Committee Chairman Jim Oberstar (D-Minn.) Porker of the Month for August, 2007. In the wake of the bridge collapse in the congressman's home state in which at least nine people were killed, Chairman Oberstar's immediate reaction was to propose a "temporary" 5 cent increase in the gas tax to raise \$25 billion within three years for a new bridge trust fund.

A tax increase is not necessary. As President Bush said, "Before we raise taxes which could affect economic growth, I would strongly urge the Congress to examine how they set priorities. And if bridges are a priority, let's make sure we set that priority first and foremost before we raise taxes." The nation's aging infrastructure is not a state secret. In 2005, when Congress was considering a major highway bill reauthorization, the American Society of Civil Engineers reported that more than a quarter of the nation's bridges were structurally deficient or obsolete.

The 2005 highway bill contained \$2 billion annually for bridge reconstruction. During its markup of the bill, the House Transportation Committee considered increasing that figure to \$3 billion a year. The committee not only failed to include the higher level of bridge repair funding, it opened the door for members of Congress to stuff the bill with nearly 6,500 pork-barrel projects worth more than \$24 billion, about the same amount now being sought by Rep. Oberstar with his proposed tax increase. "High-priority" transportation projects in the 2005 legislation included \$452 million for the infamous "Bridges to Nowhere" in Alaska, \$5 million to improve air quality in the Sacramento region of California, \$4 million to develop bicycle paths and public park space adjacent to the New River in Calexico, California, and \$4 million for streetscape, pedestrian improvements in Clarkson, Georgia.

Chairman Oberstar himself was a participant in that earmark melee. Rather than send funds to repair and restore bridges in his state, he added five projects totaling \$14.6 million for Duluth, Minnesota, including \$3.2 million for the Willard Munger State Trail extension, the longest paved recreational trail in the nation. Since the bridge collapse in Minneapolis, Chairman Oberstar now says he wants his new bridge trust fund plan to eschew all earmarking and extraneous spending. Had he made that pledge in 2005, his new "temporary" increase in the gas tax would be unnecessary. Instead of talking taxes, Chairman Oberstar should demand that Congress give the Secretary of Transportation authority to immediately transfer the billions of dollars in unobligated earmarked funds to bridge repairs.

The August 11 *Rochester Post Bulletin* quoted Rep. Oberstar as follows: "If you're not prepared to invest another five cents in bridge reconstruction and road reconstruction, then God help you." To which one might reply, "If members of Congress are not prepared to wisely spend the money they already have for bridge construction and road construction, then God help them."

For seizing an opportunity to turn tragedy into tax increases and an unnecessary new trust fund, and for protecting transportation pork, CAGW names Rep. Jim Oberstar its August 2007 Porker of the Month.

Citizens Against Government Waste is the nation's largest nonpartisan, nonprofit organization dedicated to eliminating waste, fraud, abuse, and mismanagement in government. Porker of the Month is a dubious honor given to lawmakers, government officials, and political candidates who have shown a blatant disregard for the interests of taxpayers.

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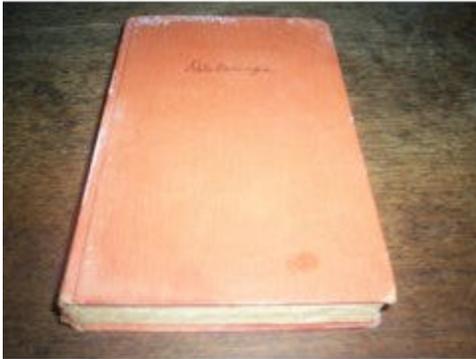
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Editorial Reviews

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This grandfather of all people-skills books was first published in 1937. It was an overnight hit, eventually selling 15 million copies. *How to Win Friends and Influence People* is just as useful today as it was when it was first published, because Dale Carnegie had an understanding of human nature that will never be outdated. Financial success, Carnegie believed, is due 15 percent to professional knowledge and 85 percent to "the ability to express ideas, to assume leadership, and to arouse enthusiasm among people." He teaches these skills through underlying principles of dealing with people so that they feel important and appreciated. He also emphasizes fundamental techniques for handling people without making them feel manipulated. Carnegie says you can make someone want to do what you want them to by seeing the situation from the other person's point of view and "arousing in the other person an eager want." You learn how to make people like you, win people over to your way of thinking, and change people without causing offense or arousing resentment. For instance, "let the other person feel that the idea is his or hers," and "talk about your own mistakes before criticizing the other person." Carnegie illustrates his points with anecdotes of historical figures, leaders of the business world, and everyday folks. --*Joan Price*

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★★★★★ **Great, timeless information for any human interactions**, January 14, 2006

Reviewer: [Lisa Shea "LisaShea.com"](#) (Massachusetts) - [See all my reviews](#)

TOP 100 REVIEWER

This classic book by Dale Carnegie was originally written back in 1937. You might ask yourself, "how could a book from the 30s possibly help me with my current modern problems?" This is probably the same question asked by the other 15 million plus people who have bought the book. The answer is simple. This book is NOT about how to run your business, how to choose a cell phone or laptop. It is about interpersonal dynamics. It is about how to talk to that employee of yours in order to get them to perform well. It is about how to discuss issues with the person you are selling to, in order to get them to agree to the sale. If you read historical books, you'll find that humans had the exact same emotions back in the days of the Greeks and Romans - love, envy, jealousy, self pity, pride, hope. It is these basic human needs you need to understand. Once you do, your daily business problems become MUCH easier.

There are a ton of thoughts in this book that are clearly important. Dale will first explain the issue, and then often will give a real life example of how handling the issue properly helped a real person in a real world situation. It really helps to make the image stick in your mind. None of these are complex, algebraic formulas. They are all straightforward, simple tasks - but once you practice and master them, they can make a huge difference in how others interact with you.

For example, if you have an employee or contractor that simply isn't doing their job properly, you have many options available to you. You can scold them or hound them. Those of us in business who have tried this approach find that it rarely works, especially in the long term. Dale explains what techniques DO work - and work reliably - in these situations. It's a matter of expanding your roster of options, so that when you hit a problem, you have a group of ideas to work with in order to solve it.

If I were to have a criticism about this book, it would be that everything is portrayed as being "solvable". It is put forward as if one of these solutions to a given problem will surely work. In the real world, that just isn't true. You could hit a cranky employee who already is looking for another job and who could honestly not care less about fixing his current job's problems. I really wish there was a section of the book that helped you know when it was just time to cut your losses. That being said, for the other 99% of the issues you face in your daily work life, this book is truly invaluable.

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★★★★★ **How to Live Your Life.**, April 3, 2005

Reviewer: [Bernard Chapin "Ora Et Labora!"](#) (CHICAGO! USA) - [See all my reviews](#)

TOP 500 REVIEWER REAL NAME™

For those of us who work in psychology, there is often a tendency to look down on works that were

created for the mainstream population. They are sometimes dismissed as "pop psychology." I believe that I regarded How to Win Friends... until I read it upon the recommendation of a friend. I could not have been more wrong about a book. Although Carnegie's title is often the target of derision, it is a deceptively deep and important work. There's a very good reason why How to Win Friends... has been a bestseller for seventy years as the man shares essential truths with us about human behavior. Every single one of us can profit from his advice. His central ideas, such as that one should avoid arguments whenever possible, cannot be questioned. The command that one should listen to others and let them talk about themselves is crucial to being liked. A "simple" idea like that one is one that actually works. I'm considering putting his nine rules for effective leadership on my wall so I can remember to generate enthusiasm in others and lead by example.

I was really surprised as to how much this book matters and how much I learned by reading it. Yes, some of the advice may be obvious, but it brings the correct way in which to interact with others to the forefront of the mind and that's why it's so valuable.

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 **Develop an interest in other people**, January 16, 2007

Reviewer: [Ilya Grigorik](#) (Toronto, ON, Canada) - [See all my reviews](#)

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Road to success: develop a genuine interest in other people. This book has been in print for 70 years for a reason - absolutely everyone should read it. I you ever wondered how to make yourself more 'interesting', friendly, or turn yourself into a leader, I think you may be genuinely surprised by the contents of this book. I know I was. It's not about you, it's about 'them' - you can make more friends in two months by becoming interested in other people than you can in two years by trying to get other people interested in you. I read the book, I took notes, and now I'm going to read it again.

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 **Got it fast, good condition!**, January 11, 2007

Reviewer: [S. Burgett](#) (Sanford, FL) - [See all my reviews](#)

REAL NAME™

Great service! Shipped fast and got it fast! I bought it new and I recieved it new. Great Job!

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 **Great read!**, January 11, 2007

Reviewer: [Courtney J. Murphy "Mrs. GI"](#) (Baghdad, Iraq) - [See all my reviews](#)

REAL NAME™

Never realized how much info could be learned about people. I find myself analyzing others in how they

handle people! I wish I had gotten the more recent addition.

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★★★★★ **A True Classic**, January 7, 2007

Reviewer: [Goddess Lilith "star of 'Goddess Worship' DVD and the book '9 Free Secrets...' & consultant to 'NEW S E X DVD' :-\)"](#) - [See all my reviews](#)
REAL NAME™

This book may be the one that Created the Self-Help genre, and it's every bit as true today as it was when it was written many years ago. One of the loveliest parts about this book are the stories and anecdotes from the time when it was written. It was a simpler time back then. And the people faced such different dilemmas than we do today. Yet, the more things change, the more things stay the same. The humanity of this books comes through loud and clear.

