

E-mail Update 1/4/08

In This Issue:

1. Taxpayer Zero Award.
2. El Tinklenberg Gets National Attention.
3. A Fair Trade.

1. Taxpayer Zero Award.

Like last year, the nominating committee was overwhelmed with a cornucopia of deserving candidates for the prestigious “Zero” award. There was certainly no shortage of tax-and-spend-feather-my-nest-while-gouging-the-taxpayer bandits who could have legitimately claimed the prize. This is Anoka County, after all. Steve Novak, Melissa Hortman, Kathy Tingelstad, Dan Erhart, Dennis Berg, Scott LeDoux, and El Tinklenberg all made strong bids this year. But, alas, only one person can ascend the heights and claim this ignoble crown.

Before unveiling the winner, the committee has decided to give a window into its deliberations by revealing the runner-up. Without further ado, the envelope, please.

And the runner-up for 2007 is.....state Representative Meli\$\$\$a Hortman. Like many of her DFL legislative colleagues, Rep. Hortman went hog-wild in 2007 supporting, and authoring, a variety of tax increases because, well, a \$2 billion dollar state budget surplus just isn’t enough. When it comes to the family budget versus the government budget, taxpayers know where this silver spoon, trust fund wunderkind stands. Her “let them eat cake” attitude propelled her candidacy to the top, almost.

In support of her runner-up status, the committee need not even reference Hortman’s voting record. A brief review of the bills she authored provides ample and irrefutable evidence that she has more than earned her place in the rarified air of the super-taxers.

Hortman authored bills to raise transportation taxes, expand the sales tax to things like underwear, and authored a bill to raise mortgage and deed taxes, as if times weren’t hard enough these days in the real estate sector.

Okay, so you say that there are many other legislators who have equally poor fiscal records. True, but Hortman rose to crème-de-la-crème status for two other reasons.

The first is her rank, overpowering phoniness and insincerity. This self-described “moderate” is far from it. Back home in the district, she shrewdly cultivates a benign “sensible center” image. Down at the Capitol, she has supported tax and fee increases that sap more and more dollars from the pockets of the folks she is charged to represent. Of course, this two-faced routine is nothing new in the world of politics. But the committee has to give recognition to this relative newcomer who has already earned her PhD. from the Slick Willie Institute for Pain Detection.

Second, Hortman adopted a true bunker mentality in 2007. Long gone are the bi-monthly town hall meetings in Coon Rapids and Brooklyn Park. These meetings have been replaced, apparently, by interviews with Lori Sturdevant and penning self-serving news columns.

Now, on to the winner.

Our Taxpayer Zero should really be no surprise. In fact, the award could have been a lifetime achievement award. The committee was unanimous – and emphatic - in its selection.

The winner: Anoka County Commissioner Dan Erhart.

The Godfather of the Good Ol' Boy network had himself a pretty good year in helping himself to your money. Sure, there were some defeats in his quest to raise your taxes, but his overall record is one to be admired by big government devotees the world round.

Take the Vikings stadium, for example. While some would call the ultimate failure of the stadium a defeat, that view would be shortsighted. While Erhart didn't achieve the sales tax increases he so feverishly pursued (a tax increase with no referendum, mind you), he did manage to blow through nearly a cool million in the process. That million very likely bought some nice sweetheart consulting contracts as well as a few upscale dinners.

Second, 2007 was the year Erhart's Folly (aka Northstar rail) cleared its last major hurdles. Anoka County taxpayers got a taste for what's to come when the County doubled the regional rail tax levy for 2008. Thanks to Erhart, taxpayers are soon to own a train that is about 50% over budget and half the route of what was promised. Taxpayers are soon to own a \$320 million thingy that will move only 2,000 each rush hour starting in 2009. Moreover, there will be million upon millions in operating subsidies as far as the eye can see.

In some respects, Erhart's award is also a bit of a nostalgia vote. Yes, Danny Boy had a very good year, but it wasn't as bountiful as years past, when the County was his fiefdom. After suffering some stinging defeats, most notably the stadium and the Ron Jerich termination, Erhart's influence is on the wane. Before the Tax and Spend torch is passed to a new generation (see above), the committee wanted to recognize a man who has visited so much damage on local taxpayers for so many years.

Enjoy the award, Mr. Erhart. You truly deserve it.

2. El Tinklenberg Gets National Attention.

Off again, on again congressional candidate Elwyn Tinklenberg got some unwanted recognition this week when a national widely read political newsletter bestowed upon him a dubious honor.

The Rothenberg Political Report recognized Tinklenberg with its Greatest Indecision award for his constant dallying with respect to the 6th Congressional District race.

Said Rothenberg:

The winner: Almost an impossible choice here. Some couldn't make a decision at all. Some kept changing their minds. How do these folks ever buy furniture? But the award has to go to Tinklenberg, who for the second cycle in a row reversed himself. This time, he has reversed himself twice, and the year isn't over yet.

Congrats, El!

3. A Fair Trade.

With the Iowa Caucuses in the history books, it would be appropriate to begin commenting upon the various positions the major candidates have taken on the campaign trail.

Among the major contenders, none have attacked free trade and embraced protectionism more than John Edwards and Barak Obama. Edwards has been the more vociferous zealot, but Obama actually has a chance to garner his party's nomination.

And since Senator Obama is obviously an intelligent man, we can only conclude that his advisors have failed him in not educating the senator regarding the benefits of free trade.

Perhaps the good senator should take a look at a recent Cato Institute white paper that conclusively demonstrates that free trade policies have strengthened, not harmed, American workers. The anti-free trade rants may make for good politics, but it's poor public policy.

Obama and other aspiring Oval Office occupants can click here:

<http://www.freetrade.org/node/782>

E-mail Update 1/11/08

In This Issue:

1. Paying Your Fair Share.
2. The Folly of Punishing "Big Business."
3. Public Service: A Bad Deal?
4. Tyranny in Columbia Heights.
5. Saint Francis Goes Back to Kindergarten.

1. Paying Your Fair Share.

With an election year upon us, there will be no shortage of candidates who will play the class warfare card, arguing that the "rich" are not paying "their fair share" and that candidate X will make things right by sicking government on these capitalist pigs.

But, alas, facts can be inconvenient little buggers. The Watchdog has already demonstrated that income taxes in Minnesota already fall mainly on the wealthy.

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

Now comes a study by the non-partisan Congressional Budget Office (CBO) that proves empirically that the wealthy pay an enormous share of all federal taxes. (Kudos to our friends at the Taxpayers League of Minnesota for reporting on this issue as well.)

According to the CBO, the top 5% of wealthiest households pay about 60% of all federal taxes. Moreover, the lowest household income quintile pays only 4.3% of all federal taxes.

If that isn't a progressive tax system, we don't know what is. The wealthy are more than paying their fair share, although we realize that will never be enough those who demagogue the politics of envy.

<http://www.cbo.gov/ftpdocs/88xx/doc8885/EffectiveTaxRates.shtml>

2. The Folly of Punishing "Big Business."

Of course, it is an article of faith amongst the Class Warriors that corporations are greedy, soulless monsters that exploit the proletariat for gains that accrue only to owners of the means of production. Hence, it is the role of government to keep these corporations in line by taxing the snot out of them so government can rake in some dough to "level the playing field" and create some nanny state programs.

Really? In describing its methodology, the CBO noted that it included EMPLOYER paid payroll taxes in calculating the household tax burden. This is so because it is a well-

settled economic principle that these employer-paid taxes are passed along to employees in the form of lower wages.

Moreover, the CBO acknowledges that some economic models also conclude that, over the long-term, corporate income taxes are also passed along to employees, at least in part, in the form of lower wages.

It's not really hard to grasp the concept that corporations are often times forced to pass along costs, either by raising the price of their goods and services, or by cutting costs – including the cost of labor.

Contrary to the creed of the Class Warriors, those greedy business owners actually have an incentive to pay good wages and benefits precisely because of free markets. When an employee is free to sell his labor to any employer, employers seek to attract and retain quality human capital by offering good wages and benefits. In other words, when we cut corporate taxes, the benefits will be passed along to employees, just like the burdens. If our presidential candidates want to boost the quality of life for American families, they can start by offering policies that reduce corporate tax burdens, not raise them.

<http://www.cbo.gov/ftpdocs/88xx/doc8885/EffectiveTaxRates.shtml>

3. Public Service: A Bad Deal?

Like the Class Warriors, there is no shortage of politicians and union bosses who pander to government employees by telling them, and those who pay their wages, that working for government is tantamount to indentured servitude and, conversely, everyone working in the private sector is filthy rich and much better off.

Ugh. Let's go over some data one more time.

Take the Anoka-Hennepin School District. Teachers in that district work 187 days per year. The top of the pay scale is about \$77,000. There is also a generous defined-benefit retirement package. In addition, the employer pays 100% of health and dental premiums.

At the state level, take a look at the collective bargaining agreement between the Middle Management Association union and the state with respect to time off. A senior union member accrues 234 hours of vacation and 208 hours of sick leave per year. Combined with 20 (yes, 20) paid holidays, that equates to over 75 days of paid time off each year.

<http://www.doer.state.mn.us/lab-rel/pdfs/0709/2007-2009%20MMA.pdf>

Furthermore, the magazine "Governing" had a recent article that supports the proposition that public sector employees get benefits that are rarely, if ever, seen in the private sector.

<http://www.governing.com/archive/2007/dec/benefits.txt>

Now the Watchdog will concede that public service isn't a path to wild riches (unless you're Steve Novak). On the other hand, it must also be admitted that working for government is a pretty good deal.

4. Tyranny in Columbia Heights.

The city fathers in Columbia Heights have managed to stay off the Watchdog's watch list so far, but they certainly earned some ink this week.

According to watchdogs in the area, the city council recently authorized the funding of a community center even though the community center had been voted down in a recent special election called just one month after a general election. This time, of course, there will be no citizen referendum.

Talk about a lack of respect for the humble taxpayer! It looks like the city council borrowed a page out of the county commissioner playbook on this one.

Columbia Heights taxpayers can contact their council here:

http://www.ci.columbia-heights.mn.us/city_council/council_members.asp

More information:

<http://www.mnsun.com/articles/2008/01/03/opinion/fo03letters.txt>

Editor's Note: Since the city has yet to post the minutes of the relevant meeting, the Watchdog has not fully verified all details of this matter.

5. Saint Francis Goes Back to Kindergarten.

The recent trials and tribulations of Councilman LeRoy Schaffer have been well documented

(http://abcnewspapers.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1318&Itemid=26).

While the Watchdog has no opinion on the matter, the city council took the strange step recently of adopting a childish "code of conduct" apparently aimed at Schaffer. Among the "rules" are admonitions to "praise in public and critique in private." Council members must not "undermine" the decisions of the majority.

Puhleeze! Politics is a contact sport for big boys and girls, folks. Intense, public debate and heavy criticism come with the territory. It's not pre-school.

Unless Schaffer broke the law, he answers to no one except one higher authority: the voters. And that's as it should be.

http://abcnewspapers.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1420&Itemid=26

E-mail Update 1/18/08

In This Issue:

1. Bond, Timothy Bond.
2. The Per Diem Trough.
3. Local Government Lobbying Report.
4. Federal Government Credit Rating to Drop?

1. Bond, Timothy Bond.

As Watchdogs know, the even number years at the legislature are devoted primarily to passing a bonding bill, which is essentially a bill that issues debt to pay for capital improvement projects. (Click here for a primer on state bonding: <http://www.house.leg.state.mn.us/fiscal/files/ibbond07.pdf>).

The chronology of a bonding bill calls for the governor to release his bonding recommendations just prior to the start of the legislative session in February.

This week, Governor Pawlenty did just that, releasing recommendations that, on the whole, are fiscally responsible and reflect projects of statewide significance.

Pawlenty's recommendations come in at just over \$1 billion, and are essentially devoid of the local projects for which bonding bills have become notorious.

Having said that, there are two turds in the bonding punch bowl.

The first is a \$70 million bonding request to begin planning the Central Corridor Light Rail Line. If passed, this will be the white elephant gift that keeps on taking. The line, which is but a trolley running between Minneapolis and Saint Paul, has a projected cost of \$1 billion dollars. Rest assured, if the estimate is a cool billion today, cost overruns will push it to at least \$1.5 billion before it's all said and done. Heck, this project makes Northstar rail look fiscally sound!

The second turd is a \$40 million request for an upgrade to the Duluth hockey arena. Please, governor. The state has a \$373 million deficit and problems with core functions like transportation. An upgraded hockey arena is hardly a priority now (or ever, for that matter).

Speaking of transportation, the governor devotes nearly \$250 million to roads and bridges, a record amount.

Moreover, the Governor resisted nearly every local pork barrel project. Among some of the local projects "With statewide significance" that were axed:

- \$2.3 million for Anoka County for a bike trail;
- \$10 million for impoverished Burnsville to get an arts center;
- \$13 million for Crookston to move an ice arena;

- \$1.5 million for Worthington to build a fire station.

http://www.budget.state.mn.us/budget/capital/2008/project_funding_summary_080115.pdf

<http://www.budget.state.mn.us/budget/capital/2008/gov/index.shtml>
Now we wait to see what the House and Senate will come up with.

2. The Per Diem Trough.

2007 was a banner year for our legislators and their successful attempts to pass increases for themselves without having to actually vote on the matter. Instead, the DFL-led House and Senate each had a small committee increase per diem payments that apply to all legislators. Last year, a senator could claim up to \$96 in daily per diem while a House member can collect up to \$77. These increases, combined with the DFL turning the legislature into a full-time job, has had the perverse result of some legislators collecting more in per diem and other payments than they receive in salary!

This week, KSTP was the first news organization to report on 2007 year-end per diem totals for the legislature.

In the North Metro, state Rep. Kathy Tingelstad (<http://www.house.leg.state.mn.us/members/members.asp?district=49B>) led all area legislators with nearly \$13,000 in per diem collections in 2007.

Kudos go to state Rep. Paul Gardner (<http://www.house.leg.state.mn.us/members/members.asp?district=53A>) who was the North Metro taxpayer hero with \$3,640 in per diem.

In the Senate, Coon Rapids' own Leo Foley (http://www.senate.leg.state.mn.us/members/member_bio.php?mem_id=1013&ls=85) helped himself to over \$16,000 in per diem. Foley, who is also an employee of Anoka County, must feel underpaid by the county.

Senator Ray Vandever (http://www.senate.leg.state.mn.us/members/member_bio.php?mem_id=1145&ls=85) was the North Metro low man with just over \$9,000 collected last year.

<http://kstp.com/article/stories/S305876.shtml?cat=1&v=1>

3. Local Government Lobbying Report.

The Office of the State Auditor recently released its annual report on what local units of government spend on lobbying. The report is of special import to Watchdogs because Anoka County is usually amongst the biggest spenders, thanks in part to sweetheart deals for Good Ol' Boys who need an allowance from Papa Erhart.

This year was no surprise, with Anoka County coming #6 amongst all Minnesota counties, cities, school districts, and other units of local government.

In 2006, the county reported spending over \$130,000 on lobbying activities. This amount, while troubling, should be taken with a grain of salt. In its 2005 report, the state Auditor noted that lobbying expenses are likely understated, since local jurisdictions self-report and have every incentive to BS when comes to their numbers.

Moreover, the \$130,000 is only the county. When the Regional Rail Authority and the Housing and Redevelopment Authority are included, the total comes to nearly \$263,000.

http://www.osa.state.mn.us/reports/gid/2006/lobby/lobby_06_report.pdf

4. Federal Government Credit Rating to Drop?

Starting in 1917, Moody's Investor Service (www.moody.com) has given U.S. government treasury notes the highest "triple a" rating.

This week, Moody's warned that the U.S. may lose that rating if it doesn't reign in the outrageous increases in entitlement spending. That's what a \$9 trillion IOU will do to your credit.

It's about time citizens got serious about federal spending. The federal government has leveraged us to the hilt and compromised our sovereignty by selling mountains of debt to foreign investors, mainly China and the Oil Emirates. While this issue ought to be high on any voter's priority list, it sadly appears to be down the list near the bottom.

Witness what has happened to Congressman John Kline. Declaring that reform would start with him, Kline and a handful of other courageous members of Congress declared that they would not seek or accept pork barrel earmarks.

Instead of being hailed for his leadership, Kline was roundly criticized by the usual local government suspects for not bringing home the bacon.

What these spending hogs don't understand is that Kline is trying to give his constituents the best gift he possibly can. Namely, a fiscally responsible government that hasn't sold our children and grandchildren down the river to the Chinese for bridges to nowhere and benefits for illegal aliens.

<http://www.anokacountywatchdog.com/mngovt/2008/01/01.08.08%20STrib,%20Kline's%20spurning%20of%20earmarks%20has%20cost.pdf>

E-mail Update 1/25/08

In This Issue:

1. The Ol' Bait and Switch.
2. Thought Northstar Rail was Expensive?
3. Town Hall Meetings on Education.
4. Legislative Scorecard.
5. Quotes of the Week.

1. The Ol' Bait and Switch.

For all you thought the Northstar rail nightmare was over just because federal funding has been secured, guess again. This week's news proves that when you give the Good Ol' Boys a \$320 million check, the games never end.

It was revealed this week that the Good Ol' Boys are now seeking money for Northstar stations in Ramsey, Coon Rapids, and Fridley.

Is it a coincidence that this development comes just a month after the federal government announced that it had given final approval to the project?

Remember that federal funding for commuter rail is wholly dependent upon the project falling within cost-benefit parameters. Moreover, overall project cost as well commuter travel time savings are key criteria. Thus, a reduction in stations saves money and reduces the time it takes the train to run from the point of origination to the terminus.

Thus, it appears that the Northstar Corridor Development Authority and Anoka County had two rail plans. One that would pass federal cost-benefit scrutiny and one that would be substituted once federal funds had been secured.

Where funding would come from for these stations is a whole other story. Watchdogs are already familiar with the Ramsey Town Center debacle, where public and private money were squandered attempting to create a downtown out of thin air. A rail station would be one more expensive earring adorning the face of this pig.

<http://www.startribune.com/local/north/13912056.html>

Check out this blog for more information on Ramsey:

<http://zaetsch.blogspot.com/>

2. Thought Northstar Rail was Expensive?

Who can be content spending someone else's money on one rail line when there is an empire to build? After all, pursuing other people's money can be a career in and of itself (right, Elwyn?).

This week, the long-awaited study regarding the viability of the Duluth tourist train arrived. And would you believe it's projected to cost \$400 million, just to build, excluding the cost of the stations? Who would have thought Dan Erhart and Good Ol' Boys could find a rail project more expensive than Northstar? But they did, by golly.

Added together the cost of both lines comes to \$720 million, with cost overruns running and running, even as you read this. \$720 million could replace a few bridges and pour a bit of asphalt, eh? (By the way, you can ride the Greyhound to Duluth for about \$27).

The report also notes that track improvements would be needed so the tourist train can race northward at 110 miles per hour. No doubt, that's just what the citizens of Andover and Oak Grove want – a train blasting through their semi-rural neighborhoods at NASCAR speeds.

Also, don't be fooled by the "study" claiming that the rail line will create jobs, expand the tax base, solve world hunger, and cure the common cold. The study is funded by people who have a vested interest in getting money to build the line.

When it comes to this rail business, here's the deal:
If Dan Erhart fools the taxpayers once, shame on Erhart.
If Dan Erhart fools the taxpayers twice, shame on the taxpayers.

<http://www.startribune.com/local/north/14014991.html>
<http://www.startribune.com/local/north/13911266.html?page=2&c=y>

3. Town Hall Meetings on Education.

State Representative Meli\$a Hortman has emerged from her bunker and will hold a town hall meeting with state Senator Leo Foley regarding education.

The meeting will be held February 4th at 4:30 p.m. at the Caribou Coffee located at HWY 252 and Brooklyn Boulevard in Brooklyn Park.

This is your chance to speak with these legislators regarding education. It is a great opportunity to ask why their party passed an education bill so harmful to our suburban schools while enriching Minneapolis schools.

State Rep. Kathy Tingelstad will also host a similar town hall meeting on January 29th at 4:30 p.m. at the Caribou Coffee in the Riverdale Mall in Coon Rapids.

See you there, Watchdogs!

<http://www.cariboucoffee.com/locations/locations.asp?state=mn>

4. Legislative Scorecard.

Our friends at the Taxpayers League of Minnesota (TLM) must be pretty busy these days. Their legislative scorecard, the gold standard in Minnesota politics, is some 5 months late.

But that's okay. While we await a belated publication of the TLM scorecard, Watchdogs can peruse the recently released 2007 legislative scorecard from the Legislative Evaluation Assembly (LEA). While the TLM scorecard has a strict focus on fiscal issues, the LEA scorecard is a mix of fiscal and social vote analysis.

In the North Metro, a number of legislators scored well:

Chris DeLaForest (R-Andover) (92%)
Tom Hackbarth (R-Oak Grove) (92%)
Bob Dettmer (R-Forest Lake) (85%)

Of course, some also were bottom dwellers, earning "zero" scores:

Melissa Hortman (DFL-Brooklyn Park) (so much for the "moderate" label).
Kate Knuth (DFL-New Brighton)
Carolyn Laine (DFL-Columbia Heights)
Tom Tillberry (DFL-Fridley)

To see the entire scorecard, click here:

<http://www.mnlea.org/2007report.pdf>

5. Quotes of the Week.

"People only insist that a debate stop when they are afraid of what might be learned if it continues."

George F. Will

That quote fits the Northstar gang like a velvet glove.

<http://www.startribune.com/opinion/commentary/13906356.html?page=2&c=y>

"The worst thing to ever happen to fish, duck and pheasant habitat is corn-based biofuels."

University of Minnesota Economics Professor Ford Runge

Too bad many environmentalists are wasting time on the global warming hoax instead of focusing on the ethanol disaster at our front door.

<http://www.startribune.com/sports/outdoors/13909011.html>

E-mail Update 2/1/08

In This Issue:

1. Precinct Caucuses.
2. The Scorecard has Landed (Sort of).
3. Pigs (Six Different Ones).
4. Raising Taxes is Bad (Reason 456).
5. Retirement Watch.

1. Precinct Caucuses.

If you've been in political hibernation this winter, it's time to wake up. The 2008 election season is upon us, like it or not, and precinct caucuses are just around the corner – next Tuesday, in fact.

This is your opportunity, Watchdogs, to get involved and change your government for the better. It's time to drop the excuses, get off the couch, and prepare for November. This fall, Minnesotans will elect a president, a U.S. Senator, all eight Congressional seats, and all 134 seats in the Minnesota House. So yes, the stakes are high.

You can find information on precinct caucuses, including locations, here:
<http://www.sos.state.mn.us/home/index.asp?page=886>

Now, this is the official web site of the secretary of state, so you run the risk of ending up on Mark Ritchie's campaign mail list if you visit (just kidding, we think).

2. The Scorecard has Landed (Sort of).

The squeaky wheel gets the grease, it is said. And, yes, we here at the Watchdog can be ornery, cantankerous, and even a bit peevish. After all, we're not a social organization.

Last week, we called out our good friends at the Taxpayer's League for failing to timely publish their legislative scorecard. We did so because that scorecard is the gold standard in legislative accountability and clearly demonstrates which legislators "walk the walk" on fiscal issues.

In response, the League has furnished us with an advance copy of the 2007 legislative scorecard. We don't want to give too much away, but we will publish the names of North Metro legislators who received a 100% "Best Friend of the Taxpayer" score and those who managed to rack up a perfect "zero" by failing to support the beleaguered taxpayer on a single scored vote.

"Best Friends of the Taxpayer":

Rep. Kurt Zellers (R-Maple Grove)

Rep. Tom Emmer (R-Delano)

Rep. Chris DeLaForest (R-Andover)

Taxpayer “Zero” award:

Sen. Don Betzold (DFL-Fridley)

Sen. Leo Foley (DFL-Coon Rapids)

Sen. Satveer Chaudhary (DFL-Fridley)

Rep. Meli\$\$a Hortman (DFL-Brooklyn Park) Rep. Kate Knuth (DFL-New Brighton) Rep.

Carolyn Laine (DFL-Columbia Heights) Rep. Mike Nelson (DFL-Brooklyn Park) Rep.

Tom Tillberry (DFL-Fridley)

On another very disappointing note, Rep. Kathy Tingelstad (R-Andover) scored the worst among Republicans with a decidedly taxpayer un-friendly score of 27%.

Look for the League to release the full scorecard soon.

www.taxpayersleague.org.

3. Pigs (Six Different Ones).

Citizens Against Government Waste (CAGW) is one of Washington’s premier taxpayer watchdogs (pun intended). CAGW annually produces a number of resources that keep taxpayers informed, including a “Porker of the Year” award.

This week, six finalists were announced for this dubious award, including one of Minnesota’s native sons. Rep. Jim Oberstar, who becomes more partisan, bitter, and hostile with each passing year, made the ballot with his attempt to raise the gas tax to fund a trust for bridges. Never mind the fact that Oberstar has been the Raider-in-Chief of the national gas tax for decades (“bike paths before bridges” could be a campaign slogan for this guy).

Head over to CAGW’s web site and cast a vote for good ol’ Obee!

http://www.cagw.org/site/PageServer?pagename=getinv_Survey_2007PorkeroftheYear

Big man, pig man, haha charade you are...

http://tralfaz-archives.com/coverart/P/pfloyd_animals.html

4. Raising Taxes is Bad (Reason 456).

The Minnesota Business Partnership (MBP) is a public policy group that comprises many of Minnesota’s best companies and job creators. While the group may not have a high public profile, they produce excellent literature regarding the relationship between politics and the economy. Namely, they offer excellent arguments against the high-tax high-regulation “utopia” so many politicians seek.

Check out these pieces:

<http://www.mnbp.com/files/Why%20Not%20Raise%20Business%20Property%20Taxes.pdf>

<http://www.mnbp.com/files/Why%20Not%20Raise%20Personal%20Income%20Taxes.pdf>

The MBP home page is here:
<http://www.mnbp.com/>

5. Retirement Watch.

Many readers frequently inquire about who's stepping down from Minnesota politics. In response, the Watchdog will occasionally update our readership regarding who has announced they won't be running again and who is rumored to be stepping down.

Congress:

Jim Ramstad (Third Congressional District)

Legislature:

Rep. Neva Walker (DFL-Minneapolis)

Rep. Dennis Ozment (R-Farmington)

Rep. Brad Finstad (R-Comfrey)

Rep. Scott Kranz (DFL-Blaine)

Rumored retirement:

Rep. Erik Paulsen (R-Eden Prairie) (Running for Congress) Rep. Randy Demmer (R-Hayfield) (Running for Congress)

E-mail Update 2/8/08

In This Issue:

1. Straight to the Moon, Meli\$\$a!
2. Tinklenberg Troubles.
3. A Pain in the Glass.
4. The Scorecard has Landed.
5. Highway 10 Congested? No Way!

1. Straight to the Moon, Meli\$\$a!

Yeesh, more frolic and fantasy from the mouth of state Representative Meli\$\$a Hortman (DFL-Brooklyn Park). This week, the Watchdog's "Hortman Unit" reported that she was recently interviewed by the local Sun newspaper regarding the upcoming 2008 legislative session and the recent 2007 session.