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REAL NAME™

Last edited by: [Rolf Evren "RAE"](#) (Dandyride, Sweetden) on Aug 10, 2006

REAL NAME™

Dale Carnegie: "How to Win Friends & Influence People", 1981 revision.

The brash title and brisk exposition is a go-go approach to getting along with people. The Carnegie Foundation has not seen fit to update it to today's social climate, nor extend its potential to a larger readership. Nevertheless it is still very helpful to constructive minds, which realize, that 'we lead with deeds' and not with words. Non-defiant decency is taken for granted.

It is not a book for people with minds closed to change. It does not demand, that one always challenges people with one's own opinions. It suggests understanding one's audience before promoting one's own views in a constructive, non-challenging manner. This puts considerable responsibility for consideration on all involved. Thus, respect for another's current opinions does not make one a carpet for not acclaiming or defiantly responding with one's own current opinions.

It is a book for people, who understand, that "If You spit enough on a stone, it becomes wet" and "Nothing is more permanent than change" and the serious businessman's compliment: "There is room for improvement", which may – or not - open one's mind vastly.

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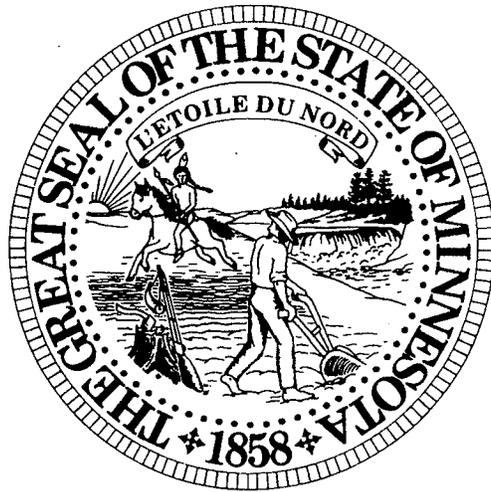
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State of the State Address

The Honorable Tim Pawlenty
Governor of Minnesota

Delivered before a joint session of the
85th session of the Minnesota Legislature

January 17, 2007

House of Representatives Chamber
State Capitol, Saint Paul, Minnesota

**STATE OF THE STATE ADDRESS
Governor Tim Pawlenty
January 17, 2007
Saint Paul, Minnesota**

"A BETTER MINNESOTA"

IT STARTS WITH GRATITUDE

Thank you. Well this is now my fifth State of the State address. I never really thought I had that much to say. In all the years I spent in this chamber, I sometimes saw Mr. Lincoln looking down on us and wondered what he might have thought.

I think he might say that politics and politicians aren't too popular these days and our first job is to work together to reestablish the people's trust in our government.

In response to political criticism, Lincoln once said this, "If I were two-faced, why would I be wearing this one?"

The face of state government needs to be trustworthy and open.

We serve in this beautiful and historic building, by the people's choice, to do their work with a spirit of humility, service, and gratitude.

Minnesota is incredibly blessed in every way. They say that gratitude makes way for more blessing.

So, let's begin by expressing our gratitude for those who carry the heaviest load for our nation and state.

During the past four years, the First Lady, who is with us today, and I have had a chance to spend a great deal of time with members of our military and their families. We have seen their uncommon courage and extraordinary dedication. These brave men and women come from all over our great state, and they are inspiring examples of duty and honor.

The First Lady and I went to Kosovo a few years ago to visit the many troops from Minnesota National Guard who are serving there to keep the peace. While we were there, we met Sergeant Mark Gaulke. Mark served in the military for 28 years before retiring in 2005.

Mark is with us in the gallery and he's holding a picture of his daughter, Jessica. She is a student at Augsburg and is currently on her honeymoon, otherwise I'm sure she'd want to be with us today. Jessica just stepped down as Minneapolis Aquatennial Queen of the Lakes, but not because of her wedding. She stepped down because she will be deploying soon with her National Guard unit for a tour of duty in Iraq.

Members of the United States military deserve our deepest appreciation. Join me in thanking Sergeant Mark Gaulke, Specialist Jessica Gaulke and all the men and women of our military, their families, and our veterans.

The news last week that 2,600 members of the Minnesota National Guard will have their tours in Iraq extended hit our

military families and their communities really hard. It frustrates and disappoints all of us. But I know the quality of these people: They will continue to do their duty with excellence.

The burden under which they are serving today strains even their steely and selfless commitment.

We need to do our duty by supporting them and all members of the military with our words and our deeds. We need a surge of support for our military families, and we need it now.

I'm calling on every Minnesotan to find a way to express support for these outstanding Americans. Here are just a few ways that you can help: Buy a "Support Our Troops" license plate. Help an organization geared towards assisting the military or veterans. Go on the Governor's web page and sign up for the First Lady's Military Family Care Initiative. Donate money to the Minnesota Military Family Foundation or the Minnesotans' Military Appreciation Fund. Attend an event like a deployment or welcome home ceremony to show your support. Pick up the tab at a restaurant for one of these heroes or their families. If you see them around town, stick out your hand, shake their hand, look them in the eye, and give them heartfelt thanks from a fellow Minnesotan.

I proposed a veterans and military package along with Senator Vickerman, Representative Haws, Representative Severson, and others. It includes a tax exemption for military pension benefits, a Minnesota GI bill for college expenses, which I look forward to working with the Attorney

General on, she has a similar proposal, it also has full funding for the National Guard's budget requests, and dramatic increases for Minnesota's veterans programs.

Please pass it; we owe it to these great heroes.

THE PROGRESS OF MINNESOTA

One of the privileges of serving here is being able to work in this amazing building.

Cass Gilbert and all those who designed the Capitol left us a message.

They put a sculpture on top of the Capitol called "The Progress of the State," or the Quadriga.

In the sculpture, a person rides a chariot carrying a banner that says "Minnesota." Now, the golden guy in the chariot is not Joe Mauer, he's called "Prosperity." I think here is the lesson:

The progress of our state depends on prosperity, but it also depends on all of us working together.

In the statue, two strong women are out front leading and guiding the four golden horses. Like these leaders, Democrats and Republicans need to work together to guide our state in a common direction. We have plenty of powers here, that's not the problem: The key is pulling at the same speed, in the same direction – all in the name of progress and prosperity for the citizens we serve.

The state of our state is great, but we can make Minnesota even better.

There are many important things we need to do to advance prosperity and prepare Minnesota for the future this session, such things as improving our transportation system, enhancing public safety, continuing to support agriculture and our natural resource-based industries, maintaining a pro-job business climate and stimulating rural economic development.

But in the short time we have today, I want to focus our common efforts to steer four big "horses" that will have a very large role in powering Minnesota's prosperity and progress.

They are these:

- Better Government
- Better Energy
- Better Education, and
- Better Health Care

BETTER GOVERNMENT

Government provides important services and has an important role to play. But we need to be careful, so that our desire to do well through government doesn't slowly suffocate and stifle one of our key advantages: the unprecedented freedoms and liberties we possess and the personal responsibility that comes with it.

This building is filled with ideas, philosophies and agendas that call for government to do more, and more and more. That inevitably leads to demands for more taxes, more regulation, and more bureaucracy.

A key measure of good government is this: Do the taxpayers get good value for the money they pay? During the past four years, we've made some great progress on this front. Let me give you just one example.

Brenda Willard is a manager in our Administration Department. She and her colleagues helped develop purchasing standards and policies for state computers, cell phones, and furniture that will save the state over \$22 million. That's the combined annual tax bill for 1,100 Minnesota families! Brenda is with us in the gallery today. Let's thank her and all of her colleagues and team members for their great work.

When my budget is released next week, you will see a key theme: Minnesota government should stop paying for good intentions and start paying for better performance.

I'll be more likely to reach for the signing pen, rather than the veto stamp, if the bill on my desk clearly defines expected results. It should also have clear measurements for those results and link spending to performance, rather than just wishful thinking.

We owe that to the hard-working taxpayers of this state.

And just like Minnesota families, state government needs to live within its means. We just climbed out of an epic budget hole, and we're not going to spend our way back into one!

Under the November budget forecast, state spending will go up about \$1 billion automatically because we'll be serving more people under our entitlement programs. Beyond that, an additional \$2 billion is available for use. That means the state can use about \$3 billion in the upcoming budget cycle. That would be about a 10 percent increase over the current budget. Ten percent growth is more than most Minnesotans will see in their paychecks and it should be enough growth for their government, too.

I've said it before and I'll say it again – Minnesotans are not undertaxed.

We should lessen their burden by cutting taxes. Thanks for your efforts to pass the bill which provides tax relief for college tuition and other education costs. I urge you to pass additional tax-cutting legislation this session that provides property tax relief, tax relief for veterans, and other tax cuts that will strategically help our economy.

I also continue to urge you to cap property taxes by placing a limit on how much any local unit of government can increase property taxes without voter approval. Now some have opposed this idea by citing the need for "local control." That's understandable, I've heard those concerns and today I offer a compromise by proposing to exempt any local unit of government from this requirement if they get less than a third of their general fund revenues from the state.