When asked what her proudest accomplishment was regarding the 2007 session, Hortman replied that she was proudest of a bill that requires MnDOT to develop a strategic plan to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. She further gushed that the plan "will be our generation's moonshot." Uh, Meli\$\$a, don't you think that's just a tad outlandish? Perhaps a bit too much latte before the interview.

As usual, Hortman is out of touch. A recent MPR poll (not exactly a conservative organization) noted that global warming ranks as the most important issue to only 4% of DFLers. For Republicans, the issue doesn't even register.

http://minnesota.publicradio.org/features/2008/02/04_issuespoll/issuespoll.pdf

Regarding the upcoming session, Hortman remarked that she will spend her time finding ways to override the governor's veto of the transportation funding bill that increases the gas tax, increases license tab fees, increases the wheelage tax, and imposes a regressive sales tax increase on the Metro area without a voter referendum. (Editor's note: To be fair, the 2008 transportation funding bill has not been unveiled, meaning there could be changes from the 2007 version. The Watchdog predicts there will be changes. Namely, even more taxes.)

Again, Hortman must not be looking at the multiple polls that show Minnesotans opposed to increasing the cost of gasoline. Then again, when you're the general counsel at daddy's company, a few hundred bucks in tax increases is probably chump change.

Good luck, lady. The Watchdog was there last year when Hortman publicly named 5 House Republicans she said had "committed" to overriding the governor's veto. All voted to uphold the veto. The Watchdog trusts that House Speaker Kelliher has someone else counting votes for the DFL on the House floor.

<http://www.mnsun.com/articles/2008/02/07/news/bp07legislativepreview.txt>

2. Tinklenberg Troubles.

It seems the Watchdog isn't the only organization tracking the Good Ol' Boys in Anoka County.

Eric Zaetsch, who runs a blog out of Ramsey, has been tracking the lobbying activities of Elywn Tinklenberg, the GOB who would be a Congressman. Essentially, Zaetsch and others believe Tink ought to register with the federal government as a lobbyist. Moreover, a very pertinent question is asked about how Tink can serve so many masters as a lobbyist for a number of groups all seeking the same pool of government funding.

Cmon, Eric, lighten up! Steve Novak is on the public payroll to lobby for Anoka County yet he also finds time to lobby for a private entity. It's the Anoka County way, it appears. Just ask Ron Jerich.

Take a moment to check two blogs:

<http://zaetsch.blogspot.com/>

<http://buildourparty.blogspot.com/search?q=tinklenberg>

3. A Pain in the Glass.

This item is proof positive that people pay no attention to their local units of government.

The Andover city council has been kicking around the idea of criminalizing the activity of bringing a glass container into a city park. Apparently, the city is so well run and so efficient, it has the resources to make sure that young mother doesn't dare bring a jar of strained peas to Sunshine Park. A jar of pickles at the family reunion? No way! Mustard for that hot dog at the little league game? Forget about it!

How is it that Andover consistently sends conservatives to Washington and Saint Paul yet elects, year after year, people who support boobery like this?

Even worse, councilman Julie Trude stated on cable tv that the policy will likely have no impact. So you're passing the ordinance for the fun of it?

Andover Watchdogs, time to rouse from slumber and take a close look at your city council. Your property taxes climb year after year and this is what your council spends time on. That and prevailing wages.

<http://www.ci.andover.mn.us/>

4. The Scorecard has Landed.

Last week, we gave a sneak preview of the 2007 Taxpayers League of Minnesota legislative scorecard. The complete scorecard is now available for your edification.

Check it out here:

<http://www.taxpayersleague.org/pdf/legscorecard2007.pdf>

Good job, guys!

5. Highway 10 Congested? No Way!

Speaking of not paying attention, Anoka County is about to unveil a “transportation vision” for the County. Nothing like waiting until 2008. This is perhaps why we spend money on lobbyists and not roads.

ABC newspapers reported on the issue this week. It certainly looks like the “plan” mostly entails laying blame on the legislature for not raising taxes (do we need to talk about the money spent on the Vikings stadium?).

Moreover, the article notes the need to add an extra lane to Highway 10 to relieve congestion.

Say what? What about that \$320 million train we’re building? You know, the one that will add a lane and ½ worth of capacity. The one that will need tens of millions in operating subsidies for decades. The one that caused our regional rail property taxes to go up 100% this year. And we’re not done tabulating the costs yet, as more and more stations are proposed.

Think of all the lane miles we could have laid down for \$320 million. Then again, don’t. It’s too depressing.

http://abcnewspapers.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1702&Itemid=1

E-mail Update 2/15/08

In This Issue:

1. Bonding Buffoonery.
2. The Good and the Bad.
3. Groundhog Day.
4. Northstar Lie #99.
5. Quote of the Week.

1. Bonding Buffoonery.

We saw this one coming a mile away. For months, DFLers have complained that Governor Pawlenty and Republicans are wrong for wanting to use debt (bonding) to help finance road and bridge improvements in the state. DFLers have wailed and gnashed their teeth, crying that it is immoral and wrong to put roads and bridges on the "state credit card."

Of course, there's nothing wrong with spreading out the costs of a capital asset when the benefits of that asset are spread out over many years. Moreover, the DFL argument is absolutely hypocritical since they have no problem loading up that same credit card with pork projects.

And now we have the proof.

On the same day that the DFL unveiled an extortionist plan to force taxpayers to accept a tax increase in order to get the roads and bridges we deserve, those same legislators (DFL and GOP alike) introduced a number of bills seeking bonding monies.

Here's a sampling of what some legislators want to put on the state credit card:

- A hockey arena in Hallock;
- An orchestra hall for Minneapolis;
- Upgrades to the John Rose skating rink in Roseville;
- The "Prairie Ecology Center" in Jackson County;
- An ATV trail in Kittson County;
- The Thief River Falls multi-events complex;
- An ice arena for Crookston;
- A senior center in Mora;
- The Hinkley Fire Monument;
- Expansion of the Saint Cloud Civic Center;
- The Pine Grove Zoo in Little Falls;
- The Northwest Hennepin Family Center;
- The Austin Area Success Center;
- Improvement to the Duluth Convention Center;
- The Voyageurs Heritage Center;
- The Alden Community Center;
- The Blazing Star Bicycle Trail;

- A snowmaking machine for the Battle Creek Recreation Area;
- Heritage Village Park in Inver Grove Heights;
- The Mayo Civic Center;
- The Southern Minnesota Women's Hockey Exposition Center;
- A community Center in Pemberton.

Folks, this is just a small sampling of the kind of projects our legislators deem worthy enough to put on the state's credit card at the expense of roads and bridges. Again, the problem with funding our roads and bridges isn't that we're under-taxed. It's that the politicians would rather blow it on pork. Makes you kind of sick, doesn't it?

2. The Good and the Bad.

Now that the legislature has reconvened, we are proud to resume one of the Watchdog's most popular features, our "good bills" and "bad bills" of the week. Without further ado, here are the winners for week 1 of the 2008 session:

Good Bill: HF 2670 (Rep. Paulsen, R-Eden Prairie). A bill requiring violent sex offenders to wear tracking devices upon release from prison.

Bad Bill: HF 2663 (Rep. Peterson, S., DFL-New Hope). A bill requiring schools to use environmentally sensitive cleaning products.

3. Groundhog Day.

For years, Punxsutawney Phil has inspired and bemused us with his sweet prognosticating skills and gosh-darn cute looks.

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

From the looks of things, our own state Representative Meli\$\$a Hortman has become smitten with Phil.

Just days after emerging from his hole to divine our winter's length and breadth, we learn that Meli\$\$a will emulate our furry hero and emerge from her own bunker for a town hall meeting to actually interact with the folks she represents.

Mark your calendars for Saturday, February 16th from 10 am to 11:30 am at the Brooklyn Park City Hall. If she sees her shadow, it means tax increases. If not, it still means tax increases! After all, we've got a moonshot to pursue! (By the way, what's been wackier, the whole tail pipe emission reduction "moonshot" episode or her pursuit of the Olympics? She must really have some time on her hands.)

Bring your camera. You may not see Hortman again for another year.

<http://www.mnsun.com/articles/2008/02/08/community/p107townhall.txt>

4. Northstar Lie #99.

Watchdogs are busy people. Busy working to pay taxes, busy raising their children to know right from wrong, just plain busy in general.

One of the reasons the Watchdog exists is to act as the North Metro's institutional memory, reminding all of you of what government has said and done in the past so you can hold those same politicians accountable.

This week, Anoka County announced that it would seek state bonding dollars to help fund Northstar.

Remember that in May of 2006 the state legislature voted to bond in the amount of \$60 million for Northstar, this amount in addition to \$37.5 million in bonds appropriated in 2005. In 2006, state Representative Kathy Tingelstad pledged on the floor of the House that Northstar rail would not be back for more state bonding dollars. That pledge lasted not even two years. But would you expect anything less from this crew? Remember those other pledges? "It's the most cost-effective option." "It will carry 15,000 riders per day." "It will cost \$165 million." "It will run to Saint Cloud." "We have studies that prove the cost-effectiveness." "It's equivalent to a lane and a half of traffic." Yadda yadda yadda.

5. Quote of the Week.

"I still have an important tool to restrain taxes and spending. I call it the taxpayer-protection pen, otherwise known as the veto pen. As you know, I will not hesitate to use it to stop government from digging into your wallets."

Governor Tim Pawlenty
February 13, 2008
State of the State address

<http://www.startribune.com/politics/state/15587867.html>

E-mail Update 2/22/08

In This Issue:

1. Déjà vu All Over Again.
2. Déjà vu All Over Again.
3. The Working Man.
4. Hortman Unit Update.
5. The Rumor Mill.

1. Déjà vu All Over Again.

Well, here we are again. A multi-billion dollar transportation tax increase bill and all sorts of intrigue regarding fence-sitting House Republican legislators who may or may not respect their party by sustaining Governor Pawlenty's certain veto, courtesy of his "Taxpayer Protection Pen." These wayward Republicans would also be well served to remember that upholding the veto also honors their constituents, who have indicated via numerous polls that they're over-taxed and opposed to further assaults on the ol' family budget. Really, the only folks braying for a \$6.6 BILLION tax increase are the special interests who stand to gain by feasting on a hindquarter of this overweight pig.

To be quite honest, it isn't quite a case of déjà vu. The difference is that the tax hike is even greater than the 2007 version. Let's not forget that this is more than a gas tax increase. It's a gas tax hike, a sales tax hike (no referendum), a wheelage tax, license tab fee hike, and other assorted "revenue enhancements."

And let's not forget the hypocrisy of it all. The bill raises taxes to pay for debt (remember all the "pay as you go" talk?), and steals money from the general fund with no plan for repayment (the Watchdog is fine with re-allocating monies but then again, we never decried the practice in the first place).

The outcome of the veto override attempt is the primary question on the minds of Minnesotans, especially Anoka County taxpayers. Just like last time, Rep. Jim Abeler (R-Anoka) and Rep. Kathy Tingelstad (R-Coon Rapids) voted with the DFL and against the folks who got them elected. Where will they be on the override? Who knows? Send them an email and ask.

rep.jim.abeler@house.mn
rep.kathy.tingelstad@house.mn

Ask them if they have signed the Veto Protection Pledge.

<http://www.taxpayersleague.org/component/content/article/55-archives/168-veto-protection-pledge.html>

One thing is certain. The Republican delegates who volunteered their time and resources to elect these two year after year have had about enough. Whether it's Northstar rail, transit taxes, or a host of other issues, there comes a day of reckoning. Rep. Tingelstad's endorsing convention is tomorrow. Look for her endorsement to be

delayed until after the veto override vote. The word from Watchdogs in her Coon Rapids district is that people are tired of hearing one thing from her back home and seeing another at the Capitol.

<http://www.mnlea.org/2007report.pdf>

<http://www.taxpayersleague.org/pdf/legscorecard2007.pdf>

<http://www.startribune.com/politics/state/15857057.html>

2. Déjà vu All Over Again.

Let's get in the time machine and head back to 2003 for a moment. The state of Minnesota was facing a \$4.5 billion deficit. DFL legislators, predictably, were calling for tax increases to spare government the effort of actually reducing spending like families and businesses do when they experience financial trouble.

Next week, the state will issue an updated economic forecast. Look for that forecast to include a state budget deficit in the neighborhood of \$700 million to \$1 billion.

How curious that the DFL hurried to pass last night's \$6.6 billion tax increase before next week's grim economic news. Some may even call it crass.

Now, the DFL called for tax increases to deal with the deficit in 2003.

Now, remember as well that the DFL also pushed for \$5.5 billion in tax increases in 2007, when the state had a \$2 billion surplus.

So, for ten extra credit points, Watchdogs, can anyone tell Professor Harold Hamilton what the likely DFL solution to this budget deficit will be?

Perhaps the real deficit is the lack of new ideas.

Anyone? Bueller? Bueller?

<http://www.finance.state.mn.us/ffeu/>

3. The Working Man.

I get up at seven, yeah
I go to work at nine
I got no time for livin'
Yes, I'm working all the time

There can be little doubt that working families are feeling the pinch of higher costs in nearly every aspect of their lives. The economic angst and uncertainty is very real and there are many causes.

And so government and politicians are here to help with a panoply of mandates and aid programs. They're from the government and they're here to help, of course.

In reality, government is a big part of the problem, Watchdogs. Think about it.

Food costs have gone through the roof. These costs have escalated in large part because of ethanol mandates that have artificially increased demand for corn, which in turn has raised the price of many foods we all need to eat.

Energy costs are skyrocketing as well. Here again government has done much to raise the costs. We have renewable energy mandates that require the use of expensive and inefficient alternative fuels. While pursuing alternative energy sources no doubt has some benefit, the rush to heap mandates on utilities has raised costs.

Also consider that government has imposed prohibitions on domestic energy exploration and the use of nuclear power. The fact that government is denying low cost and efficient energy to its citizens is nothing short of unethical.

Finally, take the sales tax. It is an indisputable fact that sales taxes are regressive, hurting the poor disproportionately. Just this year, the "Party of the Working Family" passed a bill that would raise the sales tax to pay for trails, zoos and public radio. Last night, they passed a bill to raise the sales tax again in the Metro area to pay for light rail. If you live in Hennepin County, its even more because of the Carl Pohlad tax. And don't forget the "temporary" sales tax increase from 1997 that increased the statewide sales tax from 6% to 6.5% and is still with us.

It seems to me
I could live my life
A lot better than I think I am
I guess that's why they call me
They call me the working man

- Geddy Lee and Alex Lifeson

4. Hortman Unit Update.

With the legislature in session, Harold Hamilton has authorized overtime for the Hortman Unit of the Anoka County Watchdog.

A self-professed champion of the Working Man, Meli\$\$a once again this week showed her true colors. You may think her strong support of sales tax increase for light rail was the telltale sign, but you would be wrong.

Nope. While the sales tax increase was doozy, Hortman outdid herself by proposing a property tax increase on Anoka County. Yep. The economy is on the skids and the real

estate sector is one of the worst hit. So Hortman decides to re-introduce from last session her bill to put a brand new tax on deeds and mortgages in Anoka County. As if it couldn't get worse, the tax proceeds would be used for environmental clean up for commuter rail sites. That's great, Meli\$\$a, make real estate even harder to afford.

The Olympics, global warming obsessions, property tax increases. Embarrassing.

Read the bill here:

<https://www.revisor.leg.state.mn.us/bin/bldbill.php?bill=H3201.1.html&session=ls85>

Go to page 85 of the bill.

Click here to read great LTE about Hortman:

<http://www.mnsun.com/articles/2008/02/21/opinion/bp21grose.txt>

5. Rumor Mill.

The rumor mill is churning with news that a challenger to Good Ol' Boy Godfather Dan Erhart has emerged.

The purported candidate is well-known, bright, articulate, hard working, and knows how to run a good political campaign.

It would be an interesting match-up to see this energetic up and comer go toe to toe with an aging, entrenched anachronism whose influence and power is on the wane.

Stay tuned.

No, his mind is not for rent
To any god or government
Always hopeful yet discontent
He knows changes aren't permanent
But change is...

E-mail Update 2/29/08

In This Issue:

1. Hitchin' An Override.
2. Representing.
3. Counting on the County.
4. Down in a Hole.
5. MPR and the Constitution.

1. Hitchin' An Override.

The economy is in the tank. The state is a cool billion in the red. So what does government do? How about foist the largest tax increase in Minnesota history on the same people struggling to stay in their homes, put food on the table, and pay the bills.

Sad but true. On Monday, all DFLers (those independent thinkers) and eight Republicans teamed up to override Governor Pawlenty's veto. The \$6.6 billion tax increase was a billion dollars more expensive than the one successfully vetoed last year.

This "gas tax" bill includes a gas tax increase and a whole lot more:

Gas tax increase

Sales tax increase (without a voter referendum) License tab fee increase Wheelage tax increase

Of course, the funds come exclusively from reaching into your pocket. Adjust spending priorities, you say? No way! The state budget is a scant \$35 billion, with a \$1 billion reserve. The well-oiled machine we call state government apparently doesn't have one red cent it can shift over to transportation. The Capitol crew obviously favors the government budget over the family budget. The party of the Working Man? The emphasis is on "working." Working to pay the taxes (there are per diems to fund, you know).

If you folks in the Metro area think you'll be getting new roads out of this, think again. This bill is little more than another sop to mass transit and rural Minnesota.

If you think this bill will reduce your property taxes, think again. Government will just find other ways to spend the money.

You're not going get property tax relief and you're not getting new roads. You are getting a fat tax increase, courtesy of the state legislature.

2. Representing.

Admit it, Watchdogs. When you heard that six House Republicans defected on the override vote, some names came to mind. No doubt those names were Kathy

Tingelstad (R-Andover) and Jim Abeler (R-Anoka), two Hall of Shamers in the field of fiscal responsibility.

When it came to the biggest tax grab in history, they were par for the course, grabbing a handle and helping jam the tax increase in deep – very deep.

What's with these two? Like moths to a flame, they just can't help themselves. And when the tax flame is a \$6.6 billion Olympic torch, you just know they're going to burn in like a Kamikaze pilot with an aircraft carrier dead ahead.

It didn't long for the media to abet the betrayal with all sorts of high-minded talk of "voting their districts" and "voting their conscience" while the other GOP legislators left holding the bag were condemned as automatons. Of course, no mention was made of every single DFLer voting to override, including those who voted against the original bill.

Funny, it doesn't look like they voted their districts at all. The Minnesota GOP commissioned a scientific poll just days before the override. In both Tingelstad and Abeler's district, the vast majority disapproved of the DFL tax grab. Moreover, transportation was listed as the 6th most important issue among 7 (consistent with other polls in the North Metro). Finally, less than 5% in each district said transportation was the issue that would most influence their vote.

For those of you who doubt a GOP poll, you can also check this piece from MPR: <http://minnesota.publicradio.org/display/web/2008/02/26/gasvox/?rsssource=1>

Voting your district? Hardly.

Voting Dan Erhart and the Good Ol' Boys? Highly likely.

3. Counting on the County.

Speaking of Dan Erhart and the Good Ol' Boys, they also tie into the tax grab. Remember that sales tax increase? Although it allows for no vote of the people, it does require each Metro county board to vote to impose the tax.

That's right. At some point in the near future, the Board will likely consider a vote to impose the tax. And while hoping that the Board won't impose the tax is like hoping Bill Clinton can be trusted to chaperone a beauty contest, you need to make your voice heard on this issue.

Already, Commissioner Rhonda Sivarajah has publicly stated that she oppose the tax.

And with Erhart and LeDoux joining Sivarajah on the ballot in November, you never know.

Let your voice be heard:
<http://www.co.anoka.mn.us/Officials/>

4. Down in a Hole.

Yesterday, the state released its latest budget forecast, revealing a \$935 million budget deficit. Last year at this time, the state was enjoying a \$2 billion surplus. So the voters put a new crew in charge and they take us on a \$3 billion ride into the red.

With the news this grim, no wonder they jammed through the sales tax for the arts and the transportation tax hike so quickly.

5. MPR and the Constitution.

The DFL's first act when the legislative session started earlier this month was to pass a question to the ballot this November that would raise the state's sales tax to fund arts, zoos, bike trails, and clean water initiatives.

Many readers asked what the Watchdog thought of this idea. "Dumb" would probably best describe our feelings.

First, raising the sales tax is a bad idea. It will already go up under the tax-happy county commissioners. The sales tax is regressive, hurting the poor. Increasing the sales tax only encourages consumers to buy elsewhere, be it the Internet or neighboring jurisdictions.

Second, putting taxing and spending decisions into the constitution is a cop out. Legislators ought to be held accountable for taxing and spending.

Third, fencing off funding in the constitution for bike trails, arts, crafts, and MPR is just plain absurd.

Finally, the good news is that this won't happen. Why? Because no one ever wanted it to happen except for some gullible hunting groups who got played by the DFL. The DFL leadership knew this wouldn't pass, but put it on the ballot to look friendly to outdoors groups and art groups. They also looked like heroes to public sector unions because the original plan called for taking existing monies out of the general fund, something they like to keep for themselves.

Give the DFL leadership credit. They played this one very well. Now go kill this thing in November!

E-mail Update 3/7/08

In This Issue:

1. Oink, Oink.
2. Stupid in Andover.
3. Mayoral Mischief.
4. The Hortman Report.
5. Hiding Out.

1. Oink, Oink.

“Pay as you go” went out the window this week at the Capitol, as we knew it would. After thumping their chests in self-righteous indignation over proposals to issue debt for roads and bridges, the DFL majority whipped out the state’s credit card this week to the tune of a billion dollars, not counting debt service.

No debt for roads and bridges? Well, how about debt for the following:

- A gorilla exhibit at the Como Zoo;
- Orchestra Hall;
- St. Paul Asian Pacific Cultural Center;
- Duluth Zoo;
- “Sustainable” Building Grants;
- Minnesota Planetarium;
- Duluth hockey arena;
- Bemidji Events Center.

And, zero dollars for bridge replacement. One of the benefits of the \$6.6 billion transportation tax increase is that legislators left themselves maximum room to issue debt for pork projects.

https://www.revisor.leg.state.mn.us/revisor/pages/search_status/status_detail.php?b=House&f=HF0380&ssn=0&y=2007

2. Stupid in Andover.

“Stupid is as stupid does.”

- Forrest Gump

The Andover city council must be on some type of quest to pass the most asinine city ordinances in the shortest amount of time. In the past month, the council has mandated prevailing wages for city projects (thus raising costs to taxpayers) and banned glass jars in parks. Not content with their remarkable feats of mental strength, the council set a personal best this week by outlawing playground fights by calling them “mixed martial arts” bouts.

According to a story in the Anoka County Union, the Andover High School liaison officer proposed the ban because of an after school fight. Apparently, the liaison officer was unhappy because he couldn't fine the kids who showed up to watch the fight. Maybe this deputy would be better employed patrolling the streets and finding true criminals.

Under the new ordinance, if kids engage in the age-old after school throw down, the brawlers as well as any kid who shows up to watch will now be made criminals subject to a fine and a date in court. Good job, council. Make a criminal out of some 14 year-old who just happens to witness a fight. Now he gets to show up in court with mom and dad and pay a fine (getting more money into city coffers wouldn't have anything to do with it, would it?????).

So when will the city council be addressing rising property taxes?

Stupid is as stupid does.

http://abcnewspapers.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1995&Itemid=26

3. Mayoral Mischief.

Andover Mayor Mike Gamache, commander in chief of the three-ring circus at city hall, is also a writer. He penned a very eloquent letter to the editor in the Anoka County Union this week praising state Representative Kathy Tingelstad for her "courageous" vote to foist the largest tax increase in Minnesota history on taxpayers while the economy is in recession. Of course, Gamache and company will get to spend some of this booty while confidently informing the citizenry that they had absolutely nothing to do with the vote to secure said booty.

But leave it to the Dog to expose the real scam at work. Gamache signed his letter as the mayor of Andover. At no time did he disclose that he is a DFLer. In fact, Gamache has run for office in the past as an endorsed candidate of the DFL.

Thus, it's no surprise that a partisan DFLer writes a letter to praise a Republican who sided with his party on a vote to do what the DFL does best – raise taxes.

Gamache's status as a DFLer is material to his letter and should have been disclosed. A seasoned politician, it is hard to believe that this was a mere oversight. If so, Gamache should correct the record with an email to the Union this week so a correction may be made. In any case, the Union themselves should issue a correction.

Now, maybe it's true that Gamache has forsaken his DFL affiliation. Since the city council reads our update, we will be happy to publish any response Gamache wishes to make on the subject of his party affiliation.

Moreover, “boos and hisses” to the Union for failing to uncover this omission. Yet another example why the Watchdog has become the North Metro’s leading source of accurate news and information.

http://abcnewspapers.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=2019&Itemid=43

4. The Hortman Report.

During the legislative session, there is really no need to refer to the Meli\$\$a Hortman unit. We merely need to issue a weekly report on the activities of the legislature’s most infamous “moderate.”

This week was a doozy, even by Hortman standards. First, she managed to slip a real estate tax increase on all of Anoka County into a larger “omnibus” tax bill. It took the state Senate, dominated by her own party, about 5 minutes to strip out her tax increase. Of course, this tax increase was wholeheartedly supported by Anoka County, which issued a letter in support (a lot of good that did).

Earlier in the week, the House Tax Committee heard a bill authored by Hortman that would expand the sales tax to clothing, baby products, and funeral services – a true cradle to grave tax scheme.

Maybe there’s a trade off somewhere here. Hortman agrees to leave the legislature and the voters agree to put this Brooklyn Park resident on the Andover City Council.

https://www.revisor.leg.state.mn.us/revisor/pages/search_status/status_detail.php?b=House&f=HF2163&ssn=0&y=2007

https://www.revisor.leg.state.mn.us/revisor/pages/search_status/status_detail.php?b=House&f=HF0362&ssn=0&y=2007

5. Hiding Out.

Last week’s report contained an item explaining the sales tax increase authorized by the transportation tax bill was subject to approval by each county board. The item went on to provide contact information for the Anoka County Board.

Many Watchdogs reported that they were frustrated that four Anoka County Commissioners don’t have an email address listed.

In fact, Commissioners LeDoux, Sivarajah, and West are the only ones who list an email address. Berg, Erhart, Koridak, and Lang fail to list one.

Some may be tempted to think that since those four list phone numbers, including home phone numbers, that they are still accountable to constituents.

That's where the politically unsophisticated voter would be wrong. Not offering an email address is political ploy worthy of any Good Ol' Boy. You see, responding to an email means there is a written response that becomes a permanent record. With a phone call, there is no permanent record of the conversation unless one makes the effort to tape it. Thus, there is no permanent record, meaning it is much easier to "massage" your message or claim that something was taken out of context if you're called on it later on.

Prove us wrong, commissioners. Send your email.

E-mail Update 3/14/08

In This Issue:

1. Jimmy Gets An "F"
2. Rejected
3. California, Here We Come
4. A "No Brainer"
5. The Good and the Bad

1. Jimmy Gets An "F".

State Rep. Jim Abeler (R-Anoka) has been spinning like a drunken dradle trapped in a washing machine to defend his vote to raise our taxes \$6.6 billion by overriding the governor's veto of the transportation tax bill.