But being fiscally responsible is not our only duty. We need to aggressively prepare for the future in other ways.

BETTER ENERGY

Renewable energy is an important part of Minnesota's future.

Our great nation's sad addiction to foreign oil exposes the country to a reckless amount of economic and national security risk.

Even worse, as with many addicts, we are buying from some of the very people who, in many cases, want to hurt us.

Our nation has been asleep at the switch on energy policy for decades. The good news is that while much of the country has just begun to hear the energy wake-up call, Minnesota has been an early riser. While others slept in on renewable energy, we got up early, we made the coffee, we cooked the breakfast, we read the paper, we did some chores and we took the dog for a walk.

An example of our renewable energy leadership is Mark Willers, who is with us today in the gallery. Mark and his family have a farm near Luverne. He is also on the board of a farmer-owned ethanol co-op and he heads up a local wind energy company.

Mark represents the visionary farmers who didn't wait for the future to happen to them. Let's thank Mark and all of our Minnesota energy pioneers for their great work that got us to this point.

Minnesota has great renewable energy policies. Now let's show the nation how to move even more boldly towards energy independence.

I strongly urge you to consider my "Next Generation Energy Plan," add your own good ideas, and let's pass a comprehensive renewable energy plan as soon as possible.

That plan will help us move away from fossil fuels, and it will also help us clean up the environment and improve the environment. But we can do even more. Minnesota can't reverse global climate change by ourselves, but we can do our part and help lead the way. Our energy plan will significantly reduce the amount of carbon we put into the atmosphere.

I look forward to working with the Democrats and the Republicans to pass and sign comprehensive historic renewable energy legislation this session.

While we're talking about improving our environment, there's another step that needs to take place and I hope we'll take it this session – and that's finally passing a constitutional amendment to dedicate funding for the outdoors and conservation. We've come close in past years, but our environment can't wait anymore. I continue to support this important effort and urge you to do so as well.

BETTER EDUCATION

Another fundamental key to making Minnesota better socially and economically is the urgent need to make our schools even better.

Now, you all know that Minnesota is at or near the top in most measures of student performance. Nearly every state would love to have our school performance results.

We're blessed with fantastic educators, engaged parents and, of course, we have above average students.

But nation-leading in student performance isn't good enough anymore. Our students need to be world-leading, not just nation-leading.

SUCCESSFUL SCHOOLS

In any discussion, though, regarding education, the debate about the level of funding consumes most of the oxygen in the room. Very little time gets actually spent on the reforms needed to modernize our education system. So, let me address funding right up-front.

My budget next week will propose an increase of up to four percent per year for our schools for general purposes, plus increases in many special aspects of education funding as well.

But we're not just going to pay for good intentions anymore. We're going to pay for better performance as part of a new "Successful Schools" initiative.

Every district will get a general formula increase of two percent in each of the next two years. Each school will also be eligible to receive an additional two percent per year as a performance bonus if the school achieves or maintains at least a three-star rating in reading and math on their Minnesota school Report Card. That's not a particularly high bar.

My budget will include \$150 million for the bonus portion of this "Successful Schools" initiative. We need to pay for performance and quit enabling schools that don't meet our expectations.

"3R" HIGH SCHOOLS

Another hard reality we must face is this: American high schools are obsolete in their current form.

One of the most forward thinkers of our time, Bill Gates, said this: "... our high schools – even when they're working exactly as designed – cannot teach our kids what they need to know today. Training the workforce of tomorrow with the high schools of today is like trying to teach kids about computers on a 50-year-old mainframe. It's the wrong tool for the times." Close quote.

U.S. students score near the top on international test scores in 4th grade, but by 8th grade our students are about in the middle of the pack and by the end of high school they are near the bottom.

Too many of our high school students today are engaged in academic loitering for much of their high school career. In too many cases, our high school students are bored, checked-out, coasting, not even vaguely aware of their post-high school plans, if they have any, and they are just marking time.

It's costing us a lot of money and it's costing them their future. This is a silent crisis and has the potential to devastate our future prosperity if we don't fix it.

We made some good strides last year, and in proceeding years, but much more needs to be done. Let's make Minnesota the number one state in the nation for reforming high schools by creating "3R" high schools. The three Rs here stand for rigor, relevance, and results.

My budget next week will include \$75 million in funding to encourage high schools to become "3R" schools. This is also a pay for performance deal. They will be required to do a lot. First:

- (1) 3R schools will be required to implement rigorous and relevant courses for all students, including career and technical courses in high-demand fields.
- (2) 3R schools must provide access for all students to programs that provide college credit opportunities.
- (3) In 3R schools, every student, every student, must complete a full year of college while in high school.
- (4) And in 3R schools they must provide opportunities for students to pursue work-based learning and internships.

We hope that every high school will become a 3R high school. But even if they choose not to, the program will be optional, all high schools will still be required to make other changes.

So, our budget will provide additional funding for more schools to provide AP or IB programming for all students in all grade levels.

My budget will also provide funding to transform more schools so they focus on science, technology, engineering, and math. We will also be asking the Legislature to take three additional steps this year: (1) adopt new, more rigorous math standards for all our students; (2) require an individual graduation plan for 8th graders and above that parents will need to sign each year; and (3) require that all students complete four years of a second language in order to graduate from high school.

Now, this may all seem like a big leap, but the bar is very high. I urge you to pass significant high school reform this session.

ONLINE LEARNING

But we also need to change and modernize the way we deliver instruction.

I was told the other day that a majority of teenagers now spend up to 50 percent of their waking hours interacting with a device: televisions, iPods, YouTube, e-mail, text messaging, the Internet, cell phones, video games, digital cameras, and the list goes on and on and grows by the day.

I was with my daughters just the other day at a mall in Eagan and they noticed a cell phone store next to the place we were going into. They begged and pleaded with me to go into the store just to look at some of the new phones, even though they knew we weren't going to be buying one.

Now as you all know, the cell phones of today are not just phones. They're much more, both technologically and socially. I said okay, and they ran ahead of me and into the store with great excitement and glee. When I entered a moment later, they were standing in frozen awe with their mouths open in front of the display containing a "Sidekick III with illuminating features."

It took me a moment to bring them out of what appeared to be some sort of technology-induced trance or coma. Then, I burst their bubble. I told them that Apple had just come out with a new phone and that its makers believe it will leapfrog all other phones and hand-held technology on the market. I jokingly told my kids they had already fallen behind. They were stunned but we spent the next ten minutes talking about the all about the capabilities of the new Apple iPhone. And this is not uncommon for kids of this generation.

Learning and interaction for today's children is profoundly, profoundly different than even a short time ago. In many ways, they communicate, they socialize, and act differently because of technology.

Our education system is behind the times and out of sync with this new reality. Our primary method of instruction is to have adults with dry erase markers lecturing to often

bored students who carry home backpacks so full of paper they look like they could be training to join Will Steger on an Arctic expedition.

We need to move Minnesota into the modern age by making things like more on-line learning opportunities available to our students. If done well, these courses can open world-class instruction in almost any subject to every student in all corners of our state.

To get us there, though, my budget will provide funding to enhance current on-line opportunities, as well as remove the financial barriers for districts wanting to purchase online course work.

ACHIEVE II

All of these initiatives will help students be academically better prepared to go beyond high school. But we also need to do more to get them and their families more financially prepared to go to college.

Last summer, I announced my ACHIEVE proposal to provide two free years of college in Minnesota for top performing students. I continue to think that proposal is a good idea, and urge you to pass it. ACHIEVE provides a powerful incentive for students to study hard throughout their high school career and it increases the likelihood that our most talented students will stay in Minnesota at a time when competition for top talent is more fierce than ever.

I have heard the concerns about this proposal from those who feel ACHIEVE is too focused and too heavily weighted on just top performing students.

So, in the spirit of compromise, I offer you an alternative proposal, I'll call it ACHIEVE II which addresses both preparing for and paying for college. Under this proposal, high school students who take rigorous college level courses while in high school can earn college credit and receive a scholarship that they will be able to use at any college or university in Minnesota. If a student finishes a year of college in high school, they will receive enough money under the scholarship to pay for an average year's tuition and fees at a Minnesota public university regardless of their class rank and regardless of their ACT scores. So it will be open and serve many more students than the original ACHIEVE proposal. This will result in students who take a year of college in high school, they will get at least a free year of college, and the program will benefit many, many students.

70 PERCENT IN THE CLASSROOM

We also need to make sure, though, that education funding as possible reaches the classroom where it matters most. So I again encourage you to pass my proposal requiring that at least 70 percent of the money get into the classroom. We can improve our children's future by improving our education system by driving resources and money into the classroom.

HIGHER ED PERFORMANCE FUNDING

We also need to improve our higher education system. My budget will contain substantial increases for our colleges,

universities and tuition aid programs. For the first time, it will also contain \$50 million in performance bonuses for higher education institutions that achieve clearly defined and obtained strategic goals.

EARLY CHILDHOOD

It's also clear that we need to do more to help our youngest learners. They need to be better prepared for kindergarten and the school years beyond. The payoff can be well worth the investment. There have been a number of early childhood ideas already discussed during the opening weeks of this legislative session.