Of all the tangled webs Abeler is spinning, perhaps the most disingenuous thread is his claim that his vote to override was the only blemish on an otherwise distinguished conservative record. Abeler told the Anoka County Union shortly after his tax increase vote, "It's ironic that this (the legislature) is the only body where one wrong is an 'F'".
http://abcnewspapers.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1934&Itemid=26

Really? Only one wrong vote? Let's check the record regarding Ol' Jim's economic votes. As Watchdogs know, the Taxpayer's League of Minnesota (TLM) is the gold standard with respect to fiscal vote scorecards. Let's see what TLM scorecards of the recent past have to say:

1999: 73%
2000: 50%
2001: 73%
2002: 50%
2003: 67%
2004: 69%
2005: 40%
2006: 42%
2007: 44%

Lifetime score: 58%

The record shows that Abeler has a poor record of support for Minnesota taxpayers. Under TLM rules, a legislator must score at least 80% to be considered a "Friend of the Taxpayer." Jim, you're no friend of the taxpayer.

Moreover, the Watchdog learned in school (before outcome based education) that any score below 60% was a failing grade. Abeler earned less than 60% in 2000, 2002, 2005, 2006, and 2007. Note also that Rep. Abeler's worst scores are in the three most

recent legislative sessions. Most importantly, Abeler's lifetime score is a pathetic 58%. It wasn't one wrong vote, Mr. Abeler. It's been one wrong career.

<http://www.taxpayersleague.org>

2. Rejected.

Rep. Abeler isn't alone in hitting the "spin cycle" button. The other five members of the "Override Six" gang have been telling whoppers about "voting their districts" and "voting for the people." Strange, every poll the Watchdog has seen, and there have been many, shows a strong majority opposed to the mega-tax bill.

Further confirmation of voter anger has come recently via the political fortunes of the Gang of Six. First, GOP delegates in District 49B (Rep. Tingelstad) refused to even open the floor to consider her endorsement.

Second, override twins Ron Erhardt (District 41A) and Neil Peterson (41B) were thrashed in their quest for re-endorsement from the GOP faithful in that district.

Last weekend, Rep. Jim Abeler failed to achieve the required 60% vote of his GOP delegates in District 48B, although he came close with 58%. Abeler spun the "close but no cigar" result as a victory for his beleaguered campaign. What's so bizarre about his claim is the HE HAD NO OPPONENT. How a failure to beat nobody is a victory is odd to say the least.

It seems the only folks who supported the massive tax increase were Lefties who love every tax increase and the special interests that will financially benefit from this hijacking of your wallet.

By the way, it is quite likely the Override Gang will run in a primary. The Watchdog predicts that the special interests that pushed the tax increase will spend heavily in these races. The Watchdog will provide a full analysis of campaign finance reports during the campaign.

By the way, Kathy Tingelstad's rescheduled convention will be March 29th at 9 am at the Coon Rapids Middle School.

http://www.twincities.com//ci_8506165?IADID

http://abcnewspapers.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=2035&Itemid=26

3. California Here We Come.

This week's Hortman Report is yet another dandy from Minnesota's most infamous "moderate."

HF 863 seeks to force Minnesota to adopt California's auto emission standards lock, stock, and barrel.

Instead of Minnesota lawmakers or even bureaucrats setting auto emission standards, our authority would be given over to the rulemaking of the California Air Resources Board. How moderate.

<https://www.revisor.leg.state.mn.us/bin/bldbill.php?bill=H0863.1.html&session=ls85>
<http://www.arb.ca.gov/homepage.htm>

4. A "No Brainer."

So often in life, a complex issue or long-running saga is summed up in one profound moment or a single quote.

Such a moment came to pass this week regarding the Anoka County Board and Good Ol' Boy Godfather Dan Erhart.

The Star Tribune ran a story regarding the debates raging on Metro county boards over their authority to implement the sales tax increase authorized by the transportation tax increase bill.

Erhart summed up the Anoka County Board attitude by remarking that the decision to raise the tax was a "no brainer." Calling a tax increase a "no brainer" perfectly sums up the worldview of the Board. Of course, the Watchdog exempts commissioners Sivarajah and West from this observation. These two ladies are strong minority voices of fiscal restraint.

A "no brainer?" More like "no brains."

<http://www.startribune.com/local/south/16584091.html>

5. The Good and the Bad.

A sampling of the good and bad from the Capitol this week:

The good:

HF 3797 (Seifert): A bill prohibiting un-funded mandates

HF3605 (Brod): A bill prohibiting illegal aliens from getting a drivers license

The bad:

HF 4048 (Hortman): making it illegal to put a pop can in the garbage

HF 3944 (Clark): Establishing a fragrance-free education campaign in schools

E-mail Update 3/21/08

In This Issue:

1. Dennis Berg and the Road to Damascus.
2. Bound and Gagged.
3. Report Card.
4. Hanging From the Gallows Poll.
5. Quote of the Year.

1. Dennis Berg and the Road to Damascus.

Just when you thought you had seen everything out of the Good Ol' Boys, they manage to find a way to shock even the most seasoned of Watchdogs.

Periodically, Anoka County publishes a taxpayer-financed newsletter. The latest edition features a column by Good Ol' Boy extraordinaire Dennis Berg, who plays Robin to Dan Erhart's Batman.

The column starts off by warning the naïve masses that an election year is upon us, one that promises "name calling, mudslinging, distortions, and all manner of election year shenanigans." An obviously pained Berg further bears his over-burdened conscience by confessing, "My heart bleeds when I see candidates who either don't understand the oath they're asked to take or don't respect it." The passion play continues when he pontificates that "I am dismayed by candidates who dishonor the oath by singing a pledge for special interest groups or advocacy organizations."

Dennis goes on to assure the good people of Anoka County that unlike other politicians, he is a paragon of political virtue who understands and meets the burdens of the sacred oath in a manner that would make Jefferson Smith proud.

Readers are further regaled with a re-telling of Berg's political epiphany when he served on the Burns Township Board. After the Board was accused of political betrayal, Berg's political mentor, the soft-spoken yet Solomon-like chairman, opined, "What made us change was we took an oath – an oath that says we will represent everyone equally." Much like Saul of Tarsus, you can feel the thunder crack and smell the electricity as Berg observes, "For the first time as an elected official, I felt the same pride as when I wore my military uniform."

What a crock. First, Berg's self-serving, hyper self-righteous puff piece has no place in a publication financed by the taxpayers. The purpose of the County newsletter is singular: to inform taxpayers of activities the county is undertaking on their behalf. Self-serving political speech has no place in the newsletter and is unethical at best and illegal at worst.

Moreover, Berg conveniently omitted a tale of election shenanigans from the 2006 elections. In one of the Anoka County Board races, a candidate featured on his

campaign web site an endorsement from a member of the clergy. Since churches are tax-exempt organizations, it is illegal for a leader of any tax-exempt church to endorse a candidate for political office. Nonetheless, the endorsement was featured on the campaign web site and only removed after the candidate was called on it.

Who was the candidate? None other than Dennis Berg.

Commissioner Berg, you are truly shameless.

[Click here for link to newsletter.](#) (note this is a big file)

2. Bound and Gagged.

The Anoka County Board will vote on the mass transit sales tax next week.

Tuesday, March 25th

9:30 am.

Anoka County Government Center

A source within county government tells the Watchdog that no public testimony will be taken at the meeting. Apparently, some commissioners feel that the public can already weigh in by contacting the commissioners directly. That's all well and good except that they can't be easily reached. Unlike nearly every other elected official, most commissioners don't offer an email address, despite the fact that they all have one financed by the taxpayers. You may be able to reach them by telephone, where each concerned citizen may be treated to an answer that can later be plausibly denied.

The Watchdog predicts a 5-2 vote in favor of yet another tax increase.

The Watchdog also predicts the tax raisers will proclaim that this tax will offset property taxes.

The Watchdog proclaims that a bunch of hooey. If you're planning on a property tax cut, we're got some oceanfront property in Iowa for you.

3. Report Card.

Many readers were pleased with our piece last week regarding Rep. Jim Abeler's fiscal voting record. Many have asked us to do the same with respect to Rep. Kathy Tingelstad. Since we're a service organization, our friends at the Taxpayer's League of Minnesota (TLM) have provided us with the data you request, brave readers.

1997: 90%

1998: 93%

1999: 73%

2000: 50%

2001: 82%
2002: 67%
2003: 67%
2004: 75%
2005: 50%
2006: 33%
2007: 27%

Lifetime: 65%

Hey, give some credit! Tingelstad earned "Friend of the Taxpayer" status in 1997, 1998, and 2001.

The bad news is that her trend line falls off a cliff in 2006 and 2007, where she earned an appalling 33% and 27% respectively. And a lifetime score of 65% is nothing to brag about either. In the same way that Anakin Skywalker became Darth Vader, it looks like Tingelstad has converted to the dark side.

4. Hanging From the Gallows Poll

What did you bring me, my dear friends, to keep me from the gallows pole?
What did you bring me to keep me from the gallows pole?

The Republican Override Gang of Six constantly proclaims that their vote to impose the largest tax increase in Minnesota history was one their constituents wanted.

As the Watchdog observed last week, there hasn't been poll conducted that shows that a majority anywhere wanted it.

Check out the latest poll from Survey USA regarding the subject:

A whopping 63% majority disapproves of the transportation tax bill.

50% of those surveyed said a vote in favor of the tax would make them less likely to vote for that legislator while only 19% said a vote in favor made them more likely to vote for that candidate.

Finally, 58% disapprove of the job this legislature is doing while 29% approve.

Your brother brought me silver
Your sister warmed my soul
But now I laugh and pull so hard
And see you swinging on the gallows pole!

- Jimmy Page and Robert Plant

See the survey at www.anokacountywatchdog.com.

5. Quote of the Year.

Okay, it's only March but we have an undisputed winner for our Quote of the Year. Even though it's a presidential election year and there will surely be many bouts of oral diarrhea, this one will surely stand the test of time through December 31, 2008. Drum roll please:

"I think it's simplistic and naïve to say people can spend their money better than government."

DFL Senate Majority Leader Larry Pogemiller.

[Click here to read more.](#)

There you have it – the DFL worldview in one simple sentence.

E-mail Update 3/28/08

In This Issue:

1. Don't Go Away Mad...
2. Yet Another Tax.
3. We Don't Need No Stinkin' First Amendment.
4. Sales Tax Quotes.
5. Pro Business?

1. Don't Go Away Mad, Just Go Away.

The day finally arrived. State Rep. Kathy Tingelstad has announced she won't be running for re-election, after she finally got the message that her tax and spend ways had worn out her welcome with the taxpayers she so frequently ignored. While the special interests certainly wanted her around, the Republican delegates who installed her lawn signs, marched in her parades, and handed out her literature made it known they had enough.

The announcement set off the long-expected wailing and gnashing of teeth from Democrats and media outlets that all decried the shame of losing a "moderate" (meaning a Republican who never voted Republican). Tingelstad herself added to the pathos by recounting the ostracism she endured when other legislators wouldn't smile and say "hi" within the hallowed walls of the Capitol.

In fact, the endorsed DFL candidate for her seat admitted that he liked Tingelstad so much, he would not have run if she had stayed in the race. Yes, the DFL loved one Representative Tingelstad.

http://abcnewspapers.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=2196&Itemid=26

Kathy Tingelstad spent 12 years in the legislature doing not much of anything. Her only "achievement" was foisting a useless, expensive train on the unsuspecting taxpayers of the county. With her announcement coming so soon after her override vote, she essentially kicked the taxpayers in the shin and ran away before being held accountable.

Tingelstad will probably take a cushy lobbying/government job where her toadying to the special interests will be richly rewarded.

As for the citizens of House District 49B, they win either way. They will either get a true Democrat or true Republican representing them and not a DFLer in GOP clothing.

2. Yet Another Tax.

Well, that was an easy call. As the Watchdog predicted, the Anoka County board adopted the sales tax increase for mass transit on a very predictable 5-2 vote. Commissioners Sivarajah and West voted “no” and are again to be revered as the taxpayer heroes they truly are. Remember that the new tax WILL NOT buy new roads. The sales tax money is earmarked for light rail, commuter rail, and bus service.

In Anoka County, the sales tax will now rise to 6.75%. And don't forget there will be another sales tax on the ballot in November.

Kudos to Scott and Carver counties for voting down this massive tax grab. Of course the Anoka County Board just couldn't help themselves. This gang has never met a tax increase they didn't like. Just imagine life if they had passed their football stadium tax. The sales tax would have been at 7.25%!

The 5 who voted for the tax will blow smoke up your behind by telling you that this tax increase will decrease your property tax bill. Simply tell these 5 that you will hold them to this promise.

http://abcnewspapers.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=2160&Itemid=26

3. We Don't Need No Stinkin' First Amendment.

Perhaps the most shameful aspect of the Anoka County board's adoption of the tax increase is the way taxpayers who came to the meeting were treated.

Because the board meets during working hours, many citizens took time off work to show up and ask that they be heard on this important issue. Remember that Anoka County, unlike other counties, held no public hearing on the issue.

Commissioner Sivarajah moved to allow citizens to be heard before the vote. On a 4-3 vote, her motion failed and citizens were silenced. Shame on the four who couldn't even be bothered to listen to the people they are paid to represent:

Berg, Erhart, LeDoux, Kordiak

Remember that cities regularly have an “open mic” time at each council session for any resident to address the council. At the Capitol, it is the tradition of every committee to allow any citizen to testify on the merits of a bill under consideration.

The good news is that it only took Dennis Berg less than a week to prove his political puff piece in the county newsletter to be a load of crap. Berg is in no way the flag-waiving God-fearin' aw-shucks reglar' guy who understands an oath of office better than any other politician. As board chairman, he led the charge in shutting down the folks who wanted nothing more than a chance to be heard.

No, he's simply King Dennis, the Grand Monarch of Ramsey.

King Dennis doesn't want his constituents to have his email, yet it is available to other politicians, according to this web site (scroll to the bottom):
http://www.mncounties.org/about_amc/amc_board.htm

denndarl@aol.com

4. Sales Tax Quotes.

The Anoka County sales tax grab produced a number of memorable and hilarious quotes.

"I'm a middle-of-the-road conservative Democrat."
Commissioner Dan Erhart

Erhart never misses an opportunity to tell everyone how moderate he is. Kind of like Melissa Hortman. And like Hortman, it's bull.

"We can't look small now."
Commissioner Dick Lang

Uh, Dick. When it comes to taxes, we DO want to look, and be, small.

"If we don't vote for this proposal, Anoka County residents will likely see an increase in their property taxes."
Commissioner Dan Erhart

Those residents WILL see property tax increases. The only difference is that they will have an increased sales tax to deal with as well.

"If we don't pass this, then it's only going to property owners."
Commissioner LeDoux

Hey, Scott, tax everyone in every way possible!

http://abcnewspapers.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=2160&Itemid=26

<http://www.startribune.com/local/16983811.html>

<http://www.startribune.com/local/south/17003511.html>

5. Pro-Business?

Leave it to Tom Snell and the MetroNorth Chamber to support yet another tax increase. Snell, on the Chamber's behalf, wrote a smarmy, fawning letter to the editor praising

Tingelstad's "courageous" vote to raise taxes that businesses will just pass along to customers. How brave.

http://abcnewspapers.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=2116&Itemid=43

E-mail Update 4/4/08

In This Issue:

1. Gassy? Bloated?
2. Double Trouble.
3. Dude, Where's My Study?
4. Smoking Ban Buffoonery.
5. Subsidy City.

1. Gassy? Bloated?

Are you getting that bloated, gut-rot feeling as you pull into the service station? Is there a twinge of nausea as you twist off the gas cap and grasp the pump? Doctor Watchdog has the diagnosis. It's called Tingelstad-Abeler disease. This week, their "Profile in Courage" gas tax went into effect at the pump. Apparently, these two are just hunky-dory with government throwing you a tax-filled anchor as you drown at the pump under the weight of \$3.30 a gallon gas.

And yes, it gets worse. The gas tax is actually a three stage disease. Stage II happens this fall with the third gas tax increase coming after that. And don't forget about Sales Tax syndrome. That's incubating in your wallet right now and will manifest itself come July 1st. By the way, economists call for gas to be at \$3.75 a gallon by Memorial Day. But that's okay. Your 401(k) and those real estate investments are doing well, right? <http://www.startribune.com/local/17183431.html>

2. Double Trouble.

Even by the legislature's low standards this week was a truly awful week for the beleaguered taxpayer. Not one but two truly bad bills passed off the House floor, endangering your economic and mental health.

First, the earmark pageant, er, bonding bill was passed, with all the bacon, pork, sausage, and pickled feet you would expect. Heck, the DFL used everything but the squeal in slaughtering this piggy piggy.

It's all there. The bike trails, volleyball courts, gorilla housing, ice arenas, convention centers, nature centers, brass band sheet music museums and so much more that is absolutely irrelevant to core governmental functions.

And that's the good news because taxpayers expected the pork fest. What was even worse was the overall magnitude of the spending. Since 1979, the legislature has observed a fiscal practice of passing a bonding bill that cost no more than 3% of the state's general fund budget. Rudy Perpich, Arne Carlson, Jesse Ventura and legislators from both parties took care to honor this practice – until 2008.

Yes, the same gang that took us from a \$2 billion surplus to a \$1 billion dollar deficit also managed to blow past the three percent spending cap on the bonding bill! The bill should have had a price tag of no more than \$825 million. Instead, their hog weighed in at a cool \$1 billion.

Governor Pawlenty has stated he will veto the whole bill or use his line-item veto authority to conduct emergency fiscal liposuction. The Watchdog recommends the governor "Kindergarten Cop." He appears to be the only adult working at the Capitol. Larry and Margaret, it's not a tuma!

Now let's turn to the "finance" bill. Last night, after 17 hours of floor action, the House passed, on a strict party line vote, the DFL's deficit elimination bill. As mentioned above, the state is about \$1 billion in the red.

The DFL's 372 page bill was a Frankenstein collection of shifts, gimmicks, fund raids, tax increases, fee increases, along with a whole bunch of bad policy.

Where to begin? How about \$416 million in fees? How does \$232 million in tax increases grab you? How about raids on dedicated funds siphoned off to balance the general fund? By the way, that's one-time money available only this year, leaving the budget \$500 million in the red for the NEXT biennium.

After that, there's a whole bunch of rotten policy apples baked in. California emissions standards, increased sick leave for state employees (don't you have enough?), "Green Economy" economic mandates...and on and on.

Oh yeah. The Minnesota Constitution also dictates that a bill shall embrace only one subject. The courts, however, won't get a say any time soon since the governor will no doubt once again be forced to whip out his "adult supervision" veto pen.

3. Dude, Where's my study?

The Vikings has appeared to jumpstart their ill-fated inept stadium pursuit this week when the Senate tax omnibus bill contained authorization for a "study" regarding a new stadium. In actuality, these studies are usually nothing more than a blueprint for a taxpayer-financed stadium.

When the tax bill reached the Senate floor, John Marty (DFL-Roseville) extracted the study like an infected tooth.

Another loss for Lester Bagley and the Armani-clad hucksters who prowl the Capitol in the service of Zygmunt Wilf.

Watchdog sources at the Capitol collectively rolled their eyes. Some Capitol observers consider Lester Bagley mediocre and are not surprised that the Vikings can't make headway at the Capitol. Good. Give him a raise, Zygi!

Let's step back for a moment. At one time, the Vikings stadium effort was headed up by Steve Novak and Lester Bagley. No wonder nothing got done. There was Laurel and Hardy. There was Mutt and Jeff. There was Beavis and Butthead. And there was Bagley and Novak.

<http://www.startribune.com/politics/state/17236484.html>

4. Smoking Ban Buffoonery.

While the Watchdog doesn't condone smoking, we always knew there would be problems with the state's Big Brother smoking ban. We just knew there would be problems when a collection of special interests zealots teamed up with know-it-all government elites to tell business owners how to run their enterprise.

And the results are in. First, the smoking ban has seriously eroded charitable gambling receipts. Those gambling proceeds are used for everything from providing youth athletic opportunities to providing everyday life necessities for permanently wounded combat veterans.

On top of that, there is data that indicate that smoking bans increase drunk driving.

Good job, guys.

<http://www.startribune.com/local/17298174.html>

<http://www.startribune.com/politics/state/17167501.html>

5. Subsidy City.

The big news out of Washington this week was the grilling of "Big Oil" executives who apparently have been too successful running their businesses while government has made earning that profit more difficult by banning drilling in ANWR and creating regulations that make it nearly impossible to add refining capacity.

Now the Watchdog is opposed to subsidies for oil companies. But let's make note of the rank hypocrisy here.

The same week that Washington was blasting oil subsidies, a House measure to reduce farm subsidies was crushed.

Farm income is at an all-time high and our members of Congress are totally unwilling to reduce the billions in subsidies we all pay to farmers. So, who's greedy?

E-mail Update 4/11/08

In This Issue:

1. Rally Time.
2. Scalpel.
3. "Solomon" Oberstar.
4. Is there an Economist in the House?
5. Do as I Say.

1. Rally Time.

How bittersweet. Tax day is upon us and is time for most of us to get out the checkbook and give Big Brother another tribute, lest the IRS come for what's left of your assets.

Just after that, however, is Freedom Day. This year, Tax Freedom Day is April 23rd. That means working stiffs will toil from the first of the year until April 23rd to pay the taxes. Isn't Uncle Sam compassionate? He lets you keep 2/3rds of what you work so hard to earn!

And now it's time for you to bite back, Watchdogs. Remember to join the Taxpayers League of Minnesota, Jason Lewis, and your fellow dogs on the front steps of the Capitol to tell the Good Ol' Boys and their partners in crime that we're mad as hell and we're not going to take it anymore!

April 12 (tomorrow!!!!)

High Noon

The Capitol

Will the weather be bad? Yes. Are there other obligations to address? Yes. Are those excuses? ABSOLUTELY NOT! Attendance is mandatory. That's why you own a coat.

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

Moreover, you can pick up a free poster, courtesy of Phil Krinkie (Indeed! A freebie from the famous skinflint "Dr. No!") <http://www.taxpayersleague.org>

2. Scalpel.

It looks like Governor Pawlenty has found a new career in plastic surgery. After the DFL spenders at the Capitol sent him a morbidly obese bonding bill, Dr. Pawlenty got out the scalpel and liposuction vacuum to bring the corpulent, plus-size patient back to a measure of fiscal health.

The post-op exam found the following bonding projects within the gooey, yellowish fiscal cellulite extracted by the good doctor, er, governor:

- The \$11 million gilded gorilla palace;

- \$70 million for the \$1 billion Central Corridor trolley;
- \$1.5 million for the Duluth tourist train;
- \$3 million for volleyball courts in Rochester;
- \$5 million for the Asian-Pacific cultural center;
- \$3 million for Orchestra Hall.

All told, Dr. Pawlenty excised over \$200 million worth of crud blocking the state's fiscal arteries. After witnessing the DFL gorging itself at the public trough, the Watchdog calls for Dr. Pawlenty and legislative Republicans to get the patient back on the operating table for a gastric fiscal bypass. It's quite apparent the DFL is fiscally fat and can't control its fiscal food.

Another finalist in this fiscal "Biggest Loser" contest was none other than Anoka County. The Good Ol' Boys had their backsides tanned big time by the governor. The Lino Lakes bike trail, Springbrook Nature Center, the aforementioned Duluth tourist train, and some pork for the Blaine sports center all fell to the fiscal axe. About the only project that was spared was the Anoka County forensics crime lab, thanks to the efforts of House Republicans who had the governor's ear. Dan Erhart's DFL buddies certainly failed in a big way – and that's a good thing.

Visit www.anokacountywatchdog.com to read the veto message and a complete list of vetoed projects.

3. "Solomon" Oberstar.

Congressman Jim Oberstar is either a true zealot or blasphemous pretender, so often does he invoke the Man Upstairs and the Good Book.

Back in August, just days after the bridge has collapsed and the bodies were still being recovered, Top Jimmy had a press conference in the same vicinity of the casualty collection point to announced his enlightened plan to increase our taxes to pay for bridges, so as to enable him to continue to raid the bridge fund to pave bike trails on the Iron Range.

Like Moses on the Mount, Top Jimmy thundered to the assembled, "If thou are not prepared to investeth 5 sheckles in bridge and goat path construction, God helpeth thou!"

<http://www.startribune.com/local/11552136.html>

This week, radio networks carried another sanctimonious chestnut from the bike-riding congressman from Chisholm. "Where there is no vision, the people perish," he solemnly noted, quoting Proverbs 29:18.

Watchdog 33:12 states, "When politicians exploit tragedy to raise taxes, God help them, and us."

4. Is there an Economist in the House?

The Hortman Unit reports. Hortman opined last month, "When our taxes were higher, we had more jobs and we had more high income earners."

Apparently Hortman believes that high taxes spark job growth and prosperity. Just like in North Korea, Albania, Cuba, and other socialist destinations, where famine, disease, and privation is a way of life thanks to centralized government. But we can see Hortman's point. She probably loves the high bicycle usage rates and low energy consumption rates in these hellholes.

Hey, Meli\$\$a here's a thought. Maybe Kim Jong-il will peddle in from Pyongyang to testify in favor of your California emissions bill and give us some tips on economic stimulus strategies. He could make it a two-fer and stop by Prairie Island on the way out to pick up a couple of centrifuges from reactor #1. In exchange, Hortman could amend her Olympics bill. The 2012 Pyongyang Summer Games!

It looks like Meli\$\$a missed Logic 101 in addition to Econ 101 at good ol' Boston U. If taxes were high and incomes were up, then surely it is the rooster who makes the sun rise each morning. Post hoc, ergo propter hoc!

5. Do as I say.

Much has been made of Global Warming monger Al Gore's lifestyle. The man who decries carbon sure makes a lot of it, with his mega-house and jet-setting lifestyle.

So what about Minnesota's "Alberta Gore", Meli\$\$a Hortman? Is she leading by example in reducing her carbon footprint? Is she showing us the way to a more miserable, earth-friendly existence?

According to Watchdog sources, there is a nice large Lexus parked in the garage of a palatial golf course home.

Now the Watchdog has never been invited to a foxhunt at the Hortman estate, so we can't verify this. However, Hennepin County property taxes do indicate that she indeed lives in large place that probably burns a lot more carbon than the tar paper shacks she would have us all occupy.

Get on your bike, Meli\$\$a. Then maybe you would have a shred of credibility.
http://mnhousegop.com/news_view/output/multimedia_list.asp

E-mail Update 4/18/08

In This Issue:

1. Chamber of Comedy.
2. Food for Thought.
3. Survey Says.
4. We Were Wrong!
5. Quote of the Week.

Editor's Note: Feeling some more pain at the pump? Gas prices are at an all-time record. Minnesotans are paying 64 cents more per gallon than a year ago. And the summer driving season isn't even here. Thanks, legislature!
<http://www.startribune.com/local/17911869.html>

1. Chamber of Comedy.

The MetroNorth Chamber of Commerce. What can one say? When it comes to public policy, this group just doesn't get it. The Watchdog has devoted many updates to setting the record straight and helping the Chamber's membership understand just what the Chamber is supporting, be it tax increases for football stadiums, tax increases for choo choo trains, tax increases for school levies, or tax increases for transportation.

In the latest Chamber newsletter, a "summery" of the transportation tax increase bill is offered. In the interest of space, the Watchdog offers just a few corrections.
<http://www.metronorthchamber.org/Files/metronorth4.08.pdf>

First, the Chamber observes that the tax increase will bring \$50 million in transportation dollars to the County over the next ten years. The Chamber then states "We expect this legislation will have a positive impact on commercial and industrial property taxes."

The \$50 million figure comes from the Transportation Alliance. This group is a liberal advocacy group, not the non-partisan fiscal office that releases official state government financial data. In fact, the group is allied with Minnesota 2020, the think tank led by disgraced former DFL leader Matt Entenza.
<http://www.transportationalliance.com/>

Furthermore, the comment regarding the property taxes is wishful thinking. These taxes are levied by the state and go to the general fund. With the DFL in charge of a \$1 billion deficit, the chances of a reduction in business property taxes are about nil. In fact, the DFL has introduced bills to RAISE these taxes.

Second, the bill allows counties to impose a sales tax to fund mass transit, which took Anoka County about a millisecond to impose. The system for dividing the spoils of these tax increases follows a complex weighted voting system that puts Anoka County on the short end of the stick. Think all the transportation projects go elsewhere? Wait until Hennepin and Ramsey County team up to throw their weight around.

http://abcnewspapers.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=2160&Itemid=26

Finally, the analysis solemnly notes that the Chamber is interested in ensuring that the tax increase monies will be spent “at costs and quality comparable to the best in the private sector.” Readers are assured that this goal will be met because “The bill includes a task force that will make specific recommendations at the end of the year.”

Huh? Hey, guys. The bill is already law. You’ve already given government the power to take the money. They’re already collecting and spending it! This vaunted task force will put together a report to the legislature that may or may not turn the recommendations into a bill that or may not become law sometime in the future. Ready. Fire! Aim.

2. Food for Thought.

The age-old Law of Unintended Consequences certainly has a comfy home within the confines of government, especially the federal government. The latest manifestation is the ethanol debacle.

We all know the problems with ethanol: it uses too much water; it’s an energy negative product; it produces less energy than gasoline; it offers huge corporate subsidies which are paid for by regular taxpayers; it encourages the destruction of the environment by offering incentives to destroy prairie land to plant corn, which is a very fertilizer-intensive crop.

Perhaps worst of all, ethanol is causing food prices to skyrocket, which is a hardship for many Americans and a matter of life and death in many poor countries.

Food riots have wracked countries from Haiti to Egypt to Pakistan. While famine and hunger are tragic, it is all the more tragic to realize our government is taking our tax dollars to subsidize a program that exacerbates this problem.

Agriculture subsidies are protected by very powerful special interests in Washington. Just ask Congressman Ron Kind (D-WI). In a time of record farm profits, Rep. Kind offered a modest proposal to reduce some of these unneeded subsidies. His legislation was crushed.

This is what happens when government and the special interests distort markets.
<http://www.farmpolicy.com/?p=669>

3. Survey Says.

County Commissioner Dick Lang has been a staunch advocate of Northstar rail. In fact, some of his constituents complain that he has pursued Northstar to the detriment of other transportation projects, including much-needed road improvements in his district.

Lang represents Ham Lake, whose city council recently conducted a citizen survey on a number of issues, including Northstar rail. The results aren't surprising. 62% stated they and their family have no plans to use commuter rail. Only 7% plan to use Northstar to get to work.

http://abcnewspapers.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=2288&Itemid=26

What the survey didn't mention is that 100% of Ham Lake property tax payers saw their regional rail levy double this year.

And Highway 65? It promises to remain dangerous and congested for the foreseeable future.

4. We Were Wrong!

The Watchdog's mission includes providing factual, reliable information to our readers. Thus, it is indeed a rare occasion when we must utter a mea culpa and correct ourselves.

Last week was one of those rare, unfortunate instances.

We reported that Tax Freedom Day was April 23rd. That date is the national average Freedom Day. Here in Minnesota, Freedom Day is actually April 27th.

We sincerely apologize for leading our readers to believe that they were done working for the government before they actually were.

<http://www.taxfoundation.org/UserFiles/Image/Tax-Freedom-Day/2008/maplarge.jpg>

Notice that Minnesota is among the latest Freedom Days!

5. Quote of the Week.

Another gem from the Hortman Unit!

"These are the vehicles consumers want."

Hortman uttered this quote in a Star Tribune story about her attempt to force California's auto emissions standards on Minnesota.

It should easily go without saying, but we have to say it. If Minnesotans truly wanted these vehicles, then the market would move to satisfy their demand. Using government to force consumers to accept a product is antithetical to free market economics and democratic principles.

We would be tempted to say Hortman doesn't understand simple economics, but that's not the case. Instead, it is far more likely that she believes in government solutions instead of free market solutions. That's called socialism. Hortman's legislative record clearly demonstrates that she doesn't believe in free market economics. Do her constituents agree? We'll find out in November.
<http://www.startribune.com/17648204.html>

E-mail Update 4/25/08

In This Issue:

1. Draining the Pool.
2. Windbag.
3. True Colors.
4. Tink's Tawdry Taconite Tailings Tale.
5. Bad Bills.

1. Draining the Pool.

He's baaaaaaaaack... Just when watchdogs thought their tax money was safe from Zygi Wilf's plundering perfidy, a scheme most foul has revealed itself at the Capitol.

Essentially, Wilf is allegedly looking to tap the Fiscal Disparities pool to help fund his football stadium.

Fiscal Disparities? What's that? Folks, this is one reason the Watchdog exists. We introduce you to arcane, dry, unglamorous laws and explain why those laws are important to you. Trust us, fiscal disparities monies are quite important to every property tax payer in Anoka County.

Here's the underlying public policy: In the Metro area, the growth in commercial development is uneven. Some areas are naturally more attractive to commerce than others. For example, some companies need to be close to the airport and have ready Interstate access, making a city like Bloomington quite attractive over another city like East Bethel. Thus, some cities enjoy large tax contributions from commercial properties while others must disproportionately turn to residential properties to provide the services all cities are expected to provide (police, fire, etc).

In response, the legislature created the Fiscal Disparities program to "share the commercial wealth" among Metro cities. The program has three public policy goals: 1) support a regional approach to development; 2) Equalize the distribution of fiscal resources; 3) Reduce competition for commercial properties.

Anoka County has been a large recipient of these dollars, which have helped reduce property taxes, even though local government seems to be doing its best to jack them up.

In short, Wilf seeks to divert money away from the program and into a subsidy program to build a stadium. And how do think cities in Anoka County would react? Reduce spending accordingly? Or raise your property taxes to fill the gap?

Folks, Wilf's idea would essentially have you, through higher property taxes, subsidize his stadium. Get educated on this!

<http://www.house.leg.state.mn.us/hrd/issinfo/ssfisdis.htm>
<http://www.startribune.com/politics/state/17994069.html>

2. Windbag.

You just can't make up this stuff. While the Dog was tempted to put HF 3585 in the "bad bill" update, this one deserves special mention.

Authored by Rep. Lyle Koenen (who doesn't even live near the Metro area), the bill would allow Metro counties to own and operate wind power facilities. Yes, you heard it right. Anoka County would be empowered to tax all of us to purchase and operate windmills.

Yeah, that 's just what that gang needs. Another excuse to raise our taxes to finance another scheme far afield from core functions like law enforcement and road improvement. It just doesn't end. Commuter rail, football stadiums, wind farms. Just what the good people of Anoka County demand from county government.

In addition to authorizing taxes, the bill also empowers Metro counties to "acquire" wind generation facilities. "Acquire" is code speak for eminent domain, the government's power to seize land from folks against their will. Have a prime piece of real estate to support a wind turbine? Hold on to your deed!

Here's an idea for wind energy. Put a huge windmill in front of Dan Erhart's mouth. You could power Anoka County for decades. In fact, one on his backside would work as well, seeing as he talks out of his behind so often. Wind or methane, it's all in the name Mother Earth!

https://www.revisor.leg.state.mn.us/revisor/pages/search_status/status_detail.php?b=House&f=HF3585&ssn=0&y=2008

3. True Colors.

The Watchdog received the following invitation this week from Education Minnesota, the teachers union:

Tingelstad will be leaving her position in the legislature when the current session ends. Rep. Tingelstad has received the recommendation of Education Minnesota on several occasions in the past. She has been a strong supporter of public education, of teachers, and the Anoka-Hennepin school district. The event honoring Tingelstad will be held on Tuesday April 22, 2008 at Anoka High School. The start time is 7:00 pm. This is a great opportunity to stop in for whatever time you have available and thank Tingelstad for her years of service.

Ah, yes, we all remember Tingelstad's "several occasions" where she received the teacher union endorsement. Unfortunately for her, the GOP delegates in her district remembered as well, which is why she would have never been endorsed this year and instead opted to retreat, er, retire.

While the media and DFL apologists want to portray the situation as one of Republicans demanding lock-step loyalty on every issue, this event is a reminder of what really happened.

Northstar rail, AFL-CIO endorsements, teacher union endorsements, gas taxes, bigger government. It all adds up.

The Watchdog, by the way, didn't attend. We couldn't afford the gas and Northstar doesn't have a stop at Anoka High School – yet.

4. Tink's Tawdry Taconite Tailings Tale.

Politics is a contact sport. Every candidate and elected officials takes lumps from voters, opponents, and the media on occasion.

What's interesting about Elwyn Tinklenberg is the surprising number of fellow DFLers who seem to truly despise the man and his lobbying background. It's one thing for the other party to dislike you; it's another when it's your own people.

Tinklenberg's ties to the taconite industry have raised further suspicions amongst the liberal DFLers he must bring home if he wishes to lose respectably this fall.

The blog "Blue Man in Red District" has a number of thought-provoking posts on this subject. Our friend Eric Zaetsch does as well.

<http://buildourparty.blogspot.com/search?q=taconite>

<http://zaetsch.blogspot.com/>

The Watchdog offers humble advice to our DFL friends: Getting in bed with a Good Ol' Boy and can be very dangerous. He who lies with dogs rises with fleas.

5. Bad Bills.

Here's what Rep. Paul Gardner is doing for his constituents:

HF 347 Yard bags required to be compostable HF 3789 Stores have to post signs about phosphorous in fertilizer

At least the economy is doing well, gas prices are stable, and unemployment is low enough to allow him to spend taxpayer resources pursuing these whims.

<http://www.house.leg.state.mn.us/members/members.asp?district=53A>

E-mail Update 5/2/08

In This Issue:

1. Foot In Mouth Disease.
2. Nepotism Nincompoopism.
3. Pohlad's Public Plundering Pays.
4. Train Taps Treasury Twice.
5. Rosemount Rejects Ridiculous Recreation Ruse.

1. Foot in Mouth Disease.

An outbreak of foot in mouth disease has been reported in Ham Lake. Authorities have isolated the source and confirm that Mayor Paul Meunier is at the center of the hot zone.

According to news reports, the Ham Lake city council met April 16th as a task force to consider changes to the city's comprehensive plan. After casting the lone dissenting vote, Meunier remarked "I feel like a black person in a room with 30 white people." After being asked to clarify his remark, Meunier repeated the statement.

Meunier apparently believes his remarks were appropriate and acceptable. He has refused to issue an apology thus far and has even deflected responsibility by questioning the motives of those who have criticized his ignorant remarks. While the Watchdog cannot speak to the motives of his critics, he is the one who uttered the remark and no one forced him to do so.

Way to go, mayor. Way to think it through. Opinion leaders in Anoka County have been working hard to overcome stereotypes that the county is little more than a den of ignorant hicks. Meunier's comments make Jed Clampet look like Alex Trabek and set back efforts to showcase our county as a wonderful place to run a business and raise a family.

<http://www.startribune.com/local/north/18302604.html>

2. Nepotism Nincompoopism.

Anoka County commissioner Scott LeDoux is a frequent flyer in the pages of the Watchdog. Although absent in recent weeks, he makes an encore appearance this week.

According to the Pioneer Press, LeDoux offered, then withdrew his wife's name from consideration for an appointment to the county board of Appeal and Equalization, the board that has the power to adjust home valuations.

In a blinding flash of the obvious, LeDoux realized that nominating his wife would look like a conflict of interest and create the appearance of impropriety.

Assistant County attorney chimed in with a rather Good Ol' Boy-esque legal analysis of the situation, noting that such an appointment wouldn't be a conflict of interest and isn't against state law.

What wasn't mentioned is that many local units of government have policies regarding nepotism, the practice of hiring or appointing relatives of elected officials. Not surprisingly, Anoka County has no such policy. What a surprise.

In fairness to LeDoux, he did withdraw his wife's name and recognized that pushing her nomination would have been problematic.

LeDoux further observed that integrity and honor are important to him. We also take him at his word and call on him to introduce some more integrity and accountability into county government by introducing a policy to prohibit nepotism.

http://www.twincities.com/cj_9047629?IADID

3. Pohlad's Public Plundering Pays.

Well, it didn't take long for Carl Pohlad to begin reaping the financial benefits of that new "public facility" being built in downtown Minneapolis on the backs of those least able to afford a sales tax increase.

One of the world's richest men has seen the value of the Twins skyrocket 33% to \$288 million, thanks to the new stadium.

Talk about corporate welfare! The average taxpayer in Hennepin County gets a gas tax increase and a sales tax increase while Pohlad gets millions he didn't earn. Perhaps it's time for a Hennepin County Watchdog.

<http://www.startribune.com/local/18217239.html>

4. Train Taps Treasury Twice.

Ah, Northstar rail, the gift that keeps on taking. You think Northstar is done ravaging your wallet? Hardly. The \$165 million rail line is now projected to cost \$320 million.

This week, the legislature heard a bill that would exempt certain Northstar and Central Corridor purchases from the sales tax.

Really? What happened to the promise that Northstar wouldn't be back for more state money? After all, exempting from the sales tax removes money from the state treasury. How in the world do Northstar cheerleaders expect to do that when the state is already \$1 billion in the red under DFL control?

<https://www.revisor.leg.state.mn.us/bin/bldbill.php?bill=H3395.0.html&session=ls85>

5. Rosemount Rejects Ridiculous Recreation Ruse.

There must be a whole lot of Watchdogs down in Rosemount. Voters in that fair city overwhelmingly smacked down an \$8 million bond issue to build baseball fields and refurbish a church to turn it into an arts center. A whopping 70% rejected the tax increase proposal.

Do you think folks are just a bit tired of tax increases?

<http://www.startribune.com/politics/local/18031339.html>

E-mail Update 5/9/08

In This Issue:

1. An Emesis-Inducing Endorsement.
2. Perusing Pork Publication Produces Panic.
3. Football Fails Frustrated Fans.
4. Going Nuclear.
5. No Climate Change.

1. An Emesis-Inducing Endorsement.

The Watchdog knew how this was going to work out. Legislators like Jim Abeler would deliver the override vote to increase taxes and, in turn, the special interests who supported and benefited would return the favor. Exactly the type of “you scratch my back I’ll scratch yours” politics average citizens despise.

The first installment of the payback happened last week when the MetroNorth Chamber of Commerce endorsed Abeler. The Chamber eagerly supported the \$6.6 billion tax transportation tax increase Abeler helped pass. Since when, by the way, did increasing tax burdens on business become a chamber of commerce priority?

Usually, special interest groups at least feign the appearance of impartiality by screening all candidates for a particular office. For legislative seats like Abeler’s the filing period won’t even OPEN until July. As of today, not one candidate, not even Abeler himself, is an official candidate for House District 48B. The MetroNorth is apparently so enamored of Abeler’s tax raising ways they have dropped all pretence of conducting an impartial endorsing process.

The stature of the MetroNorth Chamber continues wane...

2. Perusing Pork Publication Produces Panic.

Citizens Against Government Waste (CAGW) recently published its annual “Pig Book” exposing Washington’s porcine ways.

CAGW had this to say in the “introduction” section of this year’s report:

If Washington, D.C. were to export a commodity, it would be rhetoric. Politicians especially love to talk about fiscal responsibility. On March 13, 2008 the Senate had an opportunity to test that rhetoric when Sen. Jim DeMint (R-S.C.) offered an amendment to impose a one-year moratorium on earmarks. Pork beat talk as the measure failed by a vote of 29-71.

In the House of Representatives, Republicans want a one-year moratorium but will not unilaterally disarm. Democrats won’t agree because of objections from big porkers such as House Defense Appropriations Subcommittee Chairman John Murtha (D-Pa.). On February 11, 2008, Roll Call noted, “Every private entity that received a special

project from the Pennsylvania Democrat in last year's defense spending bill had given him political money at some point since 2005." At his February 27, 2008 fundraiser for lobbyists, Murtha received a standing ovation.

The latest installment of Citizens Against Government Waste's (CAGW) 18-year exposé of pork-barrel spending includes \$3,000,000 for The First Tee; \$1,950,000 for the Charles B. Rangel Center for Public Service; and \$188,000 for the Lobster Institute in Maine.

In fiscal year 2008, Congress stuffed 11,610 projects (the second highest total ever) into the 12 appropriations bills worth \$17.2 billion. The 11,610 projects represent a 337 percent increase over the 2,658 projects in fiscal year 2007. The \$17.2 billion is a 30 percent increase over the fiscal year 2007 total of \$13.2 billion. Only the Defense and Homeland Security bills included earmarks in fiscal year 2007, so comparisons of other bills are made between fiscal years 2008 and 2006. Total pork identified by CAGW since 1991 adds up to \$271 billion.

Alaska led the nation with \$556 per capita (\$380 million). The runners up were Hawaii with \$221 per capita (\$283 million) and North Dakota with \$208 per capita (\$133 million).

http://www.cagw.org/site/PageServer?pagename=reports_pigbook2008

Also note that Minnesota's own Pork King, Jim Oberstar had 33 earmarks totaling \$88.4 million.

http://www.cagw.org/site/DocServer/House_-_alpha.pdf?docID=3021

3. Football Fails Frustrated Fans.

The Watchdog has frequently exposed the hapless, bungling ways of our losing pro football franchise.

Complimenting mediocre play on the field, the team has further alienated fans and citizens alike with ham-handed lobbying efforts at the Capitol and deplorable behavior on the streets and lakes of the Northstar state.

Those embarrassing chickens have come home to roost. ESPN recently ranked 122 professional sports franchises with respect to fan satisfaction. The Vikings ranked a lowly 110th.

This information was derived from a Pioneer Press column by Charley Walters.

4. Going Nuclear.

Disciples of the Global Warming religion like to paint skeptics as right-wing extremists and know nothings.

It appears the extremist shoe may be on the other foot. Greenpeace founder Patrick Moore recently spoke to the Boise Metro Chamber of Commerce (it looks like they get interesting speakers, unlike a certain local chamber), offering some unique insights regarding climate change and the future of energy.

Moore first observed that there is no proof that global warming is caused by humans (are you reading Rep. Hortman? Yes, we know you are!).

While Moore expressed skepticism with respect to human-caused global warming, he does believe climate change of some type is serious enough to mandate changes in the way America produces energy. Namely, Moore called for hundreds of new nuclear power plants. Moore supports nuclear power, in part, because alternative sources like wind and solar don't have the potential to replace fossil fuels in any great quantity.

Moore also opined that the uranium fuel that powers nuclear plants comes from domestic and friendly foreign sources that are not hostile to America.

If the founder of Greenpeace is cool with nuclear power, why does the Minnesota legislature maintain a ban on the construction of new nuclear power plants?

<http://www.idahostatesman.com/newsupdates/story/360625.html>

5. No Climate Change.

Speaking of climate change, there is one area where the climate most certainly has not changed – Minnesota's business climate. According to the Small Business & Entrepreneurship Council, Minnesota's business climate currently ranks a dismal 49th of the 50 states, just ahead of New Jersey.

Here's to hoping Minnesota will undergo some real climate change!

<http://www.sbesc.org/states/>

E-mail Update 5/16/08

In This Issue:

1. Criminal Red Tape.
2. Smellin' the Coffee.
3. Tastin' the Tailpipe.
4. Capitol Capers.

1. Criminal Red Tape.

If you thought bureaucratic red tape and inertia wasn't all that bad, listen to what we encountered as we tried to fulfill our role as a good corporate citizen this week.

Unless you're living under a rock, you're well aware of the wave of violent muggings plaguing Coon Rapids.

When the Watchdog learned that a modest \$2,000 reward had been offered to catch the dirt bags responsible, the Watchdog stepped forward with a \$3,000 donation offer to increase the reward amount to \$5,000.

Sounds pretty easy, right? Not so fast. The Watchdog was told that the reward was offered through an organization called the Coon Rapids Crime Prevention Association (CRCPA). The Board of Directors of the CRCPA authorized the reward from the budget of the organization.

The Watchdog was further told that it could make a donation to the CRCPA but not directly to the reward fund. There would be no guarantee that a donation would be added to the reward amount. In other words, "give us the money and we'll decide how to spend it."

Give us a break. Among all the buffoonery we've uncovered in our storied history, this ranks right near the top.

Thank goodness it appears the perps have been fingered.

Are there any good crime fighting organizations out there that could use a \$3,000 boost and won't give us the red tape run around? Send an email and we'll consider.

<http://www.ci.coon-rapids.mn.us/publicsafety/Police/crcpa.htm>

http://www.startribune.com/local/north/18959059.html?location_refer=North%20Metro

2. Smellin' the Coffee.

If the Republican Party didn't get the wake up memo in November of 2006, the voters have delivered another copy – times three!

In recent months, the GOP has lost three congressional seats that were considered strongholds.

In March, the Democrats won Illinois District 14, a seat vacated by former House Speaker Dennis Hastert. Democrat Bill Foster garnered 53% of the vote in a district that George Bush carried with 55% in 2004.

Early this month, Democrats picked up another former GOP seat in Louisiana's 6th District, a seat that had been in GOP hands since 1974. Democrat Don Cazayoux defeated Republican Woody Jenkins 49-46% in a district that gave George Bush 59% of the vote in 2004.

And earlier this week, Democrat Travis Childers won a convincing 8 point victory in Mississippi's 1st district, which went for George Bush in 2004 with a whopping 62% in 2004.

It is clear George Bush's "compassionate conservatism" and a band of enablers in the congress have deeply sullied the Republican brand. It comes down to two problems, really.

First, Washington Republicans have virtually destroyed the party's reputation for fiscal conservatism. From a \$9 trillion debt to pork barrel "bridges to nowhere" to massive expansions of entitlement programs, Republicans in Washington have proven that talk of fiscal conservatism is just that.

Second, the president's foreign policy blunder in Iraq has cost the party, and the nation, dearly. War policies that go wrong have been an unfortunate aspect of geopolitical life since time immemorial. The Romans, Napoleon, and LBJ are three examples of leaders who were swallowed alive by their war policies.

So where does the GOP go from here? They can start by making a legitimate attempt to regain their reputation for free markets and limited government.

Rep. Mike Pence of Indiana said it best. Said Pence, "Until we convince our public we have renewed our commitment to limited government and fiscal discipline, we will continue to lose."

3. Tastin' the Tailpipe.

The Hortman Unit reports! Thursday, a state Senate committee killed Meli\$\$a Hortman's bill to put California in charge of Minnesota vehicle emissions.

Rep. Hortman has been on a bit of losing streak. First, her nanny state bill to make seat belt violations a primary offense was rejected by the full House and sent back to conference committee.

On Thursday, the Senate Business, Industry, and Jobs committee killed her California car bill on a 10-7 vote.

The vote goes to show just how liberal and out of touch this “moderate” really is. After all, both chambers are dominated by fellow democrats. In fact, the Senate is so dominated by DFLers that it has a veto-proof majority. Hortman couldn’t even get her bill through the committee process and to the floor.

What does it say about your politics when your fellow Democrats kill your bill? Moreover, where’s the work on real issues like health care and education? It seems Hortman’s priorities are focused on things like seat belts, light bulbs, and the Olympics. Yeesh.

http://www.twincities.com/allheadlines/ci_9270337

4. Capitol Capers.

It’s that time year. The legislative session winding down and the DFL is eye to eye with the governor in a showdown over the state’s budget. At this writing, we’ve got just three days to get a deal before the May 19th adjournment (the legislature can’t do business on the last day of session, per the state constitution).

Putting aside the budget numbers and the tedious details, here’s the Dog’s two cents on who wants what out of the budget deal.

The House DFL: Speaker Kelliher wants a deal and wants one bad. Her entire caucus is on the ballot this fall for the first time since taking control in 2006. She would like to go into the election cycle with an orderly, timely conclusion to the session on the resume. She would like to contrast this hoped-for finish with the special sessions, failed bonding bills, and general gridlock that plagued Republican rule.

A special session or a failed budget deal that forces the governor to unallot funds to close the deficit will haunt DFL House candidates, especially suburban freshmen who won with narrow margins in 2006 who are already contending with unhappy constituents angry about the \$6.6 billion transportation tax increase in a sour economy.

The Senate DFL: This group is led by folks who may have something to gain from failure. First, they’re not on the ballot this fall and won’t face the voters until 2010.

Second, majority leader Larry Pogemiller is rumored to have a strong antipathy for Governor Pawlenty. Getting these two to agree is a difficult proposition, given the personality conflicts that seem so apparent.

Moreover, assistant majority leader Taryl Clark and Senate Tax chairman Tom Bakk are rumored to be candidates for governor in 2010. This dynamic puts special considerations on their negotiations with the governor – and each other. These folks

are required to view negotiations through the prism of their aspirations and evaluate how various outcomes affect their personal ambition.

Governor Pawlenty: With the bully pulpit and considerable political skill, the governor can probably turn any situation to his advantage.

If a reasonable deal can be struck, Pawlenty can claim the mantle of leadership and burnish his credentials as a potential VP candidate who knows how to reach across the aisle and get things done in a state that trends Democrat.

If things blow up, he can use the bully pulpit to rail against tax and spend Democrats and thus burnish his credentials as a fiscal conservative with the courage to stand tall in the face of large Democrat majorities.

So if a deal doesn't materialize by the May 19 deadline, should the governor just unallot to balance the budget or should he call the legislature back into special session?

If he unallots, he runs the risk of solely owning some painful budget cuts and allowing the DFL to stand on the sidelines and hurl criticism.

On the other hand, Pawlenty controls the unallotment process, making it predictable.

If he calls a special session, he benefits by highlighting the DFL-led legislature's failure to fulfill a primary responsibility – taking care of the state's budget. Pundits recall 2004, when the GOP House majority lost 14 seats after failing to pass a bonding bill. Every day the legislature sits in special session shines a light on the DFL House majority that will face the voters that fall.

On the other hand, only the governor calls a special session but only the legislature decides the agenda and when the special session ends. Ceding control of the situation may be something the governor doesn't want to do.

Are we right or full of malarkey? We'll tell you next week!

E-mail Update 5/23/08

In This Issue:

Editor's Note: The 85th session of the Minnesota Legislature adjourned this past Sunday, lowering the curtain until a new legislature convenes next January (barring a special session).