One of those ideas is all-day kindergarten. I believe all-day K has merit, but it is enormously expensive if it is required for all kids statewide. Its price tag is \$320 million and it would not be targeted to the kids who need it the most. The truth is that children from advantaged backgrounds don't generally have an elementary academic performance problem. In an era of limited resources and seemingly limitless needs, we need to focus and prioritize our efforts and our money.

With all of that in mind, I'm proposing an early childhood scholarship program to provide up to \$4,000 per child for at-risk students to attend a certified kindergarten readiness program of their choice. This will get help to the kids who need it most and, hopefully, it will help close the achievement gap, which we need to work on more. We've made progress, but not nearly enough and not nearly fast enough.

As you can see, we have much work to do in education.

Let's not allow our nostalgia to limit our children's future.

We owe our children their own future, not our past.

BETTER HEALTH CARE

We have other large challenges and opportunities in front of us. One of them is the need to fix our broken health care system. We have a historic opportunity to accomplish real reform. Let's take the journey together by passing my Minnesota Health Connections plan.

Expanding access to health insurance is a priority. But expanding access to a broken system is not a complete solution. We need to have a comprehensive approach that simultaneously focuses on improving access, improving quality, and lowering cost.

Let me start with access. We have a goal that all Minnesotans should be covered by health insurance. This does not mean a single-payer; it doesn't necessarily mean or shouldn't mean that the government takes over the system and pays for all of that coverage. There are many ways to achieve that goal. While we expand access, we also need to fix the underlying system and make sure that our efforts are financially sustainable.

Under current law, without anybody casting a vote, without anyone doing anything, under current law, access to our state-subsidized health care programs will expand to cover

an additional 45,000 Minnesotans this biennium. But we need to do more than that, our first installment for additional access should consist of expanding coverage to all children under age 21, not just 18, with a household income of \$60,000 or less for a family of four.

But we also have to focus on cost containment. Unfortunately, providers and consumers in the current system have little motivation to contain costs.

But market forces can help reduce cost and improve quality. Let me give you an example.

Lasik surgery was introduced about ten years ago. It was priced about \$5,000 per eye and only available in limited locations. After ten years of price and quality wars in a real marketplace, the price has come down to about \$500 an eye, quality has improved, and access has grown dramatically.

So while market approaches may not work for all medical procedures, we know that engaged, motivated consumers are a powerful force in controlling cost, especially when price and quality measurements are easily understood.

As the private market begins to change and implement cost containment strategies, we should study them and apply the best of them, what is working, and apply it to our public programs. I propose MinnesotaCare II, which will take the framework of MinnesotaCare and modernize it to introduce consumer choice and competition so that MinnesotaCare consumers can obtain the benefit of lower premiums along with incentives for making healthy choices.

We will also reduce costs by creating the Minnesota Health Insurance Exchange, to allow uninsured individuals access to health insurance that will lower premium costs by roughly 30 percent.

The Insurance Exchange will also absorb administrative costs for small businesses purchasing insurance and give the employees access to a greater array of insurance products.

Finally, comprehensive reform this year should also move Minnesota toward an interoperable electronic medical records system; overhaul our mental health system; streamline, thank you thank you Representative Greiling, Minnesota's billing and coding systems into a single operation; and advance efforts to pay for better health rather than just procedures provided.

CONCLUSION

As we finish here today, I am reminded of a story about a man of great intellect and great perspective.

David McCullough is one of the premier historians of our time. He's taught us a lot about John Adams, Harry Truman, Teddy Roosevelt, the founding of our nation, and some of the most critical moments in our history.

I heard he recently made a presentation to a very distinguished audience. In the question and answer period, someone asked him which period in American history was most important. He thought for a moment and his simple answer was, "This one, right now."

Looking back is interesting and helpful. But we have to embrace the importance of "right now."

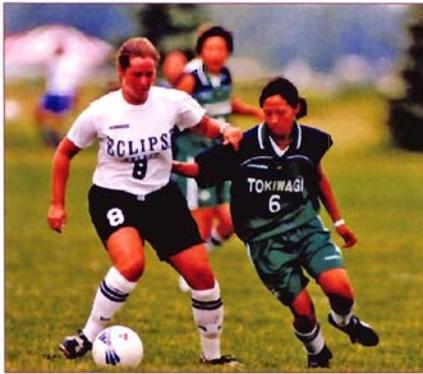
We don't have certainty about what lies ahead for our economy, our national security, or our society. But we do know that the people of Minnesota have chosen the folks in this room to work together and to do our very best to make decisions that lead us towards a better Minnesota and a prosperity for all our citizens.

Our state is filled with wonderful people. Minnesotans are kind, they're generous, hard-working, and they are born innovators. They will certainly do their part if we do ours. Together, let's focus on the future and boldly lead, right now.

Thank you very much. May God bless each of you and may God bless the great state of Minnesota.

Anoka County/Blaine Airport

Major improvements to the Anoka County/Blaine Airport have resulted in a more convenient and functional airport, and have also enhanced general aviation safety, reduced noise, and is spurring economic growth. The east-west runway was expanded to 5,000 feet, making it usable by more planes in more weather conditions. In addition, improved technology is allowing for quieter landings.



SportsTown USA

With an innovative mix of specialized sports training, sports retail shops, restaurants, entertainment venues, sports medicine facilities, and a fitness center, SportsTown USA at the National Sports Center in Blaine will be a regional "sport-tainment" destination. The NSC is home to the largest hockey facility in the world with eight sheets of ice, in addition to already being the largest soccer complex in the world.

*Northstar Commuter Rail *

Scheduled for completion in 2009, the Northstar Commuter Rail line from Big Lake to downtown Minneapolis could carry as many as 10,000 riders a day. Riders can count on a 35-minute commute from Elk River to Minneapolis, whether it's sunny or snowy. In contrast, the typical car commute is 50-70 minutes.



North Metro Harness Initiative

Harness racing comes to Anoka County! Located at the intersection of I-35 and Lake Drive in Columbus Township, the harness track will have a grandstand capacity of 1,400. The project is expected to create 300 new jobs with an annual payroll of \$7.9 million.

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Bridge collapse kills four

20 missing after Minneapolis disaster sends vehicles into river

By the St. Paul (Minn.) Pioneer Press

Article Last Updated: 08/02/2007 06:55:42 AM MDT



Cars are strewn on the collapsed portion of the Interstate 35W bridge, which stretches between Minneapolis and St. Paul, after it collapsed Wednesday, Aug. 1, 2007, into the Mississippi River during evening rush hour. (St. Paul Pioneer Press | Brandi Jade Thomas)

Minneapolis - At least four people died and more than 60 were injured Wednesday when the Interstate 35W bridge over the Mississippi River collapsed, plunging dozens of vehicles into the water.

Officials expect the death toll to rise as the search effort turns to recovery today. Besides the deaths and injuries reported Wednesday, 20 people were missing, authorities said. Today, Police Lt. Amelia Huffman said: "This morning, the medical examiner's office only has four sets of remains." Initial reports of seven people killed were based on the best estimates authorities had Wednesday night, she said.

Witnesses said the bridge was "bumper to bumper" with traffic when it buckled shortly after 6 p.m.

"It was

Bridge Collapse

Watch surveillance video of the actual collapse.

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Watch amateur video of the aftermath.

Watch a morning-after press conference with the Minneapolis police chief.

Watch as witnesses describe the unfolding disaster.

Watch video of the bridge in Minneapolis that collapsed into the Mississippi River.

View more dramatic photos of the Minneapolis bridge collapse.

Watch and listen to a narrative slide show about the collapse, an interview with a school bus survivor and a zoomable satellite image of the scene.

Visit a special section with all the latest videos from Minneapolis.

Related Minneapolis Bridge Collapse

Aug 16:

2 found in bridge collapse; 2 missing
Pedestrian bridge closed near collapse site

Aug 15:

Lack of memorial in Minn. bridge design stirs objections

one of the most tragic nights in the history of Minneapolis," said Mayor R.T. Rybak during a news conference Wednesday night at City Hall.

The 64-foot-high bridge was undergoing maintenance and had a Minnesota Department of Transportation crew on it at the time of the collapse, authorities said. It was unclear Wednesday night the full number of cars or people affected by the collapse.

A school bus was on the bridge at the time it buckled, according to officials. Sixty children were taken from the bus. Up to 10 were transported to area hospitals.

Aerial shots from local television stations showed the entire span of I-35W had crumpled into the river below. Some of the injured were carried up the riverbank, while emergency workers and volunteers tended to others on the ground.

"Obviously, this is a catastrophe of historic proportions for Minnesota," said Gov. Tim Pawlenty.

While authorities didn't rule out any cause Wednesday, they indicated structural failure as the most likely. Federal transportation officials are expected to arrive today to investigate the matter. Officials said they did not suspect foul play.

"It is not likely that this was a terrorist incident," Pawlenty said.

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Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff issued a statement Wednesday night saying there was no indication of terrorism.

Contradictory reports surfaced Wednesday about bridge inspections.

Inspectors in June 2005 reported the bridge was in need of being replaced, according to data from the Federal Highway Administration.

Pawlenty said the bridge's three spans were inspected in 2005 and 2006, and no structural deficiencies were found. The bridge deck was scheduled to be replaced in 2020 at the earliest, the governor said.

Lawmakers said they were not aware of any problems with the bridge.

"The fact MNDOT did not bring that forward and request funding tells me engineers did not have any reason to be concerned about its safety," Rep. Melissa Hortman of Brooklyn Park said. "If they know there was any risk with this bridge, that would be their highest priority with spending dollars."

"We have never sensed there were any troubles with this particular bridge," agreed Rep. Frank Hornstein of Minneapolis. Both are members of the Minnesota Democratic-Farmer - Labor Party.

Hortman speculated that 90-plus-degree heat Wednesday and the above-normal temperatures of the past two summers may have been a contributing factor.

"Did the heat put extra strain on the steel?" Hortman said. "You wonder if this bridge was built to withstand the massive heat we have had this summer."

Contractors were doing concrete, lighting, guardrail and joint repair work on the bridge Wednesday. All but one contractor had been accounted for as of 9 p.m.

The heavily traveled, four-lane bridge gave way at 6:05 p.m., dumping at least 50 vehicles into the water and onto the river's banks, some 60 feet below.

Cars lay smashed in the juts of concrete and submerged in the river as rescue workers and volunteers raced to pull people from the wreckage.

Black pillars of smoke rose from a burning tractor-trailer rig wedged under a collapsed section of concrete.

Janet Stately of Minneapolis was driving south on I-35W from Duluth with her daughter, Brianne. Stately said she exited



Rescue workers gather on the Interstate 35W bridge, which stretches between Minneapolis and St. Paul, after it collapsed Wednesday, Aug. 1, 2007, into the Mississippi River during evening rush hour. (St. Paul Pioneer Press | Scott Takushi)

hope those kids are OK."

Michael Vechell, 25, of Minneapolis was traveling along I-35W heading into Minneapolis when traffic came to a dead stop. When he saw what was happening, he went to help get people out of their cars and later, with others, helped carry injured people to ambulances. He described seeing cars in the river with huge concrete slabs on them.

"It's pretty sad, man," he said.

The steel arch truss bridge was built in 1967 and spanned about 400 feet over the river.

The survivors in Wednesday's accident, pulled from crushed cars and carried from the river, were taken away by emergency personnel and volunteers, loaded on backboards and the back of pickup trucks.

A Minnesota Twins game against the Kansas City Royals went on after the collapse. Today's game, however, was postponed a month.



The Interstate 35W bridge lies in pieces Wednesday evening. Inspectors reported in 2005 that the steel arch truss bridge, built in 1967, needed to be replaced, according to federal data. The governor said, however, that the bridge passed inspections in 2005 and 2006. (AP | David Denney)

onto University Avenue just before reaching the bridge. On the overpass, she heard the cracking of the structure and smoke rising from below.

"I was driving the car, and I screamed when I heard it crack," Stately said. "It's like it went in slow motion. I heard the crack and I saw the cars going straight in. There was not a space between the cars on that bridge. I tried to tell people on the road, 'If you can swim, get down there and help.'"

"I just saw concrete dust and I don't know if it was water flying up in the air," Stately said. "And the noise, I don't even know how to describe it to you."

Stately broke into tears thinking about a school bus with children driving next to her on I-35W before she exited. "I kept screaming, 'There's kids on that bus!'" she said. "I just said, 'That bus is going to go in.' I

Colorado bridges in need of repair

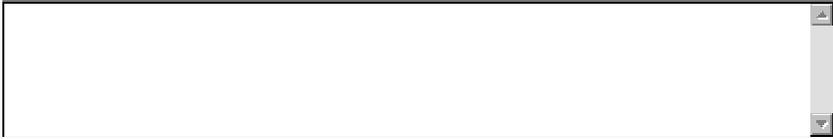
The Colorado Department of Transportation reported in June that 46 bridges in metro Denver are in need of immediate repair and 80 others "may need significant repair in the near term."

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OH YEAH, LETS BUILD OUR NEIGHBORS HOME WHILE OURS BREAKS!!

Yet another reason why Mr. Bush is fighting this war to fill his greedy pockets. Our troops are dying, the resources that are needed to fix our infrastructure here at home (roads, bridges, education, healthcare) are being diverted to Haliburton, Oli execs, friends and family.

Investing in our infrastructure will also create much needed jobs.

I am guilty of all this myself, I am human, greedy. I fully expect Mr. Bush and his crooks to be greedy, especially when they have so much more influence and power!!!!

Posted by [DP](#) at 9:07 PM on August 1
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I'm no fan (!) But you really can't pin this one on Voldemort's Henchman.

Posted by [bandoliers](#) at 9:40 PM on August 1
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I would really like to know what company was in charge of the repairs at the time. As a Civil Engineer at Mines these bridges consist of a lot of fairly simple yet in depth beam analysis calculations that clearly no one did (or at least did with precision) at this construction company. No one seemed to account for the total weight the bridge would be subjected to during rush hour, I really hope someone loses their license over this one because this type of engineering is not acceptable.

Posted by [soqrbrad](#) at 10:16 PM on August 1
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WOW!

Posted by [pauly](#) at 9:42 AM on August 2
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[quote:cb13c7a8ac="soqrbrad"]I would really like to know what company was in charge of the repairs at the time. As a Civil Engineer at Mines these bridges consist of a lot of fairly simple yet in depth beam analysis calculations that clearly no one did (or at least did with precision) at this construction company. No one seemed to account for the total weight the bridge would be subjected to during rush hour, I really hope someone loses their license over this one because this type of engineering is not acceptable. [/quote:cb13c7a8ac]

I agree. The article says that the bridge was under repair at the time. Probably nobody thought to look at permissible loads. I suspect that traffic was routed over one side of the bridge and it created forces and moments that were above the permissible limits. Shoddy construction and repair history might have contributed. Does anybody know when the bridge was built?

Posted by [concerned in Denver](#) at 11:34 AM on August 2
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When was it built? Well the article says....

"The steel-arched bridge, built in 1967, rose 64 feet above the river and stretched 1,900 feet across the water. It was built with a single 458-foot-long steel arch to avoid the need for piers that might interfere with river navigation."

The 8 lane bridge was reduced to 4 lanes for pavement resurfacing (this was the only "construction" taking place)

2 lanes each way may or may not have been a blessing - 8 lanes, cars further spread out.
4 lanes, cars compact at a virtual standstill during rush hour.

Sure makes me wonder about the bridges around Denver, such as the one over Santa Fe. Exposed rebar, documented chunks of concrete crumbling to the road below, etc..

Posted by [phishy](#) at 12:52 PM on August 2
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NOLA KATRINA VICTIMS HUM & QUOT;WE SHALL OVERCOME"

NOLA-Katrina victims and families of 1500 waterboarded, singing "We Shall Overcome".

Posted by [jitenant](#) at 1:44 PM on August 2
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THAT KOOL AID TASTES GREAT!

I see the nut jobs are blaming George Bush for this bridge collapse. The money for this bridge repair would have come from the State of Minnesota, not the federal government. Stop swilling kool aid you idiot!

Posted by [colorado kool aid](#) at 4:40 PM on August 2
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What do you want to bet they rebuild this bridge before they rebuild NOLA?

I feel for the families involved in this tragedy, however, the people in New Orleans and other towns affected by Katrina are still waiting for the government to help.

If they rebuild this bridge first, I foresee an increase in racial tensions across the country. People WILL blame Bush, and for good reason.

If you haven't yet been down New Orleans since Katrina, I suggest you visit. Only then will you understand how the government has failed our own citizens.

More to come...

Posted by [SilverJ](#) at 4:58 PM on August 2
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I request every single one of you reading this post, call each senator and congressman in your home state and DEMAND the checking account of the Congress be CLOSED due to the NSF charges piled up, on account of Iraq and that sand hole.

The checking account subsidised by us, the U.S. taxpayer and from the loans from RED CHINA be re-canted and assigned to UNITED STATES INFRASTRUCTURE USE ONLY!!!!

IF, each and everyone of you will do this, there will be a louder BANG heard in D.C for some course changes, within our country.

Posted by [getsteppin](#) at 5:27 PM on August 2
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BRIDGE OR TOWN?

[quote:ecda4c80f7]What do you want to bet they rebuild this bridge before they rebuild NOLA?
 [/quote:ecda4c80f7]

It's a lot easier to rebuild a single bridge than an entire city, you know.

If you don't believe me, look at the I-10 bridge in NOLA that was heavily damaged by Katrina - it was reopened to traffic in less than five months.

Posted by [On the Other Hand](#) at 5:33 PM on August 2
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I agree that it takes longer to rebuild a city than a bridge.

My point being there is still a ton of work to be done in NOLA. Water and sanitary issues still abound. Yet bush has already promised to rebuild a bridge. What about his promises to New Orleans? How much longer will they have to wait? When I was there it was volunteers and ordinary citizens helping to rebuild. I saw no government agencies rebuilding anything.

We are too busy- building bridges and infrastructure in other countries- to care for our own citizens, many of whom still live without running water and electricity.

The priorities are askew.

Posted by [SilverJ](#) at 5:52 PM on August 2
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Gee, how many bridges and water systems could be repaired and upgraded with all of the money we've dumped into KBR/Halliburton, er, I mean the "war on terror" in Iraq.