This week, the Watchdog will highlight 10 issues from the 2008 session that involved north Metro legislators or affected our area.

Next week's update will take a wider perspective as we analyze what did and did not happen at the Capitol this session.

#10: Who's Your Daddy?

Retiring state Representative Kathy Tingelstad of Andover authored HF 3449, a bill modifying the state's laws with respect to assisted reproduction. The bill changed words like "husband" and "father" and replaced them with "partner." Tingelstad withdrew the bill in the middle of a committee hearing when neither she nor her expert witness could tell the committee the definition of "partner," much to the irritation of many members of the committee.

<https://www.revisor.leg.state.mn.us/bin/bldbill.php?bill=H3449.0.html&session=ls85>

http://www.house.leg.state.mn.us/comm/minutes1ls85.asp?comm=6000&id=1120&ls_year=85

#9: Garbage in, Garbage Out.

Number 9 comes from the Hortman Unit, recalling HF 4048. The Watchdog "lowlighted" this bill via a regular email update during the session. Dedicated readers will remember HF 4048 as the bill that would make throwing a pop can in the garbage illegal.

"A person may not place a beverage container in mixed municipal solid waste" the bill intoned in succinct and totalitarian fashion.

This bill did not even receive a single committee hearing and died when the final gavel fell.

Moreover, it looks like the DFL-dominated senate didn't like her bill either as there was no senate companion bill.

<https://www.revisor.leg.state.mn.us>

#8: A Womb With a View.

Rep. Tingelstad makes a second appearance on our list with HF 3448, a bill regulating "gestational carrier agreements", another term for "rent a womb" arrangements whereby

usually wealthy and educated infertile couples pay usually poor and under-educated young women to carry a baby to term in exchange for some cold hard cash.

While the bill passed the legislature, the governor laid a veto beat down on the legislation.

<https://www.revisor.leg.state.mn.us>

http://www.governor.state.mn.us/priorities/legislation/index_NextRow11.htm

#7: Didn't We Already Pass a Tax for This?

Watchdogs are well acquainted with the \$6.6 billion transportation tax increased passed this session (more on that later). What Watchdogs may not know is that a provision was included in the end-of-session tax bill that would have expanded the Met Council "transit tax district" to the entire Metropolitan area. Currently, the Met Council can levy a property tax to pay for mass transit in certain parts of the Metro but not all. Areas like Ham Lake, Saint Francis, and East Bethel don't pay the tax but would have under the provision.

The provision was dropped in conference committee after Republican legislators and the governor objected.

<https://www.revisor.leg.state.mn.us>

#6: Busy Work.

Rep. Jim Abeler plays MacBeth when we hear a legislative tale told that is "full of sound and fury, signifying nothing."

The Watchdog has reported in the past on Abeler's prolific ways, authoring and co-authoring far more bills than any of his colleagues.

This session was no different. Abeler's signature was affixed to a mind-boggling 550 pieces of legislation. In fact, it took our computers a full 30 seconds to upload his author page.

Did Abeler actually read and fully comprehend each and every bill?

One thing we do know is that a great deal of staff time and resources was expended researching and writing all these bills. In fact, the Minnesota House as a whole introduced 4,256 bills in the 2007-2008 biennium.

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

<http://www.house.leg.state.mn.us/bills/revisornumbers.asp>

#5: Breaking Wind.

State Rep. Lyle Koenen of Clara City waaaay out in western Minnesota somehow got entangled with the Anoka and Hennepin good ol' boys who convinced Lyle to carry a

piece of legislation that would allow Metro counties to get into the wind farm business, through eminent domain, if necessary.

Since Dan Erhart failed at the football stadium business, he must be looking for a new outlet for his entrepreneurial urges!

Governor Pawlenty got hornswaggled on this one and signed it into law. At least the power to levy property taxes to back the wind projects was dropped.

<https://www.revisor.leg.state.mn.us>

#4: California Dreamin'

Another Meli\$\$\$ Hortman gem smacked her constituents upside the cylinder head when she authored HF 863, a bill to put some un-elected bureaucrats in California in charge of our auto emissions standards.

This "moderate" bill never made it to a vote of the full House and was killed in a senate committee.

<http://www.senate.leg.state.mn.us>

<https://www.revisor.leg.state.mn.us>

#3: Real Estate, Real Scary.

As far as Anoka taxpayers are concerned, HF 362 takes the blue ribbon as the dumbest bill of the entire biennium.

Authored by (you guessed it) Rep. Hortman, the bill authorized Anoka County to levy a new tax on mortgages and deeds processed in the county.

Apparently some legislators missed the memo about the whole real estate downturn thing. They were apparently out earning some per diem when the news broke that this is the worst real estate market in a long, long time.

Despite the obvious foolishness of this bill, it found its way into various omnibus bills and even passed off the House floor, only to be dropped in conference committee after a threatened veto.

<https://www.revisor.leg.state.mn.us>

#2: We've Got Train Money!

Despite a \$935 million deficit, the state somehow found the money to give Northstar rail an exemption from the state's sales tax.

In a cynical way, the Watchdog could support this legislation because it theoretically forces the state to pay a cost that would otherwise be borne by local taxpayers.

Not to worry. In testimony before the House Taxes committee, the Good Ol' Boy Godfather himself refused to promise that local taxpayers would see any of the money passed on to them in the form of reduced taxes. The Watchdog predicts that the local money for sales taxes will just be spent on some other aspect of Northstar rail, like lunches at the Oceanaire Seafood room. Right, Mr. Novak?
<https://www.revisor.leg.state.mn.us>

#1: A \$6.6 Billion Punch to the Gut.

While not much of a surprise, the #1 issue this session was the massive transportation tax that was enacted via a veto override.

The issue also had a local flavor as two of the six Republicans who voted to override hail from Anoka County. Rep. Kathy Tingelstad chose to retire rather than face judgment at the polls while Jim Abeler faces a more uncertain future as of this writing. His endorsing convention comes later this month.

There you have it, folks. Our top 10 issues from a local point of view. Where else would you get this kind of coverage?

E-mail Update 5/30/08

In This Issue:

Editor's Note: This week, the Watchdog continues our examination of the 2008 legislative session. While we promised a different type of analysis, we heard from a number of dedicated readers that they wanted our take on who was retiring and what the future holds for the Anoka County delegation.

You asked, we deliver. We will therefore defer our global analysis of the 2008 session until next week.

With 2008 being an election year, the end of the session brought about a number of retirement announcements from House members, with the entire House standing for election this fall while no member of the senate will stand for re-election. On the final night of session, 4 DFLers and 8 Republicans stood to give their farewell speeches.

The North Metro claimed 25% of those retiring members, with three members calling it quits. So what does this mean for our area?

Retiring:

Kathy Tingelstad (R-Andover)

Tingelstad's retirement means that pharmacies in Anoka County will see sales of Tums and other antacids plummet as area Republicans will no longer have to chew their nails or work over their worry beads wondering how Tingelstad will vote on a particular issue.

Tingelstad started strong but her career took a sharp turn to the left over time, leaving this RINO to be most remembered for 1) making Northstar rail a reality; and 2) voting for a veto override to increase our taxes by \$6.6 billion.

Outlook: The Watchdog gives the edge to the DFL right now. DFL candidate Jerry Newton is an experienced campaigner and well known in the area. If Newton campaigns as a common sense kind of Democrat, he will be a formidable candidate.

On the Republican side, newcomer Jake Cimenski will make his first run for elective office. Cimenski is a rookie but seems to have the right work ethic and enthusiasm to overcome a lack of experience. Moreover, the district is not a blue as some claim. George Bush carried the district in 2004.

Either way, the Watchdog predicts the area will have a more conservative legislator come January than we have right now.

<http://www.house.leg.state.mn.us/members/members.asp?district=49B>

<http://www.newton.dflsd49.org/>

<http://www.jake08.net/>

Chris DeLaForest (R-Andover)

DeLaForest steps down after three terms. Over his tenure, DeLaForest hewed to a conservative philosophy on economic issues while demonstrating a more libertarian/conservative viewpoint on social issues. It is interesting to note that he and Tingelstad are seatmates and members of the same party yet voted differently on many issues.

Outlook: This is a safe Republican seat. DeLaForest won with over 60% every election and never lost a single precinct. The area has been in Republican hands for many years, going back to Kathy Tingelstad (before redistricting), Teresa Lynch, and John Hartinger.

The Republicans have endorsed Peggy Scott, an attractive and articulate conservative whose views fit the district well. The Watchdog also hears that Scott is running an aggressive campaign, taking nothing for granted.

On the DFL side, the party has decided to go with Ted Butler, a government employee who is married to a government employee. In other words, Butler looks to be the "typical" DFL candidate. The hard fact for Ted Butler is that he won't win. At least there's that public subsidy for a new computer and a sweet "volunteer appreciation" party.

<http://www.house.leg.state.mn.us/members/members.asp?district=49A>

<http://www.scott49a.com/>

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

Scott Kranz (DFL-Blaine)

Kranz is a first-term legislator who was swept into office in the DFL landslide in 2006, perhaps against his wishes. Kranz quickly developed a reputation at the Capitol as one who didn't seem too enthusiastic about being there, especially for a newcomer. Kranz was one of the first to announce his retirement and was subsequently absent for a number of floor sessions.

Kranz leaves very little in the way of a legislative legacy. If the legislature was high school, the yearbook would show him as one of the stoners (oops, they're called "at risk" these days) who failed to show up for picture day and is thus listed in name only at the back of the book under the title "camera shy."

Outlook: This seat had been trending Republican during Andy Westerberg's tenure. 2006 changed that trend. In a normal year, this is a fairly red district. If 2008 looks like 2006, the seat very well may stay in DFL hands.

The local DFL has endorsed newcomer Shawn Hamilton, who despite his age, has run two previous races unsuccessfully.

Republicans have endorsed Tim Sanders, another newcomer who overcame a crowded endorsing field to earn the Republican label for the 51A seat.

<http://www.house.leg.state.mn.us/members/memberselectls85.asp?district=51A>

<http://www.shawnhamilton.org/>
<http://www.timothysandersmn.com/>

County Outlook: Assuming the other incumbents are re-elected, what does our legislative leadership in the House look like heading into the 86th session of the Minnesota legislature?

The Dean.

Tom Hackbarth (R-Cedar) is the undisputed dean of the delegation. First elected in 1994, Hackbarth is by far the most senior Anoka County House member, with Jim Abeler coming in two terms later in 1998.

A staunch conservative, Hackbarth will have his work cut out for him working in the minority, which is the likely outcome of the election at this point.

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

Up and Coming.

Denise Dittrich (DFL-Champlin) is poised to take on a greater role for Anoka County in Saint Paul. A former school board member, the second termmer is well liked on both sides of the aisle and truly understands the issues. While the Watchdog doesn't always agree with her, she is truly a moderate who demonstrates the ability to see both sides of an issue.

If the DFL comes back in the majority, Dittrich will be well positioned to leverage her talents.

<http://www.house.leg.state.mn.us/members/members.asp?district=47A>

Rookies.

Bob Dettmer (R-Forest Lake)

Tom Tillberry (DFL-Fridley)

Carolyn Laine (DFL-Columbia Heights)

The legislature is a complex place and it takes awhile to learn the ropes, so we'll give them a break for now. We'll watch these three over the coming years to see how they develop as policy makers.

<http://www.house.leg.state.mn.us/members/members.asp?district=52a>

<http://www.house.leg.state.mn.us/members/members.asp?district=51b>

<http://www.house.leg.state.mn.us/members/members.asp?district=50A>

Class Clowns.

Despite being in the majority and serving as an assistant majority leader, it's hard to take Melissa Hortman seriously. She uses her influence to do little beyond pursuing a radical enviro-weenie agenda that seeks to use the power of government to force citizens to ride horses and live in mud huts so as to minimize our carbon footprint.

When time allows, she also spends taxpayer time and resources chasing down Olympic dreams.

<http://www.house.leg.state.mn.us/members/members.asp?district=47B>

Everything we've written about Hortman can also be applied to Paul Gardner (DFL-Shoreview) as well. Known best around the Capitol as the guy who authored a bill requiring yard waste bags to be compostable, Gardner is all about radical environmentalism. Again, if the legislature was high school, Hortman and Gardner would attend prom together, riding the bus instead of a limo and ensuring that any empty beverage containers were properly recycled.

<http://www.house.leg.state.mn.us/members/members.asp?district=53A>

A snazzy pair, indeed.

And this is the district that used to be represented by Phil Krinkie!

http://www.taxpayersleague.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1&Itemid=55

Wild Card.

Who can figure out Jim Abeler's agenda? We certainly can't.

In any case, it may be moot, as Abeler's re-election is in doubt. In fact, his re-endorsement is uncertain as well.

At this point, no other candidates, DFL or GOP, have filed the necessary paperwork with the state's campaign board, although some have publicly announced their intent to run.

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

Besides the three Anoka County legislators, the other 9 retirees include:
Neva Walker (DFL-Minneapolis)

<http://www.house.leg.state.mn.us/members/members.asp?district=61B>

Aaron Peterson (DFL-Madison)

<http://www.house.leg.state.mn.us/members/members.asp?district=20A>

Frank Moe (DFL-Bemidji)

<http://www.house.leg.state.mn.us/members/members.asp?district=04A>

Brad Finstad (R-Comfrey)

<http://www.house.leg.state.mn.us/members/members.asp?district=21B>

Dennis Ozment (R-Rosemount)

<http://www.house.leg.state.mn.us/members/members.asp?district=37B>

Connie Ruth (R-Owatonna)

<http://www.house.leg.state.mn.us/members/members.asp?district=26A>

Erik Paulsen (R-Eden Prairie)

<http://www.house.leg.state.mn.us/members/members.asp?district=42B>

John Berns (R-Wayzata)

<http://www.house.leg.state.mn.us/members/members.asp?district=33B>
Bud Heidgerken (R-Freeport)
<http://www.house.leg.state.mn.us/members/members.asp?district=13A>

E-mail Update 6/6/08

In This Issue:

1. The One Thing You Need to Know.
2. What's the Score?

1. The One Thing You Need to Know.

In our final piece of analysis regarding the 2008 legislative session, we take a clear-eyed look at the most important issue to emerge from the 2008 legislative session that nobody is talking about. Sure, we all know about the transportation tax override. We have read about the line item vetoes of bonding projects as well as the record number of vetoes cast by governor Pawlenty. But what about structural balance? What did you read or hear about the state's structural budget deficit? It's a very important issue and the media virtually ignored it. But we didn't and that's why you turn to us each week for the real scoop.

Structural Balance.

Editor's Note: These budget figures were compiled by the non-partisan Minnesota House fiscal staff.

<http://www.house.leg.state.mn.us/fiscal/fahome.htm>

The media made much of the fact that the \$935 million state budget deficit was "resolved" before the session adjourned.

What the media didn't tell you was that the governor and the legislature left the budget out of "structural balance." Structural balance is a term for what the budget looks like beyond the current biennium. When government doesn't balance the budget into the future, it simply defers hard fiscal decisions for later, when the problem is more pronounced and options are fewer. For the fiscal year (FY) 2010-2011 biennium, the deficit is predicted to be \$947 million, even worse than the current problem. Moreover, the economy may very well be worse off, making the deficit larger. Furthermore, the legislature tapped heavily into the budget reserve, leaving fewer reserve dollars available. A fiscal storm is shaping up for the next biennium and most taxpayers don't even know it. As always, that's why the Watchdog exists.

Here's how the legislature solved the current deficit (in millions):

Deficit: -935

New spending: -137

Spending reductions: 268

Budget transfers to general fund: 117

Non-tax revenues: 51

Tax revenues: 141

Budget reserve: 500

Total Balance: 6

Note a couple of things. First, the legislature managed to spend an extra \$137 million despite the dire fiscal situation. Only government could raise spending while facing a deficit.

Second, note the \$51 million in non-tax revenues. These are called “fees” by average people.

Third, note that over half the deficit was solved by tapping reserves while just over half that amount was in the form of spending reductions. When the new spending is factored in, the net spending reductions are a mere \$131 million.

Check out the balance sheet for FY 2010-2011 (in millions):

Deficit: -1,086

New spending: -428

Spending reductions: 340

Transfers to general fund: 1

Non-tax revenues: 85

Tax revenues: 140

Total Balance: -947

Note the \$428 million in new spending! In other words, the budget deficit resolution committed state government to spend an additional \$565 billion in total. Your government at work.

2. What's the Score?

The Taxpayer's League of Minnesota is right on time with their 2008 legislative scorecard, and not a moment too soon. The gold standard in state-level fiscal scorecards, it was needed this year more than any other in recent memory.

While there is some joy in stopping the worst tax increases, the simple fact is that legislators acted like hungry NFL lineman at the trough of taxpayer gravy this session. While some legislators earned praise for their fiscal prudence, the majority earned failing grades, much like Mr. Hand's U.S. History class. In this case, Mr. Hand is played by Phil Krinkie, who is convinced all legislators are on dope.
<http://www.netwalk.com/~truegger/ftrh/hand-thing.jpg>

Much like the legislature at large, the Anoka County delegation went hog wild at the buffet as well. Let's see who suffered from fiscal bulimia.

State Senate Score:

Ray Vandever (R-Forest Lake): 90

Debbie Johnson (R-Ham Lake): 78

Mike Jungbauer (R-East Bethel): 75

Satveer Chaudhary (DFL-Fridley): 10
Leo Foley (DFL-Coon Rapids): 10
Don Betzold (DFL-Blaine): 9

There are really no surprises here, although Debbie Johnson and Mike Jungbauer have generally scored higher in years past. All other scores are par for the legislative course.

State House Score:

Tom Hackbarth (R-Cedar): 100
Chris DeLaForest (R-Andover): 91
Bob Dettmer (R-Forest Lake): 73
Jim Abeler (R-Anoka): 27
Denise Dittrich (DFL-Champlin): 9
Melissa Hortman (DFL-Brooklyn Park): 0
Paul Gardner (DFL-Shoreview): 0
Scott Kranz (DFL-Blaine): 0
Carolyn Laine (DFL-Columbia Heights): 0
Tom Tillberry (DFL-Fridley): 0
Kathy Tingelstad (R-Andover): 0

Congratulations to Tom Hackbarth for being one of only 5 members of the House to score a perfect 100% and earn the coveted "Best Friend of the Taxpayer" title.

Unfortunately, that's about it regarding positive news.

After scoring a pathetic "9", we may have to retract the nice things we've recently said about Denise Dittrich.

After scoring a zero, Paul Gardner must be confused about the area he represents. While everyone takes leave of their political senses on occasion, the taxpayers of Lino Lakes and Shoreview will not long stand for elected officials who demonstrate a complete lack of fiscal discipline. Even though Gardner lives in Shoreview, he needs to remember that he also represents LINO Lakes, not LIBERAL Lakes.

This guy ought to be easy pickings in November.

It looks like Jim Abeler decided to burnish his fiscal credentials ahead of his endorsement challenge by rolling up a big ol' 27 this session. At least Abeler deigned to vote with conservatives three times, which is more than we can say for the district 49B representative, featured below.

And finally, Kathy Tingelstad. Tingelstad finishes her legislative career with a thoroughly embarrassing score of zero. To put this ignominious feat in context, no other Republican legislator in either house scored a zero this past session.

To show how far she has fallen, her lifetime score is 61, meaning that in 2008 she under-performed her lifetime average by a whopping 61 points.

Out of the 11 most important fiscal votes of the 2008 session, Republicans couldn't count on Tingelstad's support even one time. As the Watchdog has always maintained, her ouster from politics was about far, far more than one vote. Enjoy retirement Rep. Tingelstad, you have truly earned it.

<http://www.taxpayersleague.org/pdf/legscorecard2008.pdf>

E-mail Update 6/13/08

In This Issue:

1. No Endorsement, No Confidence.
2. Good Ol' Boy Nostalgia.
3. Hypocrisy.
4. Caterpillar Teaches a Lesson.
5. Hot Water.

1. No Endorsement, No Confidence.

The GOP delegates in District 48A finally had their second endorsement convention this past week. This highly unusual second convention was held after incumbent Jim Abeler failed to beat himself in an uncontested endorsement by failing to achieve the necessary 60% to receive the GOP endorsement.

The second convention, unlike the first, was contested as Abeler squared off against Don Huizenga. Both candidates failed to achieve the necessary votes to capture the endorsement. After numerous ballots, the delegates declared "no endorsement" by a unanimous vote.

This means that the GOP candidate will be decided in a September primary. The filing period to become an official candidate for the GOP primary will be in July. Any person may file to run as a Republican in the primary, not just the two who appeared at the convention.

http://www.twincities.com/ci_9516730?IADID

<http://www.sos.state.mn.us/home/index.asp?page=4>

2. Good Ol' Boy Nostalgia.

For the Good Ol' Boys, nothing beats reminiscing about the Good Ol' Days. You know, back when men were men and smoke filled back room deals were the way to get things done, until some meddling reformers came in and wrecked the whole damn party.

The respected political newsletter "Politics in Minnesota" had a recent story regarding the passing of political reporter Jack Coffman. Coffman gained a great deal of attention by exposing the obscene amounts of money spent by lobbyists wining and dining our legislators in 1993.

And guess what? Featured prominently in the story was none other than Good Ol' Boy lobbyist Ron Jerich. According to the story, Jerich reported spending nearly \$63,000 in the first six months of 1993 entertaining legislators. In today's dollars, that's a whopping \$93,000 spent on steaks, brats, and Kool Aid. In other words, Jerich spent over \$500 a day whooping it up with elected officials who allegedly work on behalf of the people who elected them. That's a whole lot of dead presidents, even by Good Ol' Boy standards. And we wonder why the County has a poor reputation in many circles.

<http://www.politicsinminnesota.com/the-weekly-report/politics-minnesota-the-weekly-report-vol-3-issue-44-5162008>

3. Hypocrisy.

Here's a good one right out of Anoka County. Last month, state Representative Kathy Tingelstad (R-Andover) received the "Legislator of the Year" award from the Anoka County Community Action Program (ACCAP). ACCAP's web site states the organization's mission is to help people escape poverty.

Apparently ACCAP is good buddies with Tingelstad or doesn't follow politics very closely. The Watchdog finds it a bit ironic that an anti-poverty group would honor a politician who has voted to raise taxes and fees that disproportionately harm the poor.

Need some evidence?

Tingelstad voted to override the governor's veto of the transportation tax increase bill. That bill raised the Metro sales tax and increased the gasoline tax. The sales tax is an extremely regressive form of taxation, as the Watchdog has pointed out on many occasions. The gas tax is also regressive because people need gasoline to get to work, medical appointments and the like regardless of income.

<http://www.startribune.com/politics/state/16201997.html>

Tingelstad also voted in favor of the Twins stadium, a stadium funded with a sales tax increase on the people of Hennepin County. We didn't know Carl Pohlad was in need of being lifted out of poverty.

http://minnesota.publicradio.org/projects/ongoing/votetracker/issue_view.php?id=52

Tingelstad also voted for the "health impact fee" on tobacco. Like it or not, taxes and "fees" on tobacco are also regressive.

<http://www.minnesotavotes.org/RollCall.aspx?ID=168983>

Way to go, Rep. Tingelstad.

<http://www.house.leg.state.mn.us/members/pressreleasels85.asp?district=49B&pressid=2575&party=2>

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

4. Caterpillar Teaches a Lesson.

The May 2008 issue of "Manufacturing Leadership" has a great article regarding free trade as exemplified by Caterpillar Inc., the legendary heavy equipment manufacturer headquartered in Illinois.

Consider how Caterpillar (Cat) and its employees benefit from free trade:

At three of Cat's manufacturing plants in Illinois, 40-50% of the equipment produced is shipped to a foreign customer.

In the first quarter of 2008, sales to customers outside of North America jumped 30% while sales inside North America rose a paltry 4%.

In 2007, sales outside North America accounted for 58% of total sales.

Of course, it is quite popular these days to bash trade with China. What the media doesn't share are the success stories.

Again, look at Cat. Over the past few years, exports to Chinese customers have risen 45%. During that time, over 11,000 Americans have been hired into good paying manufacturing jobs with Cat to meet the increased demand from Chinese customers.

Cat, like many companies, buys goods from China. However, the company exports to China over four times as much as it buys from that country.

A caterpillar official stated, "It is no exaggeration to say that Cat employees depend on the global economy for their jobs."

http://www.nam.org/s_nam/sec.asp?CID=202124&DID=233180

5. Hot Water.

Sources within the Anoka-Hennepin School district have reported very disturbing allegations regarding two district employees. The Watchdog has contacted the District for comment. Developing...

E-mail Update 6/20/08

In This Issue:

1. Ham (Lake) Sandwich.
2. When the Levy Breaks.
3. Anoka-Hennepin Update.

1. Ham (Lake) Sandwich.

The normally sleepy burgh of Ham Lake has been the subject of much controversy of late. Whether its Wal Mart, city sewer and water, the Senior Center, bond refinancing, or the mayor's comments on what it means to be African American in Ham Lake, the city has attracted no small amount of scrutiny. This isn't too surprising since mayor is ideologically different than a majority of the city council.

The Watchdog has commented in the past with respect to Wal Mart and the mayor's statement on race.

Over the past few weeks, the Dog has spoken with Ham Lakers both inside and outside city hall to get some perspective on the other three issues. Below is summary of what those people have had to say about these issues.

CITY SEWER AND WATER.

Currently, Ham Lake runs on a well and septic system model. Because this model is not conducive to high-density development, it helps the city maintain the rural character that many residents feel is critical to the city's identity.

The city has been exploring bringing city sewer and water to a limited portion of the city.

Opponents mainly cite two arguments with respect to this issue. The first is a "camel's nose under the tent" argument that maintains that once sewer and water is let in anywhere in the city, it is inevitable that it will spread, eventually wiping out the large lots and low-density housing that defines Ham Lake.

The second factor is cost. Once city hall source puts the cost of bringing in sewer and water on a limited basis at \$75 million, not counting interest payments on bonds, which could push the total to nearly \$150 million. Ham Lake's entire operating budget is just over \$4 million annually.

http://abcnewspapers.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=3061&Itemid=26

<http://www.startribune.com/local/east/19237674.html?page=1&c=y>

THE SENIOR CENTER

The city owns the building that houses the senior center and leases it to a non-profit 501(c)(3) corporation that is popularly known as the senior center board. A city hall

source tells the Watchdog that the lease is for a nominal amount and below market rates. Moreover, the city supplies a full-time employee to help manage the center.

The senior center corporation, as lessee, controls the scheduling of the building and retains all profits from building rentals.

The concept of the city owning a building yet not controlling its scheduling or sharing of the profits has a majority of the council troubled.

In fact, the council recently voted to notify the senior center corporation that it intends to change the terms of the contract once the current contract expires at the end of the calendar year.

It appears under the current contract that the city takes on all the burdens of owning the building while the senior center corporation enjoys all the benefits.

The same city hall source maintains that it is a matter of fairness to city taxpayers and not animosity towards the senior center corporation or the concept of city involvement in a senior center that is behind the proposed changes.

http://abcnewspapers.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=2995&Itemid=26

THE WILLOWS SENIOR HOUSING COMPLEX

The County HRA and Ham Lake are involved in financing and operating this senior apartment complex through a joint powers agreement.