Posted by [nanheyangrouchuan](#) at 7:08 PM on August 2
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MINNESOTA BRIDGE COLLAPSE

We live near Rochester, about 70 miles from "the bridge". So far, no one we know was involved in the collapse. I don't think it was solidly covered with traffic when it failed, but an hour earlier it probably was. As for weight distribution, I believe they had 2 lanes open per side.

They are saying it was built in 1967. I'd think that years of temperature extremes and exposure to road salt may have contributed to the failure. Also, in other parts of the Twin Cities area, and in other cities as well, they are rebuilding, extending, enlarging, and adding lanes to freeway systems that 30 years ago looked like they would be able to handle traffic increases far beyond our present time. Not only has traffic increased way beyond most expectations, but trucks have replaced trains for most freight, trucks have gotten longer and heavier, etc. etc. How many other bridges in the country have been prematurely

hammered almost to the same point as this one?
 I'm no civil or mechanical engineer, but some of the "before" pictures of the lower steel structure seem to show support members being held up by long straight spans of steel that have no support directly below what they're holding up, if that description makes any sense. Maybe the vectors and all that stuff work out in the calculations and on the drawings, but it sure looks goofy when it's all in place.
 To those who are whining that the money spent on Iraq contributed to this bridge failure and the rest of our infrastructure problems: If we had never responded to 9/11 beyond going into Afghanistan and mounting a serious war on terror without invading Iraq (thereby saving lots of money), if Bush and the Republican congress had never cut taxes, if instead they had maintained Clinton's military spending cutbacks (which were stupid, to say the least), if Bush had kept taxes up and spending down, thereby building a bigger surplus, which I sometimes wish he had done, or if Gore had been elected and reelected instead of Bush and had continued Clinton's policies - if any or all of that had happened, our national infrastructure would still be in need of repair, New Orleans would still have been flooded (What's dumber than building your city below sea level in hurricane country?) and that bridge would still be in pieces in the Mississippi River. You can bet on it. No one ever gets really excited about these things until they REALLY start to fall apart. Republicans or Democrats or Independents in charge - it makes no difference at all. But it sure makes nice ammunition for political mudslinging, doesn't it?

Posted by '63 Lark at 9:47 PM on August 2
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PLEASE CORRECT YOUR REPORTING--BOTH ENDS OF THIS BRIDGE ARE

Having been a newspaper reporter in the past, I'm having a hard time understanding how the location description of this bridge can be reported so inaccurately. I grew up about six city blocks from the north end of this bridge and the last time I was there (in May 2007) BOTH sides of this I35W bridge were still in MINNEAPOLIS. The north side actually enters an area called SE Minneapolis, which surrounds the University of Minnesota. This section of Minneapolis was originally called St. Anthony Falls which was founded by an ancestor of mine, Ard Godfrey. Please look on a map and correct your reporting. I'm also amazed you would lead with not one, but two stories from the St. Paul Pioneer Press--what's wrong with the Minneapolis Star Tribune? It's office is less than a mile from the south end of this bridge. As you can tell from my comments here, there is little love lost between the Twin Cities.

—Ann Godfrey Holmes

Posted by ephann at 11:07 PM on August 2
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REPUBLICAN RULE

after a generation of increasingly republican rule, with the last 7 years of republican one-party rule, it's a wonder anything in this country still works.

they are thieves, liars and conmen, pure and simple.

Posted by Wes Bestern at 11:39 PM on August 2
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This bridge, by some accounts (and most likely more accurate) should obviously been attended to. City officials now, under very painful and real circumstances, are once again condemning each other because it was not.

Regardless of passing inspection for 2005 & 2006, something went horribly, and painfully wrong here. A husband without his wife, an infant daughter without her Dad - this time, this could have been prevented.

I read the other day that it appears that American can spend millions upon millions of dollars fighting someone else's war in Iraq, but we can spend millions preventing things like this from happening in our own country. There is indeed something wrong with this picture.

Posted by sohayre at 8:28 AM on August 3
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[quote:f3ce510dd8]No one ever gets really excited about these things until they REALLY start to fall apart. Republicans or Democrats or Independents in charge - it makes no difference at all. But it sure makes nice ammunition for political mudslinging, doesn't it?[quote:f3ce510dd8]

Nothing gets done until someone dies...and even then it has to be spectacular.

Mudslinging? Well, what goes around, comes around.

Posted by doh at 11:56 AM on August 3
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**State Representative Melissa Hortman**

377 State Office Building
100 Constitution Ave., St. Paul, MN 55155
(651) 296-4280

For Immediate Release
8/8/2007

For more information contact:
Michael Howard (651-296-8873)

**PRESS RELEASE
I-35W BRIDGE COLLAPSE IS A TRAGEDY THAT UNITES US IN GRIEF**

It has come to my attention comments I made shortly after the collapse of the I-35W Bridge have been taken out of context by some websites and talk radio hosts.

In the hours immediately after the bridge collapse I stated that there were many potential causes to investigate, including terrorism, design flaws, poor maintenance and heat, and that all needed to be fully investigated. The National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) also has said that there are multiple potential causes and that they will examine every possible cause in their investigation, including whether the expansion and contraction associated with Minnesota's extreme temperature swings may have been a factor. The effect of weather, not climate, was my concern, and is one of many issues the NTSB has gathered data on and will consider.

Uncovering the cause of the I-35W bridge collapse in Minneapolis is of critical importance. This process should be thorough, methodical, and explore every potential cause. One week after this tragedy, there are still many unanswered questions. I believe we must focus our resources and efforts on determining the cause of the collapse. We must come together to make the changes necessary to ensure the safety of our bridges, roads, and infrastructure.

This profoundly sad event brings us together in grief and resolve to do all that we can to prevent any such tragedy in the future.

Sincerely,

Melissa Hortman

State Representative

District 47B - Brooklyn Park / Coon Rapids

Room 377, 100 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.

St. Paul, MN 55155

tel. (651) 296-4280

email: rep.melissa.hortman@house.mn

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Anoka-Hennepin

INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT 11



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Friday, January 19th, 2007

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Bullying Essay and Poster Contest 2006-2007

Theme: *Be a Friend. Don't Bully!*

See below for contest instructions!

Be a Friend. Don't Bully!- Essay Contest
2006-2007

Be A Friend. Don't Bully!- Poster Contest 2006-2007



 Have you ever been picked on or called names by a kid who was bigger or stronger than you?

 Have you ever seen a classmate teased or threatened over and over by the same group of kids?

 Do you know someone who's afraid to go out on the playground because of a bully?

Almost everyone has seen someone being picked on by a bully. It's not nice. Bullies can make school an unpleasant place for their victims.

What are some things YOU can do to make your school a place where no one gets bullied?

Create a poster that shows what YOU can do to stop bullying in your school.

Bullies can make life miserable for their victims.

Let's try to stop bullying at our schools and in our communities.

What are some things YOU can do or say to stop bullying in your school and your neighborhood? Describe your ideas in a

Contest Rules and Specifications:

- Eligibility: All students attending Anoka-Hennepin schools are eligible.
- Divisions: Posters will be judged in separate divisions for each grade level in kindergarten through Grade

short essay and enter it in the Anoka-Hennepin Stop Bullying Essay contest.

THEME: Be a Friend. Don't Bully!

Contest Rules:

- All essays are limited to 500 words.
- There are seven judging categories:

Grade 3

Grade 4

Grade 5

Grade 6

Grade 7

Grade 8

Grade 9-12

- Write your essay on only one side of each page.
- Write a title at the top of your essay.
- Staple or paperclip a cover sheet of notebook or plain paper to the front of your essay. Include this information on the cover sheet: Your name, grade, school, home address, home phone, essay title.
- If you include illustrations, they will not be considered during judging.
- You may enter only one essay.
- Entries not meeting these requirements will be disqualified.
- Your essay must be completed and turned in at school by October 13.
- Send grade level winning essays to Karen Dahl/ESC by October 18.

Judging Criteria

Judges will look for an organized beginning, middle and ending; originality, insight, creative ideas; useful ideas; correct spelling and punctuation.

Winners

A winning essay will be selected for each grade at each school to advance to the district level contest. District winners will be recognized by the School Board and their essays will be published on the district Web site and submitted to local newspapers.

12. There will be one high school division.

- Theme: All posters must incorporate the contest theme: **Be a Friend. Don't Bully!** These words must appear on the each poster.
- Size: All posters must be made on 11"x16" paper.
- Paper: Any type of plain white paper may be used for the poster, however, lightweight paper should be mounted on tag board or other self-supporting paper.
- Art Media: Crayons, cut paper, felt tip pens, markers, pencils, pen and ink, etc, may be used to create the poster. Wood, plastic, glass, metal, fabric, and felt should **not** be part of the poster. Collage materials should **not** be used; stencils, stickers, tracings, etc. may **not** be used. Posters must be flat for printshop reproduction purposes.
- Identification: Your name, grade, and school must appear on a separate piece of paper attached to the back of the poster.
- Copyright: Your poster cannot include any copyrighted characters, such as those from comics, cartoons, television programs, newspapers, magazines, etc.
- Deadline: Your poster must be turned in to your school by October 13. Send grade level winning posters to Karen Dahl/ESC by October 18. Posters will not be returned to students.

Judging Criteria

Judges will look for relationship of the poster design to the theme, originality of the poster, quality of artwork, visual impact of poster design, and suitability of poster for printing.