Under the current agreement, the county HRA must spend any monies it levies from Ham Lake in Ham Lake alone.

The county has proposed changing the agreement as a part of a refinancing proposal. The rub is that the county wants to be free to spend monies levied in Ham Lake in other cities.

A majority of the council is dead opposed to this idea and for good reason. Such a change would put the city at the mercy of the county board's good graces. The city would be forced to go on bended knee to Dan Erhart and company to recover what was already taken from Ham Lake in the first place.

Trust Dan Erhart? Apparently Mayor Meunier is the only one who thinks it a good idea to appease the county board in the name of financial peace in our time.

http://abcnewspapers.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1129&Itemid=26

[http://www.startribune.com/local/north/19647839.html?location_refer=\\$sectionName](http://www.startribune.com/local/north/19647839.html?location_refer=$sectionName)

2. When The Levy Breaks.

What's up with Star Tribune reporter Paul Levy? After receiving complaints from Watchdogs in the area, we decided to check out his reporting in greater detail. What we found does cause concern.

One complaint is that Levy engages in too little fact checking. For example, check out the stories written regarding Ham Lake Mayor Meunier's racial comments.

In a May 3rd follow up story, Levy notes that one of Meunier's critics, Don Wilson, is "an acknowledged Republican" without reporting how he derived that information. Wilson's alleged political affiliation was noted to imply that Wilson may have attacked Meunier solely because he is a DFLer.

The problem is that Wilson appears to be a DFLer himself. Carol Larson from Ham Lake wrote a letter to the editor in the ABC newspapers claiming that Wilson attended DFL precinct caucuses and was even elected a delegate to a higher convention.

Is Wilson a Republican? Is he a DFLer? The Watchdog doesn't know, but Paul Levy should since he himself made it an issue through his reporting.

To the Dog's knowledge, Levy never pursued this issue to set the record straight.

<http://www.startribune.com/local/north/18536169.html>

http://abcnewspapers.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=2926&Itemid=43

Critics also complain that Levy shows a particular bias towards certain issues like commuter rail.

Take a look at two recent articles on commuter rail. In both articles, Levy generously quotes commuter rail godfather Dan Erhart and his bureaucratic minions while not bothering to quote any skeptics or even point out that many have concerns with respect to commuter rail in Anoka County. His articles amount to little more than puff pieces that could have been authored by the county's PR commissar. That's shoddy journalism, plain and simple.

With the Star Tribune cutting staff, maybe Levy is angling to join his erstwhile colleagues who have shed their façade of objectivity and joined liberal special interest groups.

<http://www.startribune.com/local/north/20551799.html>

<http://www.startribune.com/local/north/19945319.html?page=2&c=y>

3. Anoka-Hennepin Update.

Last week, we reported on a developing story with respect to Anoka-Hennepin employees who are under investigation.

We received the following email response from superintendent Roger Giroux:

Dear Harold,

Due to state data privacy laws, we cannot comment on the allegations noted in your e-mail received on June 12, 2008.

I can assure you that when the district learns of any type of alleged employee misconduct the district investigates and we take the investigation very seriously.

Okay. But once the file is closed, the Dog will be there, Data Practices Act request in hand to get to the bottom of the matter!

E-mail Update 6/27/08

In This Issue:

1. Feeding the Beast.
2. Getting Goofy on Green.
3. School Money.
4. Fees on the Climb.

1. Feeding the Beast.

Most folks probably have never heard of Minnesota 2020, a liberal think tank founded by a bored liberal that employs laid-off journalists.

That founder would be one Matt Entenza, the disgraced former DFL House Minority Leader who was busted digging up dirt on fellow DFLers. After being ousted from politics, Entenza's rich wife apparently gave him some pin money to start his club and keep him entertained. Among the "fellows" employed by the club is Conrad deFibre, a former Star Tribune reporter who, ironically, covered the Capitol at the same time Entenza was there, which no doubt resulted in some very fair and balanced reporting.

Entenza and deFibre have released a report which solemnly notes that Minnesota doesn't tax enough for our county roads and bridges. Predictably, the report's solution is further tapping your wallet while saying nothing about reforming government spending.

How predictable. For the liberal mind, the tax increases never stop. Remember when we were told that dedicating 100% of the Motor Vehicle Sales Tax (MVST) would solve the problem? We did that at the polls in 2006.

Remember just this year when the legislature overrode the governor's veto to impose a \$6.6 billion tax increase for transportation? We were told that would solve the problem.

Now comes Minnesota 2020 and their co-conspirators braying for yet another tax increase for transportation. Among the tax increases:

- Indexing the gasoline tax to automatically rise with inflation, thereby relieving politicians of the burden of having to actually vote and be held accountable for tax increases.
- Increased fee and tax levy authority for county officials. Just what we need, more taxing authority for the gang down at Anoka County (see below).
- Increased state bonding for bridge repair and replacement.

What the report didn't mention was that perhaps a better solution would be for government to stop funding bike trails with gas tax money and actually devote that money to its intended purpose – fixing roads and bridges.

Moreover, perhaps it is time for the legislature to stop funding gorilla exhibits and polar bear condos with scarce bonding dollars.

Third, county government ought to manage it's own budget better. For example, stopping the pursuit of football stadiums and banning out of state travel junkets to places like Arizona and Hawaii.

Oh, by the way, Matt. The economy is in rough shape. Taxpayers are being laid off and eaten alive at the gas pump and grocery store. They're also dealing with the tax and fee increases their elected officials have heaped on them. Raising taxes now isn't exactly a bright idea.

<http://www.mn2020.org/>

<http://www.mn2020.org/index.asp?Type=B>

http://www.mn2020.org/index.asp?Type=B_BASIC&SEC={F35AD14B-3B5D-4FDF-8083-49D5F52A61C8}

<http://www.piperjaffray.com/1col.aspx?id=287&releaseid=1042525>

2. Getting Goofy on Green.

If nothing else, DFL conventions are good for some humor. The same folks who introduced us to fragrance free conventions are poised to shock and educate the deodorant-wearing masses once again.

The Wall Street Journal reports that organizers of the national Democrat convention in Denver are seeking to really "go green" this year. And they mean GREEN. Like Paul Gardner green. Like Melissa Hortman green. We're talking insane, enviroweenie, trees-as-religion green.

According to the Journal, convention organizers have hired a "Director of Greening" who in turn has hired an "Official Carbon Adviser" who will calculate all the carbon emissions Al Gore will spew as he flies into Denver to guilt us over our earth-endangering luxuries like stoves, running water, and heat in the winter.

The madness is best exemplified by the creation of a "trash brigade" that will set up manned checkpoints next to every garbage can to make sure that some unthinking, uncaring Reagan Democrat doesn't throw his spork in the wrong bin after eating red meat or some other politically incorrect food item.

The 900-strong brigade will wear green shirts and will actually go through every garbage bin, by hand, to ensure every piece of waste is properly disposed of.

Maybe they should have made brown shirts instead?

<http://online.wsj.com/public/us> (Subscription required)

3. School Money.

The Coon Rapids Herald published an interesting article regarding the preliminary Anoka-Hennepin School District budget.

First, nearly 75% of the district's budget pays for salaries and benefits for employees while just 3% is for capital expenditures. In light of the current economic situation, it will be interesting to see how district leadership addresses its biggest overhead cost. Many businesses are right now cutting overhead expenses to stay afloat.

Second, 68% of the district's revenue comes from the state while property taxes account for only 20% of the revenues. Minnesota is near the top when it comes to the percentage of school funding that comes from state sources. One of the problems is that the state funding formula is skewed towards urban school districts. On a side note, the Speaker of the House and the Senate Majority Leader are from Minneapolis.

Third, District Business Manager Dave Buck noted, "If the legislature and governor choose a path of no tax increases, the district would be facing significant future budget reductions." Don't worry, Dave. If history is any guide, the spending will go up and up. http://www.finance.state.mn.us/budget/summary/hist_exp/080624_hist_exp.pdf

4. Fees on the Climb.

The very same week that Matt Entenza's club was howling for county tax increases, our very own gang down at the courthouse in Anoka was busting into taxpayer wallets for a tax increase of a different kind.

Known as "fee enhancements," the pain is just the same for working people. And just this week, the county board voted to increase a raft of fees, some by 100%.

Fees might make some sense if taxes were reasonable. Just recently, the county doubled the regional rail property tax. And it imposed an increased sales tax. And it imposed a wheelage tax. And it raised general property taxes. And now come the fee increases.

In another example of shoddy journalism, reporter Paul Levy failed to note the vote count and which commissioners voted for the increase. http://www.startribune.com/local/north/20981354.html?location_refer=North%20Metro

E-mail Update 7/4/08

In This Issue:

1. Is There a Shovel in the House?
2. Watering Bandemonium.
3. Making a Statement.

1. Is There a Shovel in the House?

With the legislature adjourned and an election season upon us, expect the BS to run deep and thick through your mailbox and television as if a herd of elephants lived your yard.

And leading the dung parade is none other than state Representative Melissa Hortman, the North Metro's favorite moderate. The Watchdog has obtained a copy of Hortman's 2008 "legislative highlights" mail piece sent to constituents.

Pull on your rubber boots and grab a shovel as we wade into the specifics.

Hortman prominently lists next to a big check mark the words "balanced budget." The June 6th edition of our email update thoroughly critiqued this bogus claim already. While the current budget may be balanced, the state has crafted a gaping \$947 million deficit for the next budget cycle. The budget may be balanced today, but it is seriously in the red for the near future. Moreover, anyone want to bet that state tax revenues will be lower than forecast, making for a worse deficit?

Watchdogs in Hortman's district may want to ask her about "structural balance." This is little more than a cute phrase that means you have balanced your budget currently and in your forecast for the next budget.

http://www.anokacountywatchdog.com/email/2008/06.06.08_update.htm

Hortman also brags about increasing state education funding by 8% and that "Rep. Hortman believes that strong state funding of schools is critical to reduce pressure on local property taxes."

BS! While the education funding bill did increase state aid 8%, that aid was not evenly distributed and, in fact, hurt the very schools Hortman represents.

A June 2007 article from ABC newspapers offers a concise snapshot what this legislation Hortman so proudly proclaims will do to the district.

For the FY 2009 school year, the Anoka-Hennepin schools will receive a .75% increase, not an 8% increase. An increase of less than 1% doesn't come close to even meeting inflationary costs.

Current school board member and DFL candidate for the legislature Jerry Newton summed up the funding bill quite well. Newton is quoted in the article as saying that it is obvious that the legislature favored urban school districts over suburban districts. Newton went on to observe, "I don't want to be in a position to say that the glass is half-full for the second year. I think we have just a little water in the glass."

<http://abcnewspapers.com/2007/june/6funding.html>

According to the district, the state's education funding bill shorted the district by over \$11 million for the two-year budget cycle.

This unequal slicing of the pie is one of the primary culprits when it comes to assigning blame for school levy votes. A successful levy means one thing: rising property taxes.

<http://abcnewspapers.com/2007/june/14distshortfall.html>

Now consider Hortman's proclaimed advocacy for "a reduction in the state sales tax from 6.5% to 4.5%."

While her bill did lower the tax rate, Hortman pulls a political sleight of hand by expanding the sales tax to things like hair cuts, car repairs, and even funeral services. She claims this legislation makes the tax system "more fair for hard-working and middle-class Minnesotans." Really? Don't they die just like the rich?

<https://www.revisor.leg.state.mn.us/bin/bldbill.php?bill=H2163.0.html&session=ls85>

While a book wouldn't provide enough space to detail the parade of perfidy peddled in her mail piece, we have to conclude with a no-brainer. You just knew she would brag up her involvement in the \$6.6 billion transportation tax increase. You know, the one that raised the sales tax and made gasoline more expensive.

Yeesh. Beware the BS. It's begun already.

The Watchdog has not seen the mail piece posted on either her legislative or campaign web sites.

Hortman's opponent, Andrew Reinhardt, wrote a letter to the editor in the Brooklyn Park Sun offering his own critique. Since the letter does not appear to be available on the Sun's user-unfriendly web site, we publish it here, in the interest of equal time:

To the Editor:

As I predicted a few weeks ago in this newspaper, Rep. Melissa Hortman delivered a glowing assessment of the 2008 Legislative Session. As expected, she used plenty of Capitol-speak like "injects needed local funding," "infusing needed funds," and "move forward on issues," sounding as if money comes out of the sky, not out of your pockets.

For a balanced account, she should have said:

- I raised your sales tax (again)
- I raised your gas tax and license tab fees
- I tried to tax clothing in Minnesota
- I supported an education bill that did not address suburban students receiving thousands less per student than urban schools
- I declined to join several Democrats to hold Minneapolis accountable for harboring illegal immigrants
- I authored bills like outlawing throwing away a pop can, and \$1.5 million for the National Sports Center (near my family's business in Blaine)

I don't know much Capitol-speak, but I know what I see in Brooklyn Park with nice neighborhoods being turned into slums, people taxed out of their homes, high crime, 610 still years away, and good neighbors and taxpayers fleeing out to other suburbs.

I also know the old political measuring stick that all northern Brooklyn Park residents should be asking themselves, "Is my neighborhood better off than it was four years ago when Rep. Hortman was elected?" If they answer "NO" they should vote REINHARDT in November, and send new leadership to the Capitol to fight for our values, our homes, and our wallets!

Sincerely,

Andrew Reinhardt

2. Watering Bandemonium.

Summer offers Minnesotans a much needed respite from the ravages of winter as we come out of a long hibernation to sun ourselves, do some fishing and listen to politicians prattle (see above).

What we also experience every summer is another dose of heavy-handed government in the form of lawn sprinkling restrictions. Now the do-gooders will tell you that watering restrictions are a necessary burden in the quest to protect Mother Earth.

Really? Then what sense does it make for bureaucrats to fan out across Andover in an army of full-size trucks and SUVs, spewing earth-hating hydrocarbons? Can't these folks ride a bike as they crack down on nefarious hose hogs and their suspected links to al-queda?

Moreover, the same Andover watchdogs report that city parks are watering their fields during the very same times that are illegal for taxpayers.

3. Making a Statement.

The Watchdog has reported extensively on the legislative race in District 48B, the seat currently occupied by Rep. Jim Abeler. With the campaign season upon us, the Watchdog will once again lead the North Metro in legislative coverage by bringing you candidate questionnaires and the “inside dope” you’ve come to expect from us.

We began our coverage weeks ago with our critique of retiring area legislators and the political landscape in those same districts.

This week, we offer to you candidate statements from both Rep. Abeler and his opponent for the GOP endorsement, Don Huizenga. You can read these statements, unedited, in their entirety at www.anokacountywatchdog.com.

E-mail Update 7/11/08

In This Issue:

1. ROI.
2. Skeleton Crew.
3. Car Crazy in Cali.
4. Priced Out of House and Home.
5. Quote of the Week.

1. ROI.

In the non-government world, where accountability and results matter, most people are familiar with the acronym "ROI" which stands for "return on investment."

This past year, the Anoka-Hennepin School District asked taxpayers to suffer a steep property tax increase to "maintain the excellence." Voters responded by passing the majority of ballot questions and granting the district a multi-million dollar infusion.

So what kind of return on investment did the hardworking taxpayers receive? Recently, the state released the results of the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment II (MCA) tests. The MCA tests are administered to students in various grade levels from elementary through high school and are the benchmark for measuring where Minnesota students stand with respect to math and reading proficiency.

<http://education.state.mn.us>

First, take a look at high school math proficiency. Below is the percentage of 11th grade students who tested at or above their grade level in math at each high school:

Andover – 38%

Anoka – 35%

Blaine – 29%

Champlin Park – 27%

Coon Rapids – 32%

Average: 32%

Those results are simply pathetic and unacceptable. Two out every three 11th graders in Anoka-Hennepin aren't proficient in math. Maybe the school board missed the memo but the world runs on math and science excellence. The countries that produce the best scientists are the ones that will prosper and dominate the geopolitical landscape in this era of high technology.

The school board ought to explain to every taxpayer in the district why test scores are so low and what exactly the board intends to do to rectify the problem.

<http://www.anoka.k12.mn.us/education/components/contact/default.php?sectiondetailid=114199>

A district in which two out of every three high school students can't demonstrate math proficiency is a district in serious trouble.

The rest of the scores across the various grade levels in both math and reading aren't real impressive either. In fact, most schools didn't reach a proficiency level above the 60s or 70s in either discipline.

And that's your return on your investment.

http://abcnewspapers.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=3191&Itemid=28

2. Skeleton Crew.

Now we're not saying it's a coincidence, but it's interesting to note that Anoka-Hennepin Superintendent Roger Giroux, assistant superintendent Denny Carlson and associate superintendent Donna Studer have all announced their retirements recently. By the way, the Watchdog acknowledges the health issues Studer has faced recently.

When you combine these retirements with the sudden disappearance of union leader John Belpedio (and we know why, John!), you have to wonder just who is in charge down there at district HQ.

<http://www.anoka.k12.mn.us/education/dept/dept.php?sectionid=30448>

3. Car Crazy in Cali.

When state Representative Melissa Hortman proposed putting California bureaucrats in charge of Minnesota vehicle emission standards, it took rational thinking Watchdogs about two seconds to realize just how scary a prospect that was. Only the most extreme mouth-breathing environmentalist would find such an idea acceptable and worthwhile (right after embracing the Olympics-in-Brooklyn Park idea).

Well, California is at it again. Since the state has nothing more important to do, like fighting conflagration wildfires or solving a multi-billion dollar state budget deficit, the good bureaucrats on the Left Coast have announced that the state will soon force car dealers to post "global warming scores" on vehicles for sale. The score will be on a 1 to 10 scale, with higher scores indicating that the vehicle does less to contribute to global warming. This score is in addition to the already mandated "smog score."

How long will it take California to start charging a "global warming impact fee" for vehicles with low scores? How long before Hortman introduces a similar bill?

C'mon, Arnold. If you're not going to be helpful, at least bug out for awhile and maybe fix that Screen Actors Guild dispute so we can at least escape to the movies and forget the madness!

Read the article at www.anokacountywatchdog.com.

4. Priced Out of House and Home.

The real estate market is in the tank. We all know it. It's getting harder and harder for families to find good, affordable housing and access to credit to finance a purchase.

The Pioneer Press ran an interesting item this past week exploring how much the cost of meeting governmental regulations adds to the cost of a new home.

The upshot of the article is that is virtually impossible to build an affordable home because the cost of meeting regulations adds about 20% or more to the cost of a home. (The article notes that an "affordable" home is in the \$200,000 range for the average Twin Cities family).

http://www.twincities.com/ci_9748189?IADID=Search-www.twincities.com-www.twincities.com

Government is supposed to serve the people. So why is it that government regulations are making the dream of home ownership a distant reality? Why is it that government raises taxes and makes gasoline even more expensive? Why is it that government subsidies for things like ethanol make our food more expensive? Why is it that government mandates and artificial restrictions on patient choice make health care unaffordable? Just exactly whom are these politicians serving?

No wonder 3 out 4 Americans disapproves of the job Congress is doing.

http://www.realclearpolitics.com/epolls/other/congressional_job_approval-903.html

5. Quote of the Week.

"Al Gore was a really cool guy."

- State Representative Melissa Hortman reflecting upon her time working for Gore. From the St. Paul Legal Ledger (subscription required).

<http://www.legal-ledger.com/>

Um, we think that says it all that Hortman would find Gore "cool." Cool? About as cool as Lewis Sklonick.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pAXuogtTGjM&feature=related>

E-mail Update 7/18/08

In This Issue:

1. Primary Colors.
2. Bendover.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Now that filings have closed for county and legislative races, this week's issue will focus on the county board races as well as the happenings in legislative District 48B, where Jim "override" Abeler will fight for his political future against three other candidates.

1. Primary Colors.

Now that the filing period for elective office (with the exception of some local offices) has closed, the election season is upon us, Watchdogs. It's now time to rise from that fitful slumber we enjoy between elections and get serious about working for the right kind of change in Anoka County. Let's start by taking a look at who has filed for county board and then take a gander at one local legislative race featuring a primary.

ANOKA COUNTY

There are three seats up for grabs on the seven seat county board. Two of the seats are occupied by good ol' boys (including THE good ol' boy) and one is occupied by one of the only two fiscal conservatives on the board.

All three races feature three candidates, meaning there will be a September 9th primary to narrow the field down to two.

District 5 covers the southern half of Andover and about half of Coon Rapids. Incumbent good ol' boy Scott Ledoux of Andover is being challenged by Becky Fink and Daniel Nelson, both of Coon Rapids.

Ledoux contact information:

www.scottledoux.com

fightingfrenchman@comcast.net (Is there such a thing?)

Fink contact information:

sommerfink@comcast.com

No web site listed

Nelson contact information:

danaerovan@aol.com

No web site listed

District 6 covers eastern Anoka County, including Columbus, Linwood, Centerville, Circle Pines, Lexington, Lino Lakes, and a small part of Blaine. Incumbent Rhonda

Sivarajah will pit her strong record of fiscal conservatism and common sense against frequent candidate Kevin Ryan and Patrick Davern.

Sivarajah contact information:
www.electrhonda.com
Rhonda_S@comcast.net

Ryan contact information:
No email or web site listed

Davern contact information:
PI530@aol.com
No web site listed

District 7 includes most of the city of Anoka and the western part of Coon Rapids. The incumbent is none other than good ol' boy godfather Dan Erhart. Erhart faces a formidable opponent in current Anoka mayor Bjorn Skogquist. Eugene Rogers rounds out the field.

This is definitely the race to watch this year. Skogquist is young and energetic and will no doubt put in the sweat equity necessary to run a quality campaign. While young, Skogquist is no political rookie. He has won multiple terms as Anoka's mayor and is well known in the area. He understands political campaigns and has a good grasp of the issues. Of all the races, Skogquist is the most prepared challenger.

This will be a classic match up of the young lion versus the old lion. Or, in Erhart's case, the good old boy lion. Will Erhart be able to match Skogquist door to door? Will Erhart match Skogquist lawn sign for lawn sign? That's doubtful, given that Erhart's idea of campaigning seems to be riding around in a golf cart at parades waving at people like they know who he is. Perhaps too many taxpayer-financed meals? (More on that next week!)

In 2004, Erhart ran unopposed. He hasn't been off the political campaign couch for years. Is he up to the task?

Skogquist contact information:
Skogquist_bjorn@hotmail.com
No web site listed

Erhart contact information:
No email or web site listed. This isn't surprising, coming from a commissioner who doesn't believe in letting the general public testify at county board meetings.

Rogers contact information:
gmrogers@usfamily.net

The Anoka County Watchdog continues to be the premier source for county news and information that is too often overlooked by the mainstream press. As always, we will bring you in-depth reporting and political news throughout the election cycle, including our popular candidate questionnaires.

There will be one local legislative race this year featuring two primaries. In District 48B, incumbent Jim Abeler will face off in a GOP primary with Don Huizenga. Interestingly, there will also be a DFL primary for this seat. Andrew Boho and Nate Chapman, both of Anoka, will duke it out to win the DFL endorsement and the right to face either Abeler or Huizenga in November.

Editor's note: the Watchdog has received and posted candidate statements from both Abeler and Huizenga. We offer the same opportunity to the DFL candidates.

Abeler contact information:

www.jimabeler.com

rep.jim.abeler@house.mn (is it really a good idea to list a taxpayer funded email address for your campaign?)

<http://candidates.sos.state.mn.us/CandidateFilingSearchResults.asp?x=2>

Huizenga contact information:

www.donhuizenga.com

donhuizenga@q.com

Boho contact information:

No email or web site listed

Chapman contact information:

www.natechapman.org

chapman@natechapman.org

<http://www.sos.state.mn.us/home/index.asp>

2. Bendover.

The Watchdog hereby dubs the city of Andover the city of Bendover, considering what this city does to its taxpayers. You already know of the silly "no glass in parks" ordinance. You already know about the water Gestapo riding around in full size SUVs harassing anyone who forgets about the city's watering ban.

Now comes a low in wasteful, intrusive government. A watchdog sent us a tag he received from the city because his new trees were planted too deeply in the ground. You heard it right! PLANTED TOO DEEPLY IN THE GROUND. The city actually pays someone to go around and check tree planting depth. Other offenses include piling mulch too close to the tree base, not taking the tags off the tree, and even "improper"

pruning. The Dog will scan in the tag for all to see real soon. This is a city with way too much money in the coffers. How about a tax cut?

Bend over! This won't hurt a bit!

E-mail Update 7/25/08

In This Issue:

1. Economic Problems? Not for Government!
2. Economic Problems? Not for Government!
3. The Heights of Foolishness.

1. Economic Problems? Not for Government!

There is a fundamental problem with American democracy when government starts living better than the folks who fund government.

Today, hard working families in Anoka County are beset by falling home values, foreclosures, job losses, high-energy costs and high food costs. Simply put, it's getting harder and harder for average families to maintain a decent standard of living.

Moreover, government doesn't seem to care. Taxes and fees are on the rise. Property taxes continue to rise. Anoka County has raised numerous "fees" as well as imposing a Wheelage tax on our cars as well as a sales tax increase.

So what is Anoka County doing to tighten its belt? Not a damn thing. Not one damn thing.

The Watchdog has obtained from a source expense reports from the county for 2007. While taxpayers were tightening their belts, the county was wining and dining itself. Frankly, the list of expenses is nothing short of disgusting. The excess and outright piggery is shocking.

Below is a select sampling of expenses. The Watchdog will be posting the complete spreadsheet on our homepage.

Grab your barf bag and read on, brave taxpayers:

1/22/07 Canyon Grille \$414.91

10/08/07 Canyon Grille \$311.68

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

1/26/07 Cornerstone Catering \$745.50

3/04/07 Oceanaire Seafood Room \$403.26

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

3/1/07 Capital Grille \$532.68

Lutsen Resort \$1,056.45 (multiple dates) <http://www.lutsenresort.com/>

8/3/07 Craguns Lodge and Golf \$325
<http://www.craguns.com/>

9/14/07 Grandview Lodge \$384
<http://www.grandviewlodge.com/>

3/30/07 Ruttger's Lodge \$275
<http://www.ruttgersresorts.com/baylakelodge/>

Caribou Highlands Lodge \$255.62 (two dates) <http://www.caribouhighlands.com/>

Hilton Hotel, Washington, DC \$5,460 (multiple dates)
http://www1.hilton.com/en_US/hi/hotel/DCAWHHH-Hilton-Washington-District-of-Columbia/index.do

Jefferson Hotel, Washington, DC \$1,708.73 (multiple dates)
<http://www.thejeffersonwashingtondc.com/#Photo%201>

So, Watchdogs, when was the last time you spent a few days at Lutsen or Ruttgers? When was the last time you could afford a dinner at the Canyon Grille or the Oceanaire Seafood Room? Ever stayed at the Hilton in Washington, DC? Your county government has. And they used your tax dollars to pay for it.

The primary election is September 9th
Election Day is November 4th
<http://www.sos.state.mn.us/home/index.asp?page=4>

2. Economic Problems? Not for Government!

A typo? Hardly. As if the fringe benefits of being a public servant weren't enough, don't forget about the salaries. Use the salary finders listed below to see how much some public servants are being paid. In this economic environment, will they be taking a pay cut to share the pain? Probably not. Not as long as you continue to tolerate rising property taxes and free spending elected officials.

<http://extras.twincities.com/car/salaries/>
<http://ww3.startribune.com/dynamic/salaries/>

The Watchdog picked out the salary of our favorite Anoka County bureaucrat to get the ball rolling.

Steve Novak earns a salary of \$128,703 which equates to \$62 per hour. This salary is in addition to Novak's moonlighting job as a lobbyist for a private organization. No data is available regarding pay from that job.
<http://www.cfboard.state.mn.us/lobby/lbdetail/lb701.html>

Note that Novak's hourly wage is close to the number of hours considered full-time employment (2080 annually). So when does Novak work for the other employer? Are taxpayers getting full-time work from this highly compensated bureaucrat? Who knows. In fact, maybe taxpayers are better off to have Novak work as little as possible, since his activities seem to often entail pursuing higher taxes and more government.

3. The Heights of Foolishness.

You would think with all the money taxpayers give government, you could get some real help. At the very least, you would think government would at least give taxpayers the courtesy of doing no harm.

No way. Watchdogs in the city of Columbia Heights have informed the Dog of an ordinance under consideration by the city council that would force all homeowners to undergo and pass a city inspection before being allowed to put their home up for sale.

Never mind that core American principle of property rights. Since when do citizens have to get government permission to sell their home? What gives the city the right to interfere with a private sale offering?

The way the scheme is proposed to work is that before selling, a citizen would have to pass an inspection certifying that the home met city code requirements.

Of course, the city is likely justifying this intrusion by painting scenarios of snake infested homes and falling walls. Of course, any potential buyer can always have an inspection conducted before buying.

But just take a look at the city code and see what kinds of items can flunk out a home owner:

All doors in a home cannot have a hole or puncture (5A.201(c)); All bathrooms must have "easily cleanable" surfaces (5A.201(d)); Windows must be capable of being "easily" opened (5A.205(b)); Bathroom floors must be capable of being "easily" maintained in a clean state (5A.205(c)).

http://www.ci.columbia-heights.mn.us/city_services/city_code.asp

Notice how subjective the standards can be. Notice how easy it would be for some bureaucrat to impose subjective and arbitrary standards that have little to do with true health and safety.

Wake up, Columbia Heights. The council will consider this matter July 28! This is a bureaucratic nightmare waiting to happen.

<http://www.ci.columbia-heights.mn.us/>

http://www.ci.columbia-heights.mn.us/departments/pdf/Sequence_to_Closing_Chart_web.pdf

E-mail Update 8/1/08

In This Issue:

1. Fun at the Fair!

1. Fun at the Fair!

Ah, the Anoka County Fair, the second-greatest Minnesota Get Together. A bucolic affair where one can observe muscle shirt avant-garde, what's new in dragon tattoos, and sample the latest in deep-fried culinary cuisine (cheese curd, sir? No thanks, I'm sticking with the mini-donuts!).

And after winning that special someone a stuffed unicorn or Jeff Gordon mirror, you can stop by the GOP booth and check out the latest craziness. And we mean off-the-hook craziness!

The Watchdog's email blew up last week with allegations that Rep. Jim Abeler lost his temper and vandalized the booth after he was denied a place to leave his literature.

Since then, a whole lot of bad blood has developed between the Abeler camp and that of his primary challenger, Don Huizenga. In short, the contest has turned into a real donnybrook and should make for some interesting politics between now and September 9th. Can an old-fashioned pistol duel be far behind? We're powdering our wigs as we write.

The facts surrounding the incident are hotly disputed by the parties. Therefore, the Dog will simply publish statements we sought from each campaign and let you, the reader, decide. All we know is that this is certainly political news and something the mainstream press won't likely follow. This despite Jim Abeler's veiled threats to sue (go ahead Jim, we're not intimidated and never will be).

HUIZENGA STATEMENT FOLLOWS:

A few weeks back, incumbent Representative Jim Abeler asked the BPOU leaders of MN House District 48B if he could place his campaign materials in the Republican Party booth at the upcoming Anoka County Fair. They denied his request stating that only endorsed Republican candidates can place campaign materials in the Republican Party booth. Since neither Jim Abeler nor Republican challenger Don Huizenga are currently endorsed, neither candidate may place campaign materials in the booth. They did tell Mr. Abeler that he could set up his own booth at the fair, as other candidates have done, but it would be at his own expense. Don Huizenga was given the same response.

During the first day on the fair (Tuesday 7/22), Representative Abeler confronted a volunteer working at the Republican Party booth and again asked if he could put his materials in the booth. After receiving the same answer he got a couple of weeks earlier, Representative Abeler left. A short while after this clear answer was given; Representative Abeler proceeded to come back to booth to again fight the decision.

Abeler was so upset about this ruling that he continued to go to the booth, fight with the volunteers working, and storm off. This happened 4 times. On the 4th visit Representative Abeler was out of control and was seen and heard by many belittling and berating the volunteer (who happened to be 20 years Abeler's senior). Once Abeler finally left the booth volunteers thought the worst was finally over.

Later that evening, after the booth had closed, Representative Jim Abeler broke into the booth and took matters into his own hands. Representative Abeler removed all of the campaign literature of Michelle Bachman, Norm Coleman, Jake Cimenski and Tim Pawlenty from the table, replacing it with his own campaign literature. Representative Abeler also took two American flag poles and used them as spears to pierce the voter box that was sitting on the table. The last act was the hanging of a Jim Abeler sign on the outside of the booth. This was clearly an act of trespassing, breaking and entering, and destruction of private property...all punishable offenses. A complaint was subsequently filed by the staffer to the local BPOU. The BPOU Chair, Dan Emery, came to the fair and spoke with the staffer and Mr. Abeler. Having heard the story and Jim's confession, Mr. Emery thought it best to give Jim a slap on the wrist.

Representative Abeler continued his antics days later. Republican challenger Don Huizenga was served papers on Saturday, July 26 by Representative Jim Abeler's lawyer saying that if any news of this story was given to the press that Representative Abeler would file a law suit against Mr. Huizenga. When asked about the threat of a lawsuit, Don Huizenga said "I don't understand exactly why Representative Abeler would threaten me with this suit. The events reported were factual, and therefore threatening me with a lawsuit for reporting the incident is a clear violation of freedom of speech. If Representative Abeler was so worried about his tantrum becoming public he should have had the sense and self control to handle himself like an adult."

END OF STATEMENT

ABELER STATEMENT FOLLOWS:

The Huizenga camp is totally misrepresenting the "incident" if you can even call it that.

At best it is a misunderstanding and at worst it is a petty affair.

The "facts" which they present are largely incorrect. I was never interested in having a booth at the fair, even though I have more than adequate funds. I consider a fair booth to be a lot of work to gain a small return for a legislative seat such as mine.

I never sought the right to put materials at the booth from the District 48 GOP. They offered it to me, largely since they were so embarrassed by Don's racist and crass bloggings which he has been blogging more over the past few month at www.freedomsledder.com and since 2005 at www.hardcoresledder.com. FYI: There was an article in last weeks Anoka County Union by Tim Budig about this, including quotes from the District 48 chairman, Rep Tom Hackbarth, and the State Republican Party criticizing his writings and questioning his fitness for public service. The quote from the Party official is particularly direct and damaging.

Because they didn't want his literature at the booth, at their latest meeting the District 48 leadership created a policy that elected incumbents could place non-campaign materials at the booth, but that no candidate from our district could place "vote for ____" kinds of items. The consensus was that this list would include as allowable legislative wrapups, non-election stickers, and non-election signs. Tom Hackbarth had all of these items there, as well.

Because the booth was staffed by individuals from District 49, many of whom were still unhappy with me (and with Kathy Tingelstad) for voting to pass the transportation funding package over the objections of the governor, this placement did not go smoothly. Part of the discussions included Anoka members of the District 48 exec committee later in the day and a phone call from the District 48 chairman, which I imagined settled the matter. My items bounced from the front table to the back table back to the front table and finally to a bin inside, inconsistent with the decision of the District 48 committee, which was one of several district partners in the county-wide booth.

The conversations with the various staffers were generally civil though occasionally terse as we discussed the vote, Jake's chances for election, and how unhappy they were with both myself and Kathy. I reminded them that we were all on the same side, and that we would do better to work together. No voices were raised much beyond normal conversation even though we never did quite come to agreement.

The next morning I went over and hung one of my signs (with just my name on it) outside the booth in an empty space by some others that were stuck in the ground.

You may not be aware that I have been part of setting up and running this booth for a number of my 11 years of campaigning and being in office. I have developed an eye for organization and effective marketing and have received a large number of complements on how I set up tables and displays. Noticing that all the local candidates' literature was on the back table far from the view of passers-by and the front table was filled with clipboards seeking volunteers, I moved the materials around to better display everyone's materials, including my own which were neatly placed along with the rest. If a candidate had stickers, I put those by his or her printed item. To better display the flags, which were hidden behind a brown paper-covered box with inkpen written "Free drawing", I sliced two slots into the box and inserted the flags vertically, to better draw attention to them. I was quite satisfied that the booth now would draw more people and be more effective in helping get our county candidates elected. I expected that the other candidates would appreciate having their literature now visible and accessible.

FYI Every item that I rearranged was already in the booth, and I didn't take any items away or add anything that wasn't already in the booth. Later I asked the man in charge if there were any items strewn about or in disarray when he arrived the second day, and he remarked that all was quite tidy.

My only error was in not understanding that the fellow who was tending the booth this year was to be part of it every day (different from past years where one district or another would rotate in service duties), liked how he had set it up, and was quite offended that I had taken the liberty of rearranging the booth.

Later in the day, he and the District 48 chairman met and at the end of that meeting I stopped by. We clarified that I indeed had the right to display materials there and all agreed. Following that, I apologized to the man for rearranging his work, and he accepted that and we shook hands. I then decided then to take all my materials out of the booth in the interest of unity.

I am surprised to hear of the comments by my opponent, some of which are quite slanderous and others of which are simply preposterous, in describing the incident. We asked him by letter to correct his version or delete it from his website, and he has refused. The version presented by him is grossly and seriously incorrect, and does little to advance the debate on the issues that our constituents and our voters deserve.

It is violation of Minnesota campaign law to willfully lie about ones opponent or grossly misrepresent a situation. We are deciding if we will take this any farther since their "version" is so far from the truth, but are certainly quite disappointed in the irresponsible way he is handling this.

END OF ABELER STATEMENT

Fasten your seatbelts, sports fans!

E-mail Update 8/8/08

In This Issue:

1. A Man of the People?
2. An Ill Wind.
3. Tink's Troubles.
4. Loco for Locomotives.
5. Blog Roll.

1. A Man of the People?

"Humor" is about the last adjective that one would associate with Good Ol' Boy Godfather Dan Erhart. This is especially true since two meddlers have stepped forward to challenge his sense of entitlement regarding the board seat he has abused for the past 26 years. More than one reader has contacted us to recount a snubbing they've received by His Municipal Majesty ever since he learned there will be an election and not a coronation this November when the taxpayers will actually get a democratic choice at the polls.

But we did get a good chuckle out of Erhart's attempt at a campaign web site. Consisting of nothing more than a single home page with no links, the site offers little of value to any interested voter. The majority of space is occupied by an oversized logo and two photos of the Godfather making an obviously painful attempt to look warm and friendly. The rest of the page is occupied with a list of "accomplishments" that Erhart may or may not have been responsible for producing.

The real laughter is the quote at the bottom of the page where Erhart solemnly proclaims that "The people of Anoka County are my number one priority."

Oh really? Is that why the web site has absolutely no contact information? No email address? No phone number? No mail address?

Watchdogs, of course, realize this lack of accessibility is typical. Despite the fact that the taxpayers pay for a county email address, Erhart refuses to publish it. It is far easier to deny what was said when there is no record of it.

Erhart's true colors were revealed when he was one of 4 commissioners to vote to deny citizens the opportunity to speak to the Board regarding the increased sales tax that the County foisted upon the taxpayers this past July 1st. When a number of citizens asked to speak, Commissioners Sivarajah, West, and Lang all voted to allow the people to speak. The measure failed 4-3 with Erhart, LeDoux, Kordiak, and Berg all voting to silence the very people they're supposed to serve. By contrast, the Washington County Board listened intently to hours of public comment before voting.

In fact, when Erhart chaired the board, public comment was not entertained as well.

So is it better to have a bad web site or none at all? We're still waiting for the Skogquist web site.

<http://www.danerhart.com>

<http://www.co.anoka.mn.us/officials/districts/district7.asp>

2. An Ill Wind.

False alarm, folks. The energy crisis is over. Solved. All done. Taken care of. Fixed. Never mind.

With government on the job, solutions are never more than a tax (or fee) increase away. Just this week, we learned that government is solving the energy crisis by turning to an unreliable and expensive source – wind.

Why rely on inexpensive, reliable, and abundant sources when you can turn to wind power and watch government use eminent domain powers to jam a 150-foot wind mill in your driveway while jacking up utility fees to pay for it?

According to an article in the Star Tribune, a consortium of cities, including Anoka, is interested in setting up windmills around town to produce power.

But don't for a moment believe the goal of government is actually produce wind power in a meaningful way. According to the bureaucrat interviewed, the goal is to produce about 1% of a city's needs. Said the bureaucrat of the wind power project, "It's a visual symbol of conservation efforts and green power." Great. Why not just make a big banner and save some time and money?

Feel good government always leaves a hangover.

Of course, the Dog was on this one WAY before the mainstream media.

On April 25th we reported this issue.

http://www.anokacountywatchdog.com/email/2008/04.25.08_update.htm

<http://www.startribune.com/local/north/26212809.html>

If you've ever been past Great River Energy's building in Maple Grove, you can see a prime example of what an eyesore these things really are on the suburban landscape.

<http://www.greatriverenergy.com/about/energyefficientbldgs.html>

3. Tink's Troubles.

The Watchdog's motto is "always on the watch." When it comes to folks like good ol' boy lobbyist Elwyn Tinklenberg, the dog is indeed sleeping with one eye open.

Perhaps our concern is a bit unfounded as Elwyn is once again experiencing troubles in his quest to get elected.

According to the latest FEC campaign finance report, it looks like what many DFL watchdogs told us is true. Namely, that even democrats don't like Tinklenberg. If political contributions are any indication, it looks like ol' Tink is about as popular as head lice or, gasp, about as popular as the people he seeks to join in Washington.

As of the last reporting date of June 30th, Bachmann had raised nearly \$2 million.

Meanwhile, Tinklenberg has raised a mere \$533,000, with only \$225,000 cash on hand.
<http://www.opensecrets.org/races/summary.php?cycle=2008&id=MN06>

This is one reason why the pundits are labeling this race as "GOP favored."
<http://rothenbergpoliticalreport.blogspot.com/2008/04/2008-house-ratings.html>

4. Loco for Locomotives.

You would think even the most jaded and entrenched politician would display his best behavior during an election. You know, maybe pull at least one hand out of the cookie jar and pretend that the people of Anoka County are your number one priority.

No way. Not when you're Dan Erhart and there's a chance to take yet another junket. The Northstar rail propaganda web site has a puff piece about Dennis and Dan's big adventure out to Idaho to look at locomotives and take some campaign photos. Really. What exactly was the justification for these people to go out to Idaho at our expense? Your tax dollars at work.

<http://himlehorner.typepad.com/northstar/2008/07/first-northstar.html>

5. Blog Roll.

Over the past three years, the Watchdog has been proud to inspire other blogs and web sites dedicated to fiscal accountability and good government. We're happy to give props to other web sites and blogs out there in Anoka County that are working hard to protect taxpayers. If you know of one, send it our way.

In the meantime, check out these folks in Centerville:
<http://centervillemn.blogspot.com/>

E-mail Update 8/15/08

In This Issue:

SPECIAL EDITION: GOIN' OFF THE RAILS ON A CRAZY TRAIN.

I've listened to preachers

I've listened to fools

I've watched all the politicians

Who make their own rules

One person conditioned to rule and control Himle Horner sells it and you live the role

Property tax bill rising Driving me insane I'm going off the rails on a taxpayer-subsidized tourist train

1. Goin' Off the Rails on a Crazy Train.

Well over a year before the beleaguered Northstar commuter rail makes its expensive and meaningless (congestion relief-wise) debut, your Anoka County Commissioners are hard at work pushing yet another rail project (hey, you've got to keep your lobbyist friends on another train – the gravy train).

In a blinding flash of innovation, the folks who brought us "Northstar" rail now seek to bring us the new, different, and radical "Northern Lights" train (we would love to know how much was spent developing the name and logo).

Running from Minneapolis to Duluth, the train would seek to resurrect the failed Amtrak route abolished in 1985.

The Watchdog attended a briefing on the project last week that was long on pictures and conclusions but short on methodology. It seems that government either can't or won't give taxpayers the same data it used in drawing major conclusions and concocting pithy quotes for marketing campaigns.

Editor's Note: The presentation seen by the Watchdog is not available online. The Watchdog is in the process of scanning and posting it now. Check the web site soon. You can see just how much substance the county is offering with respect to this project by clicking here:

<http://northernlightsexpress.org/>

Here's what you need to know about this emerging debacle:

Costs. So far, the project has drained away over \$1 million in taxpayer resources that could have been used to fix our aging roads and bridges. The total cost of the environmental impact statement is expected to be \$2.2 million. In typical Washington fashion, a \$3.9 million request has been entered although only another \$1.1 million is need to fund the impact statement. There is no word regarding what the other \$2.8

million would buy, although some meals at the Oceanaire Seafood Room and junkets to Lutsen would likely be on the agenda.

So what will it cost to upgrade the tracks and make other capital improvements? The County came back with a razor-sharp estimate of somewhere between \$202 and \$394 million. Remember when Northstar rail was going to cost \$165 million? That's now \$320 million. So we know what estimates are worth with this bunch. It would be interesting to find out what the County estimates it would cost to improve HWY 65 in the corridor.

The higher capital costs are the most likely because the train only offers a positive cost-benefit calculus at 110 mph, meaning that the tracks would have to be significantly improved to handle high-speed rail. Moreover, it would be faster to drive at any lower rail speed. Of course, the presentation the Dog saw was devoid of any methodology regarding cost-benefit.

In order to accommodate high-speed rail, the existing tracks would need to be not only improved, but also expanded. Because the track is a single-line, numerous double-track sidings would have to be added. The Dog also wonders how eager suburbs like Coon Rapids, Andover, and Oak Grove are to have expanded rail traffic roaring through their cities at 110 mph. In a more comical moment, the County admitted that there is a bridge along the line that is so decrepit, the speed limit is a mere 3mph. The current plan does not provide for improvement to this bridge.

Benefits. In addition to providing problem gamblers a subsidized trip to Hinkley (you can ride the train home after you lose your car at the blackjack table), the line offers other alleged benefits.

Specifically, the lines promises to move 3,000 people per day while providing \$2 billion in economic benefits, including 13,833 jobs. These are some darn big numbers. It's too bad the County couldn't be troubled to describe the methodology that led to these claims, especially in light of the fact that bus service in the area moves about 60 people per day. While troubling, it is hardly surprising. They got away with it regarding Northstar rail.

Convenience and Common Sense.

Okay, let's put this whole sales pitch to a simple, common sense hypothetical situation. A family of four living in Minneapolis is taking a weekend getaway to Duluth. They can either pack up their eco-unfriendly Chevy Suburban or they can ride the train with the cool name there and back.

With the truck, the family can pack up and leave at their convenience. With the train, the family has to make arrangement to get to the station at a precise time, not an easy task if you have two young kids. If you take a cab to the station, there are further costs in terms of money and convenience.

At the station, the family has to check in and get their luggage aboard. Once the train gets rolling, there will be no opportunity for side trips, like a stop at world-famous Toby's for a meal. Of course, the family could presumably haul their luggage off the train and try to find a ride to Toby's and then hitch back in time to catch the next train.

In Duluth, the family finds the same hassle getting transportation to their hotel.

Come Sunday, the family gets to repeat the same exercise.

According to the County, a 110 mph train would save riders only 20 minutes over car travel. When you factor in the hassle of getting to and from the station, this 20 minute savings is obliterated and then some.

What about cost? The County noted that fares would likely run \$72 per person round trip from Minneapolis to Duluth. That's \$288 for our family of four.

According to www.twincitiesgasprices.com, gas is running about \$3.58 per gallon in the Twin Cities. According to the federal government, the Suburban gets 16 miles to the gallon. (People suckered by lower E85 ethanol prices should note E85 yields only 12 miles to the gallon.)

Thus, it would take approximately 19 gallons of regular gasoline to make the round trip. At today's prices, that's roughly \$69. Our family would need to fork over an extra \$219 for the "privilege" of riding the train.

No wonder even Amtrak found the line too costly to operate.

Any Watchdog family would readily conclude that driving was the better option.

Getting your priorities straight.

One section of the presentation was devoted to the "accomplishment" of selecting a logo for the train. Apparently, this was a big deal for the politicians. Saint Louis County Commissioner Steve Raukar noted that focus groups were used (and paid) to select the logo's color. How cute. Your tax dollars at work.

E-mail Update 8/22/08

In This Issue:

1. Un-Natural Science.
2. A Less Perfect Union.
3. Turning 3.
4. Property Tax Alert!
5. Rumor Mill.

1. Un-Natural Science.
The most endangered species
The honest man
Will still survive annihilation
Forming a world
State of integrity
Sensitive, open and strong

Arguably there is nothing more critical to maintaining American prosperity in the 21st Century than demanding that our public schools turn out young men and women who are proficient in math and science. Prosperity, influence, and power will belong to those nations that are leaders in scientific innovation.

And as Minnesota spends more and more on our public schools via ever higher property taxes and a larger chunk of the state's general fund, we see increasing evidence that more money doesn't guarantee better results.

The latest bad news from our failing public education monopoly reports that only 4 out of 10 students are labeled "proficient" in science. In the Anoka-Hennepin School District, a mere minority of 43% made the grade, making the Watchdog wonder about the levy that was recently passed to "maintain the excellence." Perhaps the district should have had a discussion with the taxpayers to define just exactly what was meant by "excellence."

It is the nature of government to be reactive, not proactive. Hopefully, the education monopoly will be exposed to the salutary effects of free market competition before we fall farther and farther behind our traditional rivals in Europe and our emerging rivals in Asia.

<http://www.startribune.com/local/27109509.html?elr=KArksUUUU>

Heck, even the Star Tribune editorial board gets it (kind of).

<http://www.startribune.com/opinion/editorials/27153919.html?elr=KArksUUUU>

2. A Less Perfect Union.

In a story broken on our web site, the Watchdog reported this week that John Belpedio has abruptly resigned as the president of the Anoka-Hennepin Education Minnesota (AHEM), the local teacher's union.

Belpedio is well known to Harold Hamilton and the Watchdog as Hamilton has debated him in the past with respect to the public education monopoly. In fact, Belpedio has been more than an apologist for the current failing system. We grew to love his hostile invective and frequent rants, all from his taxpayer-funded email account.

By the look of things, Belpedio won't be back around for awhile. We know why, the teacher's union knows why, and so does the school district. It's about time the school district informed the taxpayers.

<http://www.anokacountywatchdog.com/education/2008/08/08.14.08%20AHEM%20special%20notice.pdf>

3. Turning 3.

It's hard to believe, but the Dog is turning 3! Since our founding in September of 2005, the Anoka County Watchdog has been your source for inside political information and news. This year, we will once again celebrate our preeminence with a birthday party. In addition to free food and drink, this year's party will feature a candidate forum. Be sure to join us! Where else can you attend a birthday party where the guest of honor gives YOU a gift?

What: The Dog's 3rd birthday!

When: September 17th, 6 pm.

Where: Majestic Oaks Country Club

Why: Because we had a blast at the last one!

Do us the favor, please, of giving us an RSVP so we know how many to expect.

Harold@anokacountywatchdog.com

<http://www.majesticoaksgolfclub.com/layout9.asp?id=192&page=3609>

4. Property Tax Alert!

Apparently, the Coon Rapids city manager missed the memo about the collapse of the real estate market. And the memo about falling home values. And the memo about high gas prices. And the memo regarding the worst unemployment rate since 1983. And the memo about record food prices. And the memo about spiraling health care costs.

This week, city manager Matt Fulton submitted a proposed budget to the city council that calls for a 10% increase in the property tax levy.

It's almost (almost!) inconceivable that government would seek higher taxes to fund ever more spending when taxpayers are experiencing such hardships.

But, hey, don't worry Coon Rapids. The proposed tax increase is going to fund some core functions like:

The hiring of a "neighborhood coordinator"

\$115,000 for "quality of life improvements"

\$454,000 for the "neighborhood reinvestment program"

\$750,000 for debt service to purchase land for a community center \$115,000 for new computers

Maybe, just maybe, some of these expenditures could be postponed until the taxpayers could better absorb the blow?

Then again, since when does government cut spending? (Side bet! A free Watchdog coffee mug and t-shirt to the first person who can show any year when the city spent LESS money than the year before.)

Contact your city council to weigh in on the proposed budget here:

<http://www.ci.coon-rapids.mn.us/council/councilmembers.htm>

http://abcnewspapers.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=3609&Itemid=28

5. Rumor Mill.

Here's what our Watchdogs out on the campaign trail are reporting:

Dan Erhart was heard bragging at the county courthouse this week that he had retained the powerhouse public affairs firm of Himle Horner to conduct polling in his re-election race.

The hiring of Himle Horner would be curious indeed as Erhart has voted numerous times as a county commissioner to award the firm millions in government contracts for projects like Northstar rail (click on any press release and look at the top of the page to see the "Himle Horner" type pad like the one below).

<http://himlehorner.typepad.com/northstar/2008/08/northstar-commu.html>

Did Himle Horner offer generous terms to Erhart because of these contracts? Did Erhart pay fair market price for the services offered?

We'll be getting a copy of Erhart's next campaign finance report to see for ourselves. Sniff, sniff. Do you smell something?

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

You know it's election season when Hennepin County's favorite silver spoon princess, Meli\$\$a Hortman, throws a hissy fit. Last time around, she called Harold Hamilton and screamed "f**khead!" into the phone before slamming it down.

This time, the object of her ire was a true blue DFLer who refused to take a Hortman lawn sign. After rejecting Hortman's request, a hell-hath-no-fury-like-a-princess-scorned Hortman returned to the man's house and said he was "being un-American" for exercising his private property and First Amendment rights. The charge was also quite ironic since the homeowner in question is a Marine Corps veteran.

We'll cruise by the address in question next week to see if fellow veteran Andy Reinhardt managed to finagle a lawn sign or perhaps even a vote from this guy.

Semper Fi!

The Jim Abeler – Don Huizenga donnybrook in the GOP primary for Abeler's House seat gets more entertaining by the moment.

The Dog has recently covered the controversy that developed over Abeler's "tidying up" of the GOP booth at the Anoka County fair. Was it vandalism? Or was it merely a visit from Jim "Merrymaid" Abeler?