Winners

A winning poster will be selected for each division at each school to advance to the district level contest. District winners will be recognized by the School Board and their posters will be printed for use in

schools.

Bullying Essay and Poster Contest Winners 2006-2007

Bullying Essay and Poster Contest Winners 2006-2007

Congratulations to winners of the district's anti-bullying poster and essay contests. Hundreds of Anoka-Hennepin students participated in the contest, creating colorful posters and writing thought-provoking essays on the theme: "Be A Friend. Don't Bully!" Winners were recognized by the School Board.

Winning essays are posted here and one winning poster at each grade level will be printed and distributed to all schools. Thanks to all staff members who helped make these contests successful.

For those with dial-up Internet connections, enlarged poster images may take a minute or two to load.

Quick Link Index

[Kindergarten & 1st Grade Poster Winners](#)

[2nd & 3rd Grade Poster Winners](#)

[3rd Grade Essay Winner](#)

[4th Grade Essay Winner](#)

[4th & 5th Grade Poster Contest Winners](#)

[5th Grade Essay Winner](#)

[6th Grade Essay Winner](#)

[7th Grade Essay Winner](#)

[6th and 7th Grade Poster Winners](#)

[8th Grade Essay Winner](#)

[8th & 12th Grade Poster Winners](#)

Kindergarten Poster Winner



[\[Click to enlarge\]](#)

Winner is Arien Fritts, McKinley Elementary.

1st Grade Poster Winner



[\[Click to enlarge\]](#)

Winner is Sophia Kassela, McKinley Elementary

[Back to Top](#)

2nd Grade Poster Winner

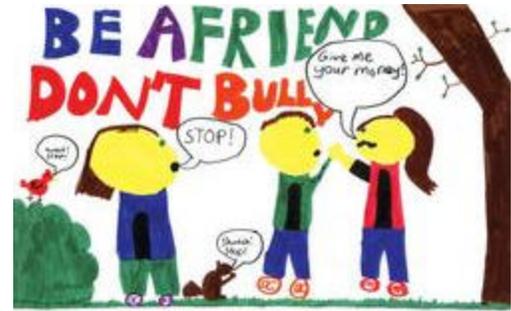


[\[Click to enlarge\]](#)

Winner is Nicole Nawrocki,
Mississippi Elementary.

[Back to Top](#)

3rd Grade Poster Winner



[\[Click to enlarge\]](#)

Winner is Amanda Mastrian, Oxbow
Creek Elementary.

[Back to Top](#)

3rd Grade Essay Winner

Alex Bakritges
Dayton Elementary School

Playground Bullies

Bullies are people who hurt other people in a lot of different ways. Even though I feel they don't want to hurt others, the bullies feel they need to. I think that bullies would like to have friends but they don't know how to make friends or to be a friend.

The playground is a great place for bullies but not for the kids who are getting bullied. The bullies are taking balls and other toys away from kids. Instead of taking toys away from others, the bullies should ask if they can play too. When you let a bully play, you need to show them how to play by setting a good example. Complimenting the players, being a good sport and respecting others, is a great way to show a bully how to act. If the bully cannot play right, then as a team you need to tell the bully that you are done playing for the day. Tell the bully that the team doesn't play that way, because it isn't fair for all the players. Walk away from the bully and play somewhere else. We all need to stick up for each other and work as a team when we are dealing with bullies.

Other examples of bullying on the playground are hitting, kicking, pushing, spitting and tripping. In order to stop the bully from doing these things, we need to stand tall and tell the bully to stop! If we have our friends and peers around us backing us up, the bully should get the message. That message would be to stop bullying everybody. It hurts people's feelings and makes them sad.

I feel if we show the bully the right way to treat people by setting the best example that we can and if we stand up for each other as a group against the bully, this would be a great start to stopping the playground bully.

[Back to Top](#)

4th Grade Essay Winner

Lauren Merriman
Washington Elementary School

Be a Friend. Don't Bully!

Be a friend. Nobody likes bullies. If you see someone getting bullied do you help? Should you help? Or will they just pick on you? No, you help anyway! At least that is what a real friend would do. If this bully just won't stop, tell the teacher. If they get caught, it won't happen again. I think that telling on a bully is kind of being their friend too because after all they bully doesn't want to be someone everybody hates.

Are you a bully? Think about this. If someone is being picked on, do you just make fun of them more? Do you just sit back and watch? Or do you do something? Think. Do you want to be someone that is a friend, of someone that everyone hates? Everybody is mean sometimes when they get mad. Try to contain it. Be if you accidentally say something you didn't mean, be sure to apologize, not just walk away. Don't question it. Being a friend is always the right choice.

Just remember, be a friend. Don't Bully!

[Back to Top](#)

5th Grade Essay Winner

Heather Mohr
Franklin Elementary School

Be a Friend - Don't Bully

It is not okay to bully! A bully is someone who thinks its fun to pick on you or to be mean. No one deserves to be bullied. We should try to prevent it. If you are being bullied it is a pattern. There are three kinds of bullying - physical, emotional and verbal. Physical is when someone is hitting or kicking, etc. Emotional is when someone is calling you names or making fun of you. Verbal is threatening for example: I will kill you or I hate you and ore.

Some ideas to stop bullying are:

When going around make sure you are with friends. Remember there is safety in numbers. Tell a teacher or other responsible adult/guardian. If someone is spreading rumors about you or others don't pass it on. If that person goes around you, tell people that you don't believe it is true. If you see someone is being bullied, get some friends and stand up for them. If you are being bullied, just walk away.

If you know someone who is scared to go to school because of a bully talk to them, their parents or a teacher. Treating individuals with kindness will impact them and they might think twice about bullying. Tell them what bullying does to people. They might consider not bullying anymore. Tell them how you feel so they will stop. I hope this essay helps you next time you run into a bully. Remember there is safety in numbers, to walk away and it's not ok to bully!

[Back to Top](#)

4th Grade Poster Winner

5th Grade Poster Winners



[\[Click to enlarge\]](#)

Winner is Kaci Mlinar, Andover Elementary.

[Back to Top](#)



[\[Click to enlarge\]](#)

Winners are Rayni Pemble, Crooked Lake Elementary.

[Back to Top](#)

6th Grade Essay Winner

Jennifer Monik
Northdale Middle School

Be a Friend - Don't Bully

Have you ever been bullied or have seen someone else being bullied? Did you just stand there with your mouth open, not doing anything? Not doing anything at all to try and stop the bullying that is going on right before our eyes. Well, I think bullying should stop, and I think we are the ones who have to do it. Here are few ways that we could try to decrease the bullying in our school.

Appreciate Diversity

This means that you should recognize the value and worth of individual differences. You should understand that everyone is different in his or her own special way. If someone is different than you, don't try to make him or her change so they'll be more like you and you will have "more in common."

Accept Change

People change in many different ways, along with you, but some changes are more drastic than others. Yet, we always have to remember to appreciate the fact that we are all different. Let changes happen, learn to accept them as they come.

Character

Good character is also very important. It doesn't matter if you're getting bullied or not, you still need to have character. Good character builds up your self-confidence along with your self-concept, your view of yourself. Here are a few good examples of good character traits:

- Have a positive attitude and outlook on life
- Accept your limitations and set realistic goals

- Have a positive attitude view of yourself and others

If you see something going on that is involved with bullying, DO SOMETHING! Don't just stand there with your mouth open thinking, "Oh, no, what should I do?" Do it! Once again, bullying is very hurtful, and we need to do something about it. Remember, "Be a friend, Don't Bully!"

[Back to Top](#)

7th Grade Essay Winner

Taylor Dronen
Northdale Middle School

Be A Friend, Don't Bully

Have you ever seen anyone being threatened by a bully? Some kids are also being teased over and over by the same group of people. Perhaps you are bullying, try and put yourself in that position and ask yourself, "What would I feel like if someone was bullying me?" To make our schools, communities, and public places a fun place to be you should be a friend not a bully.

Bullies can make our lives miserable; they can torture our daily activities. The way I look at it is, "treat other the way you want to be treated." Some kids think, "Well I don't care if someone bullied me, "wait until the day you get teased comes, then go back and realize what you made someone else go through. People often think bullying is the easiest way out of a fight, but there are many more solutions, instead you could consider peer mediation, or talk it over. Bullying just leads to trouble. If you want to be or have friends then think of the qualities you value in someone, usually the nice, responsible, respectful, and honest people make the best people to be with. People don't want friends that bully innocent people.

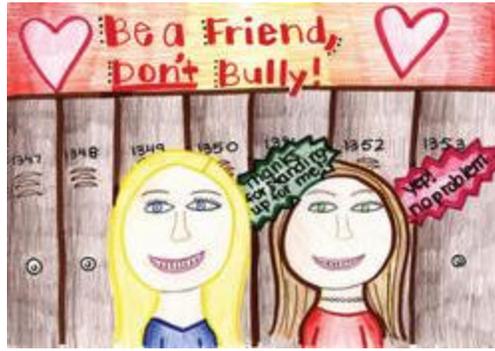
If you are getting bullied the best thing to do is just walk away. If you walk away the chances are they're not going to run after you. Tell an adult or school supervisor if this bullying continues. Another thing to do is firmly "Stop" or "Please leave me alone." These bullies are usually older than the person they are threatening or teasing, they think they are cool but really they are just being more immature. So if the same person keeps coming up to you, or even if it is just one time go tell someone they are guaranteed to help you. Don't fight back to the bully, because otherwise you are just as guilty. Those are just a few ways to stand up for yourself or to avoid more trouble.

Instead of making kids afraid to go to school, their bus stops, public parks, or even around their neighborhood, let's all be friends. That probably sounds difficult but if everyone takes a stand and lends a hand, I believe we can make it happen. Bullies aren't cool like they think they are just set their selves bad reputations. They don't realize how badly they hurt people. Some kids have committed suicide because the kids at his school bullied him. Let's not let that happen to someone at our school. Even when people grow up they will still remember the bully that teased them throughout the school years. It will forever torture them. Let's make this a bully free zone, so next time you want to say something to someone BE A FRIEND NOT A BULLY!

[Back to Top](#)

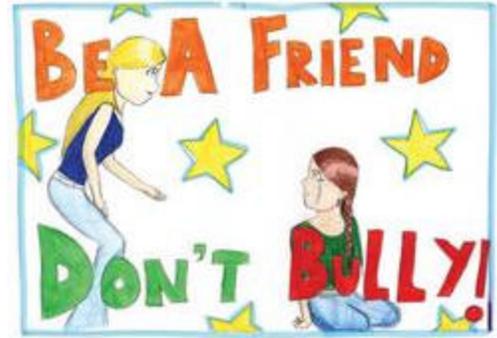
6th Grade Poster Winner

7th Grade Poster Winner



[\[Click to enlarge\]](#)

Winner is Alyssa Ness, Sandburg Middle School.



[\[Click to enlarge\]](#)

Winner is Tara Schaeffie, Fred Moore Middle School.

[Back to Top](#)

[Back to Top](#)

8th Grade Essay Winner

Emily Frohmader
Northdale Middle School

"Be a Friend: Don't Bully!"

That's an excellent guideline to keep in mind when trying to make a peaceful school and community that's bully-free. By being a friend. We create a sense of safety and support for each other.

The first step I can take in making my school and community bully-free is by simply not being a bully. If I am a friend to people, then there are no problems with bullying.

Another thing to do is stick up for someone if they are being bullied. It is very painful to have someone bully you and not be stood up for.

Strength in numbers is very important and if friends team up together to stand up against bullies, we can effectively reduce the amount of harassment and teasing we have in our school and community.

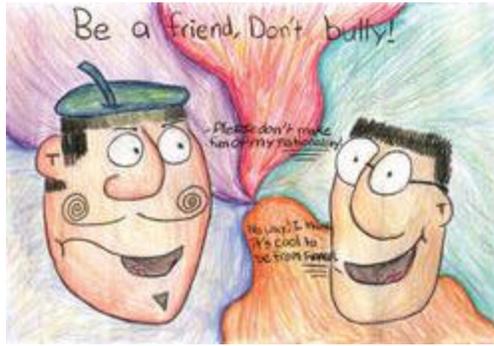
My third idea for stopping bullies is by encouraging kids and teens to participate in sports, music, and other activities. When you're busy doing things that are constructive, you build positive friendships, When you have good friends, you can support each other and stay away from dangerous situations.

In conclusion, we can all work together to help end bullying by simply not doing it, standing up for people, and by doing positive things with your time.

[Back to Top](#)

8th Grade Poster Winner

12th Grade Poster Winner



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Winner is Megan Eide, Sandburg Middle School.

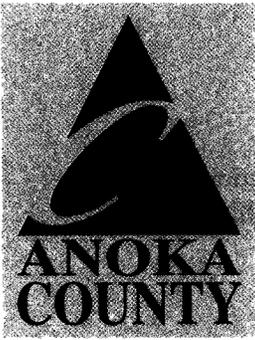
[Back to Top](#)



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Winner is Meghan Hendrickson, Anoka High School.

[Back to Top](#)



COUNTY OF ANOKA

OFFICE OF COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

GOVERNMENT CENTER
2100 3RD AVENUE • ANOKA, MINNESOTA 55303-2265
(763) 323-5700

June 13, 2007

DENNIS D. BERG - CHAIR
County Board of Commissioners

To the Anoka County Delegation:

I am writing to the members of the Anoka County Legislative Delegation to express disappointment that so many important issues fell to the wayside this past legislative session and to point out some of the consequences of the lack of passage on key issues important to the county. This is a somewhat lengthy communication, but I hope you can take the time to review the points, just in case there is a special session that may provide the opportunity to address some of these issues. Most of these were in omnibus bills as follows:

Bonding Bill

Northstar Commuter Rail release of bond fund language. This provision was in the first and second bills. No additional moneys were being sought, but a language change was included that would allow release of the state money before the Full Funding Grant Agreement was awarded by the federal government. The Federal Transit Administration (FTA) review process has taken longer than anticipated and construction must start this summer to stay on schedule for the fall 2009 opening of the service. This is a common occurrence in these federal projects, but change in the original bonding language from past years was needed to allow this to occur. An emergency meeting of the Northstar Corridor Development Authority Executing Committee and the affected regional rail authorities has been held and Anoka, Hennepin, and Sherburne County Regional Rail Authorities have agreed to jointly loan the state \$45.9 million to allow the project to move forward until the approval is received sometime this fall from the FTA.

Forensic Lab at \$2.5 million in the first bill and \$2 million in the second bill. This was to fund the first phase of the lab that was to be included in the public safety complex on Bunker Lake Boulevard. This facility would provide forensic laboratory services for three counties. Construction was to start this fall. The board will need to discuss whether the whole project is delayed a year.

Omnibus Tax Bill

County property tax aid in the amount of \$13 million. These are ongoing state aids to assist counties in providing state mandated services.

Sales tax exemption for commuter rail purchases. A three-year effort to bring parity to other transit types, as transit buses and light rail vehicles already receive this exemption.

Fridley Station TIF. This provision allowed the City of Fridley to utilize tax increment financing tools to construct the tunnel for its future station. Burlington Northern has requested that this part of the delayed station construction be completed before service starts on the line.

June 13, 2007

Page 2

Environmental Response Fund. This allows the use of a modest surcharge on property transactions to fund clean up of polluted lands so redevelopment can occur. Ramsey and Hennepin already have this authority. Anoka, Dakota and St. Louis Counties were seeking similar authority.

Omnibus Transportation Bill, HF 946

Also attached is a memorandum prepared by Anoka County Engineer Douglas Fischer outlining the consequences of the failure of the legislature to enact a comprehensive transportation funding package this year. In addition to the loss in highway dollars, the metro sales tax provision, which corridor counties supported, would have provided significant long-term property tax relief for the Northstar Commuter Rail project as the local rail authorities have been asked to provide 50 percent of the operating capital for that service, as there is no dedicated state source of dollars for rail operations. The estimates for Anoka County alone are \$1.4 million a year.

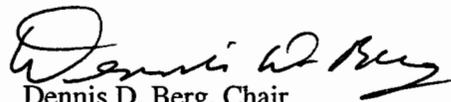
The 2007 allocation from CSAH was \$8.3 million for Anoka County. The County Board also levied an additional \$20 million from the property tax to fund transportation projects. This is 17 percent of the total county property tax levy. In a perfect world, these two totals should be reversed with CSAH paying the biggest share, not property taxes.

The third page of Doug Fischer's letter discusses ways on revamping our budgeting and transportation priority process to most effectively target our limited resources. You should be aware; our informal surveys are revealing that many counties have been approached by MnDot to "front" the cost of improvements on state trunk highways as Anoka County is currently doing for the Hanson overpass on Minnesota Trunk Highway 10. This is another sign of the critical juncture the state is in attempting to fund its own highway system.

I am aware some pollsters report that transportation does not rank high as a priority for citizens. I would suggest if you used the words *congestion relief* you would get an entirely different response. Our mutual constituents have, and will have ever increasing frustrating, unsafe, costly commutes, if nothing is done. We owe it to them, and I believe it is part of our responsibility as elected officials to provide a safe, efficient transportation system.

I appreciate your consideration on these issues and welcome any opportunity to discuss these with you further.

Sincerely,



Dennis D. Berg, Chair
Anoka County Board of Commissioners

DB:tp
Enclosures

cc: Anoka County Board of Commissioners
Jon Olson, Public Services Division Manager
Steve Novak, Governmental Services Division Manager
Lona Schreiber, Intergovernmental Coordinator
Doug Fischer, Anoka County Engineer

Thread-Index: 7001B201GE5EV0Wj0m420m0t0r1qma
From: "Tom Snell" <Tom@metronorthchamber.org>
To: <h.hamilton@microcontrol.com>

Now Harold;

Really a snow job?

First, there were 24 people in attendance not 15. Please give us credit in the next Watchdog issue for the real attendance figures. The fact is, the Democrats are in power now; and Hortman along with Dettrich are powerful legislators. We need to keep a respectable line of communication open with them.

My belief is it never hurts to say something positive about our elected officials. If you look back several months, you will notice that our PAC endorsed DeLaForest and not Hortman.

I still like the Watchdog and admire your uncompromising positive pro-business positions.

Keep up the good work, but please retract the 15 number and e-mail a correction stating the actual turnout was 24.

Tom Snell