Both sides claim to be right. What we know is that the local GOP has formally decided to investigate the matter. Will polygraphs be admissible? Will both be asked to submit DNA samples? If it doesn't fit, must the GOP acquit? Do either men have a wide stance? Was John Edwards seen at the booth? Stay tuned!

E-mail Update 8/29/08

In This Issue:

1. Money.
2. Another Tax Increase?!
3. Birthday Bash.

1. Money

Money it's a hit

Don't give me that do goody good bullsh*t

- Roger Waters

On the surface, politics can appear to be complex, even overwhelming. The rhetoric, spin, and seemingly endless flip-flops of the candidates can make following politics akin to catching a crappie with your bare hands.

The secret to discerning a politician's true colors is actually quite easy. Just follow the money. In Minnesota, following the money is easy as can be – just a matter of clicking the ol' mouse. <http://www.cfbreport.state.mn.us/rptViewer/viewRptsCan.php>

As you would expect, the Watchdog has carefully examined the latest reports to see where the candidates have been getting their money and where they've been spending it.

Without question, the most noteworthy report came from a not so unexpected source. While we suspected Jim Abeler's report would be interesting, we didn't know it would shock and intrigue even the most jaded politico. The report is sure to spark controversy. In fact, the Watchdog was the first to list the details of Abeler's report to a senior GOP official. The official was stunned by the details and demanded that we wait on the phone until he could call up the report on the Internet and verify it for himself. His only comment was "I can't believe it" then the phone was slammed down.

Check out some of the gems hidden within this seemingly mundane paperwork.

First, Abeler reported receiving a direct \$200 contribution from DFL state Rep. Melissa Hortman. To say that a sitting Democrat giving directly to a sitting GOP colleague is unusual would be an understatement (about as understated as calling Chernobyl an un-requested fission surplus).

What is really interesting is the timing. The report notes that the contribution was received on March 8, 2008. That means the contribution was received a mere 12 days after Abeler voted to override the governor's veto of the DFL transportation bill that raised taxes by \$6.6 billion. Don't forget that Rep. Hortman is an assistant majority leader and was responsible, at least in part, for crafting the override strategy. So Abeler votes to override and Hortman writes a check 12 days later. Curious.

http://www.house.leg.state.mn.us/votes/votes.asp?ls_year=85&session_number=0&year=2008&id=774

Not only did Hortman give to Abeler, her dad got out the checkbook as well. Just 8 days after Abeler's override vote, Harry Haluptzok slid \$250 Jim's way. So, within two weeks of the override vote, Melissa Hortman and a direct relative sent \$450 to Abeler. Curious indeed.

Second, under Minnesota campaign finance laws, a candidate must list every individual who contributes more than \$100. Of these so-called "itemized" donations, Abeler listed 28 such individuals. Of the 28, only 2 reside within Abeler's district (55303 zip code). There's some grassroots support for ya.

On top of all that, Abeler also took money from groups that may directly benefit from the override vote and tax increase. Some of Abeler's itemized donors list the following employers:

KGM Contractors (highway grading)
AVR, Inc. (concrete)
C.S. McCrossan (construction contractor) Tiller Corporation (asphalt contractor) Knife River Construction (aggregate producer)

Some of the special interest groups that gave money to Abeler would also likely benefit from the tax increase:

Minneapolis Regional Labor Federation
North Central States Carpenters PAC
Road PAC of MN

(Maybe those carpenters were looking to bid on repairing the GOP booth at the county fair! ;)

And that's not all, Watchdogs. What is listed above is only what the Abeler campaign raised and spent. That report does NOT cover what PACs and special interest groups have spent on Abeler's behalf without his knowledge (these are known as "independent expenditures").

The Watchdog does know that special interests have been spending money encouraging their members to vote in the GOP primary for Abeler. In fact, the Watchdog will soon be posting a mailer from the Minneapolis Regional Labor Federation encouraging their members to vote for Abeler. So is this a Republican-friendly group simply participating in the democratic process? Or is this a DFL-leaning group seeking to influence a GOP election? Take a look at who they support: <http://www.cfbreport.state.mn.us/pdfStorage/2008/CampFin/A/30011.pdf>

As Kevin Garnett once said, "I'm at a shock of words."

<http://www.cfbreport.state.mn.us/pdfStorage/2008/CampFin/A/14819.pdf>

2. Another Tax Increase?!

If you love government “investments”, Minnesota is the place to be. Hundreds of millions in fee increases, property tax increases, a sales tax increase, a wheelage tax, a gas tax increase, tab fee increases, and on and on. And like a set of fine Ginsu knives, that’s not all!

Don’t forget, the arts and croissant crowd is coming for a tax increase in November. The good news is that you get a chance to vote on this one. But stay focused Watchdogs! The arts crowd has big dollars and they’ll use them to try a Jedi mind trick to convince you that MPR and the local Mapplethorpe exhibit just can’t get by without your involuntary contribution.

The Jedi mind trick has already worked on thousands of sportsmen who are convinced that the table crumbs they will get are worth it.

To be specific, the ballot question calls for a 3/8ths increase in the sales tax, which would CONSTITUTIONALLY dedicate the money to arts and the outdoors.

This idea is bad for so many reasons. Okay, let’s put on the tinfoil hat for a moment and assume more tax dollars is a good idea. Dedicating that money through constitutional amendment is a horrible idea. That means legislators (folks accountable to you at the polls) would have no control over the funds. The only way to fix a problem or re-allocate the money would be to amend the constitution. Frankly, that kind of funding is contrary to very idea of democracy. If legislators think this is a good idea, they should be willing to control the funding and be held accountable for the results. Under this concept, they get to punt the ball.

Moreover, the trust fund babies who hang out listening to MPR must be truly immune to the economy and the realities of everyday life. Above all else, this is a profoundly stupid idea in a time of economic turmoil.

For now, chalk one up for the folks who live in the real world:

<http://www.startribune.com/politics/state/27511729.html?elr=KArksUUUU>

Learn more about the tax here:

<http://www.taxpayersleague.org>

3. Birthday Bash.

Don’t forget about our 3rd annual Watchdog birthday bash on September 17th at Majestic Oaks in Ham Lake! Come one come all! We’ve already has an overwhelming response in RSVPs and we want more! Be there! Free T-shirts! Free food! A free exchange of ideas!

RSVP: Harold@anokacountywatchdog.com

E-mail Update 9/8/08

In This Issue:

1. Time to Vote.
2. Crossover GOP.
3. Sticky Green = Sticky Situation
4. Birthday Bash.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Now hear this! Now hear this! Next Tuesday, SEPTEMBER 9TH, is a primary election day. Watchdogs, it is your civic duty to report to the polls and exercise your sacred right to vote for the candidates of your choice. That is all. Carry on.

1. Time to Vote.

That's right, faithful readers. The polls will be open next Tuesday for the Primary Election. As always, the Dog is here to provide the information you were afraid to ask regarding primary elections.

A primary election is an election that narrows a field of candidates for the general election. In non-partisan races, a field of multiple candidates is narrowed down to two candidates for the general election. For a partisan office, a primary narrows a field of two or more candidates down to one, who will appear with the party endorsement behind their name.

Any eligible voter can vote in any partisan primary, but that person has to choose a particular party. For example, if a voter chooses to vote in the DFL senate primary between Franken and Lord-Faris, that voter may not vote in the GOP primary between Norm Coleman and that nutty dude living in Rome who always runs.

While the Watchdog, can't cover every race, here are some of the area races that will have a primary on Tuesday:

GOP House District 48B: Jim Abeler v. Don Huizenga
GOP House District 53A: Mady Reiter v. John Kapler
DFL Senate: Al Franken vs. Priscilla Lord Faris and a bunch of other people.

GOP Senate: Norm Coleman vs. Jack Sheppard
GOP 6th District Congress: Michele Bachmann vs. Aubrey Immelman

On the non-partisan side, all three Anoka County Commissioner races will have a primary that will narrow the field from three candidates down to two:

District 5:

Scott LeDoux

Daniel Nelson

Becky Fink

District 6:

Rhonda Sivarajah
Kevin Ryan
Patrick Davern

District 7:
Bjorn Skogquist
Eugene Rogers
Dan "The Junket Man" Erhart

So you need information, you say? Here are the web sites you should hit before hitting the polls:

Voting information:

<http://www.sos.state.mn.us/home/index.asp?page=4>

http://www.co.anoka.mn.us/v2_dept/elections/index.aspx

Candidate Information:

<http://candidates.sos.state.mn.us/CandidateFilingSearchResults.asp?x=1>

<http://candidates.sos.state.mn.us/>

http://candidates.sos.state.mn.us/CF_CandSelResults_Local.asp?County=02&x=1

http://abcnewspapers.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=3867&Itemid=26

http://abcnewspapers.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=3834&Itemid=26

http://abcnewspapers.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=3833&Itemid=26

http://abcnewspapers.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=3832&Itemid=26

http://abcnewspapers.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=3818&Itemid=26

http://abcnewspapers.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=3817&Itemid=26

http://abcnewspapers.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=3816&Itemid=26

<http://www.skogquist4commissioner.com>

<http://www.danerhart.com/> (put on your hip boots!) www.electrhonda.com

www.scottledoux.com

Of course, you will want to peruse our archived email updates, which are chock full of information on the incumbent candidates (LeDoux, Sivarajah, and Erhart).

http://www.anokacountywatchdog.com/email/email_updates.htm

2. Crossover GOP.

Just last week, the Watchdog reported on DFL special interest groups encouraging their members to infiltrate the GOP primary to vote for Jim Abeler. That encouragement continues apace and has become quite blatant.

While Minnesota law does not prevent this kind of mischief, it is contrary to our democratic principles for people to vote in a primary of a party they don't support for a candidate they likely will vote against in the general election.

Check out this latest mail piece that cynically encourages DFLers and independents to vote in the GOP primary. The piece even assures these voters that they can go back to voting for their party's ticket in the general election after they dilute the vote of Republican voters on September 9th.

This is exactly the kind of politics that breeds the pessimism and disgust many people feel towards politicians and the political system today.

It's apparent that some special interests believe Abeler can't win amongst Republican voters in his district.

We'll find out on Tuesday.

http://www.anokacountywatchdog.com/mngovt/2008/09/abeler_construction.pdf

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

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

3. Sticky Green = Sticky Situation.

So when I'm fed up I get red up
Mary Jane messed my head up
She can be my best friend forever
At times I regret I met her

The Watchdog is betting DFL-endorsed legislative candidate Shawn Hamilton is regretting hanging out with Mary Jane. According to public documents and the blog Minnesota Democrats Exposed (MDE), Hamilton was cited by Blaine police for smoking dope in a parked car, where Hamilton's pot pipe was confiscated.

There are other allegations detailed on MDE, but the Watchdog will not publish them as we have not yet published the documents that support them.

<http://www.minnesotademocratsexposed.com/2008/08/26>

<http://pa.courts.state.mn.us/CaseDetail.aspx?CaseID=496760681>

Voters in District 51A will have to decide if this is the type of person they want representing them in the legislature.

<http://www.shawnhamilton.org/>
<http://timothysandersmn.com/>

4. Birthday Bash.

Don't forget the September 17th birthday bash at Majestic Oaks in Ham Lake. Free food, cake, and meeting candidates for office are all on the agenda! RSVP at Harold@anokacountywatchdog.com. Be there!

E-mail Update 9/12/08

In This Issue:

1. Post-Primary Analysis.
2. Birthday Bash (did we mention a birthday bash?)

EDITOR'S NOTE: On this the first update since 9/11, the Watchdog pauses to remember the victims who were killed and injured that day and all who have given their lives combating terrorism since that day of infamy.

1. Post-Primary Analysis.

Being that this is the first update after Tuesday's primary election, let's dive right into our analysis of what happened on Tuesday.

ANOKA COUNTY DISTRICT 5.

This district covers eastern Coon Rapids and the south portion of Andover. Incumbent Scott LeDoux faced Becky Fink and Daniel Nelson.

It was no surprise to see Nelson come in a distant third with 404 votes.

What was surprising was how close Fink was to LeDoux. LeDoux garnered 1,333 votes to Fink's 1,089. The fact that a first-time candidate came within 244 votes of an incumbent with high name recognition spells trouble for LeDoux. Moreover, much of LeDoux's margin came from Andover with Coon Rapids being far more competitive. Fink will likely focus on Andover, looking to close the gap. If she can, this district may see it's third commissioner in as many terms.

The close margin also makes Daniel Nelson a player, since his vote total (404) was greater than the difference between LeDoux and Fink (244). If Nelson publicly endorses one of the remaining candidates, he may put that candidate over the top.

The other players in this race are conservative Republicans who are looking for a candidate who represents their interests. While these voters would likely side with LeDoux more than Fink, LeDoux has raised their ire with his outspoken support for Northstar rail and a taxpayer-financed football stadium. Can LeDoux's position on social issues bring them home? Can Fink convince them she better represents their fiscal interests? Or will these voters simply skip this down-ballot race in a presidential election year? There is no denying LeDoux needs them more than Fink does to win on election day.

This race promises to be a barnburner, with the winner getting no more than 51 or 52% of the vote.

<http://www.co.anoka.mn.us/results/CountyCommissionerDist5.asp>

The Watchdog has also collected the pre-primary campaign finance reports to track how much money the candidates raised and spent. It's really too bad that the county won't publish these reports on the Internet themselves. But, that's why we're here. We have all reports posted for you, loyal readers (Editor's note: two candidates did not file reports and are thus not published.).

LeDoux's report is prefaced with a letter from his lawyer. While it seems to be a pretty straightforward reporting process, LeDoux apparently had problems getting this homework assignment right.

During the reporting period, LeDoux collected \$13,722 in contributions and spent in the neighborhood of \$11,472.

Fink reported \$5,558 in contributions while spending \$2,710.

Thus, LeDoux outspent Fink by a better than 4 to 1 margin to gain a narrow victory. This is another indication of trouble for the incumbent.

<http://www.anokacountywatchdog.com/elections/09.03.08%20LeDoux%20report.pdf>

<http://www.anokacountywatchdog.com/elections/09.02.08%20Fink%20report.pdf>

ANOKA COUNTY DISTRICT 6

This district basically comprises the eastern half of the county. Unlike district 5, incumbent Rhonda Sivarajah laid an absolute beat down on her two opponents, Patrick Davern and Kevin Ryan.

Sivarajah rolled up 1,825 votes to Ryan's 321 and Davern's 285. You could put Davern and Ryan's totals together and Sivarajah still won by over 1,000 votes. This was an impressive showing from an incumbent who obviously isn't affected by voters wanting "change." Maybe, just maybe, the good voters in district six see her as exactly the "change" they want to see in county government.

On November 4th, Sivarajah will be wearing a school bus driver hat as she takes Kevin Ryan to school – again. Put a fork in this one.

Maybe Davern was the lucky one. He doesn't have to campaign against a popular incumbent for another 8 weeks.

<http://www.co.anoka.mn.us/results/CountyCommissionerDist6.asp>

Moneywise, Sivarajah also played conservative. She raised just \$3,465 and spent a paltry \$412. Perhaps when you have a message that resonates, you don't need to spend much convincing people you ought to be re-elected.

Editor's Note: Harold Hamilton has contributed to the Sivarajah campaign.

<http://www.anokacountywatchdog.com/elections/08.29.08%20Sivarajah%20report.pdf>

Kevin Ryan raised \$555 and spent it on a newspaper ad. This move was probably about as astute as when Jeff Spicoli saved Brooke Shields from drowning and promptly blew the reward money hiring Van Halen to play his birthday party.

<http://www.anokacountywatchdog.com/elections/09.03.08%20Ryan%20report.pdf>
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uf5rluJPTt0&feature=related>

ANOKA COUNTY DISTRICT 7

Located in western Coon Rapids and most of the city of Anoka, this is the race that matches entrenched incumbent Dan “the Junket Man” Erhart against outgoing Anoka mayor Bjorn Skogquist. Oh yeah, Eugene “Mr. Rogers” Rogers was also in the race.
<http://himlehorner.typepad.com/northstar/2008/07/first-northstar.html>

Erhart won the primary with 2,009 votes while Skogquist came in second with 1,442 votes. Erhart’s 567 vote margin should do very little to put his mind at ease. Skogquist had an uncharacteristically late start and was outspent by the Junket Man by a remarkable, perhaps unprecedented margin.

Erhart called in his favors from the Good Ol’ Boys network to collect a whopping \$19,877 in contributions, some of it from people who have received contracts from the county or the Northstar rail joint powers group (more on that next week).

Erhart spent an eye-popping \$22,464 to get 2,009 votes.
<http://www.anokacountywatchdog.com/elections/08.29.08%20Erhart%20report.pdf>

Skogquist, on the other hand, raised a modest \$1,879 and spent \$534 to garner 1,442 votes.
<http://www.anokacountywatchdog.com/elections/08.22.08%20Skogquist%20report.pdf>

Editor’s Note: Harold Hamilton has contributed to the Skogquist campaign.

This is truly a David vs. Goliath match-up. We’ll see if Erhart’s money can win him another term – putting him at 30 years of collecting government checks at the county.

MINNESOTA HOUSE DISTRICT 48B GOP

This was the race that featured incumbent Jim Abeler against Don Huizenga for the GOP endorsement. Abeler had failed to gain the endorsement because of a voting record that did little to honor what the Republican delegates in his area believe about government. Huizenga, while sporting conservative credentials, was a candidate who carried his own baggage, with provocative Internet comments allegedly attributed to him.

Abeler ended up winning rather handily, 2069 to 1172. Having said that, it is quite possible that the race was tipped in favor of Abeler by DFLers and independent voters who were encouraged to interfere in the primary in favor of Abeler. Was Abeler truly the GOP choice on Tuesday? Like the question about getting to the center of a Tootsie Roll Tootsie Pop, the world may never know.

http://www.anokacountywatchdog.com/mngovt/2008/09/abeler_construction.pdf
<http://www.co.anoka.mn.us/results/StateRepresentativeDist48BR.asp>

HOUSE DISTRICT 53A GOP

Endorsed Republican John Kappler beat back a challenge from former state Senator Mady Reiter for the right to knock out DFL rep. Paul Gardner, who appears to be renting the seat for the next 8 weeks. Gardner's radical environmentalism and fondness for tax and fee increases seem to be just a touch out of step with the voters of Lino Lakes and Shoreview (Gardner scored a perfect "zero" on the 2008 Taxpayer's League of MN scorecard).

<http://www.co.anoka.mn.us/results/StateRepresentativeDist53AR.asp>

<http://www.taxpayersleague.org/pdf/legscorecard2008.pdf>

2. Birthday Bash.

Did we mention that we're having a birthday bash to celebrate the Dog's third anniversary? September 17th, 6pm., at Majestic Oaks in Ham Lake. We'll have free snacks and a sweet birthday cake as well as good conversation with local candidates for city, county, and state offices.

RSVP at Harold@anokacountywatchdog.com

Next week: We'll take a detailed look at the campaign activities of a certain county commissioner candidate. We'll also analyze the county board's budget discussions plus much, much more.

E-mail Update 9/19/08

In This Issue:

1. Fight For Your Right...to Party!
2. Exposure.
3. T-shirt Mania.

1. Fight For Your Right...to Party!

Folks, it was a blow out. A party of epic proportions. The Dog's third annual birthday bash was truly one of the THE social events of the year in Anoka County. Approximately 200 taxpayers were joined by over 20 elected officials and candidates in celebrating 3 years of journalistic excellence. The Fireside Room at Majestic Oaks was packed for a memorable evening of political discussion, fellowship, and good food.

If you were in the emergency room Wednesday night and couldn't make it, the Watchdog has got you covered. We were generous enough to spring for a video crew to capture the event for replay. Check www.anokacountywatchdog.com soon for a video replay and photos. If you get close enough to your monitor, you can almost taste the birthday cake. Mmmm....conservalicious.

The Watchdog would once again like to thank the candidates who participated in the candidate forum:

Anoka County Commissioner:

Rhonda Sivarajah (District 6): www.electrhonda.com Bjorn Skogquist (District 7): www.skogquist4commissioner.com Scott LeDoux (District 5): www.scottledoux.com

Minnesota House of Representatives:

Andrew Reinhardt (47B): www.andrewreinhardt.com Peggy Scott (49A): www.scott49a.com Jake Cimenski (49B): www.jake08.net Tim Sanders (51A): www.timothysandersmn.com Bob Dettmer: (52A): www.bobdettmer.com John Kappler (53A): www.johnkappler.com

Mark your calendars for September 2009!

2. Exposure.

As you well know, the core mission of the Watchdog is to inform the taxpaying public with respect to the deeds of elected officials and candidates. We show you what they try to hide. We expose what they seek to conceal. We dig up what they want to bury.

And when it comes to Dan "The Junket Man" Erhart, the Dog needs an excavator to unearth what he doesn't want the voters to see.

For example, take Erhart's endorsement from the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME). While Erhart's campaign web site highlights a number of endorsements, this one is curiously absent. Why?

Perhaps it's because this endorsement represents a difficult situation for Erhart, even an outright conflict of interest. As a sitting commissioner, Erhart is charged with negotiating with this union on behalf of the taxpayer. By taking the AFSCME endorsement, Erhart is putting himself on both sides of the bargaining table. And while Erhart may not handle the negotiations directly, he and the county board are ultimately responsible for approving any collective bargaining agreement.

How can any commissioner fairly negotiate on behalf of the taxpayer while taking a political endorsement from the union sitting on the other side of the bargaining table?

Here's what AFSCME has to say about Erhart:

Our endorsed candidates were top vote-getters in every primary in Hennepin, Ramsey and Dakota counties. We endorsed in one county board race in Anoka County; our candidate, Dan Erhart, who supports our effort to organize his county's employees, was the top vote-getter.

So will Erhart get the best deal he can for the taxpayers of Anoka County or will he try to get the best deal for the union?

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

<http://afscmemn.org/>

Erhart is also trying to conceal the true identity of some of his campaign contributors.

Last week, the Watchdog posted and analyzed the campaign finance reports of the county commissioner candidates. Despite spending over \$20,000, Erhart only managed to beat Bjorn Skogquist by a few hundred votes.

As was mentioned last week, any person who contributes more than \$100 must be "itemized" on the report, including occupation.

So why did Dan Erhart conceal the occupation of the registered lobbyists who contributed?

Erhart lists Ross Kramer's occupation as "attorney." While Kramer may have a law license, he's a lobbyist.

<http://www.cfboard.state.mn.us/lobby/lbdetail/lb6221.html>

Moreover, Kramer has received lobbying contracts from Anoka County, which were no doubt approved by Erhart and the board.

How about Louis DeMars? Erhart lists his occupation as "sales." He may sell widgets, but he's also a registered lobbyist.

<http://www.cfboard.state.mn.us/lobby/lbdetail/lb1587.html>

Trudy Richter is listed as a “consultant.” Yep. Registered lobbyist.
<http://www.cfboard.state.mn.us/lobby/lbdetail/lb8081.html>

Joel Carlson is another “consultant” who can be found here:
<http://www.cfboard.state.mn.us/lobby/lbdetail/lb8692.html>

As for the other itemized contributors, what ties do they have to county government or actions the county has taken or may take with respect to their interests? Erhart should come clean and divulge the nature of his relationship with all of these parties.

Smelly in the extreme!
<http://www.anokacountywatchdog.com/elections/08.29.08%20Erhart%20report.pdf>

Finally, it is illegal for elected officials to use taxpayer resources to get re-elected. In a blatant example of this kind of abuse, take a look at this taxpayer-financed “press release”:
<http://himlehorner.typepad.com/northstar/2008/09/commissioner-er.html>

You’ve got to be kidding! A one-sentence press release about Erhart getting a “status report” on the progress of Northstar? Note that this non-news is supported by a large photo of Erhart talking to a construction worker with the steel skeleton of the rail station rising behind him. Do ya think the photo was staged, maybe?

You’ll also note that the press release is dated September 2, just one week before the primary.

This is a blatant piece of campaign literature that was funded by the taxpayers.

The arrogance is truly sickening.

<http://www.oah.state.mn.us/faircampaign/faircampaign.html>

3. T-Shirt Mania.

The Watchdog has been swept under by a tsunami of ravenous t-shirt seekers. Our distribution center in Dubuque has added a third shift to meet the demand. Be patient! Hey, even free things come with a price.

E-mail Update 9/26/08

In This Issue:

1. T-Shirt Tsunami.
2. En-Abeler.
3. All-Aboard! For Subsidies!
4. Erhart Watch.
5. Forest Fire.
6. Multi-Media.

1. T-Shirt Tsunami.

If you're one of the hundreds who requested one of the Dog's stylish, suave, get-you-a-date-for-sure t-shirts, just chill. The shirts are SOLD OUT and on back order. You know Harold is your boy and he won't let you down. If you asked for a Watchdog t, you'll get one!

2. En-Abeler.

So the GOP primary in House District 48B is history. Jim Abeler prevailed over Don Huizenga and now Jim the GOP's guy. Or is he? Just what did GOPers in Anoka and Ramsey get when he earned the nod back on September 9th?

For one, Republicans got a candidate heavily indebted to Big Labor, government employee Big Labor to be exact.

The Watchdog told readers about the effort Big Labor made to get their non-GOP members to infiltrate the GOP primary to support Abeler.

The gambit worked, and just like a loan from Tony Soprano, they'll be back to collect when the legislature starts in January.

Said the union, "Jim Abeler handily won with a big assist from AFSCME and other unions."

<http://afscmemn.org/>

So, all you conservative stalwarts better get to know that union guy sitting next to you at the phone bank. After all, you both want the same things from government, right? Right?

On the other hand, maybe those stalwarts will be waiting for Jim's apology before they get to work on his behalf. It seems that Abeler's version of what went down at the infamous Fair Booth Imbrogio didn't carry the day.

In fact, here's what the Republican Party of Minnesota had to say:

“[Representative] Jim Abeler’s statement in the Anoka County Watchdog was incorrect in that the purpose for not allowing non-endorsed candidates to exhibit campaign materials was to prevent all non-endorsed candidates from exhibiting campaign materials, not any one specific candidate, in order to avoid confusion as to whether an unendorsed candidate was endorsed.”

Abeler had claimed in an email to the Watchdog that:

“Because they [the SD48 BPOU Full Committee] didn't want his [Don Huizenga's] literature at the booth, at their latest meeting the District 48 leadership created a policy that elected incumbents could place non-campaign materials at the booth, but that no candidate from our district could place ‘vote for _____’ kinds of items.”

So it looks like Abeler is at odds with his local Republican brothers and sisters. In fact, the local GOP executive committee voted unanimously to endorse a motion that Abeler apologize to GOP volunteers from neighboring Senate District 49 for his “unauthorized” entry into the booth and the manner in which he challenged those volunteers.

In order to avoid future unpleasanties, the Watchdog will be sending Abeler a copy of “How to Win Friends and Influence People” absolutely free.

<http://www.anokacountywatchdog.com/mngovt/2008/09/09.11.08%20Statement%20Issued%20on%20the%20Anoka%20County%20Fair%20Incident.pdf>

<http://www.anokacountywatchdog.com/mngovt/2008/09/09.11.08%20SD48%20minutes.pdf>

3. All-Aboard! For Subsidies!

It appears that the Anoka County commissioners are trying, and trying hard, to make Northstar rail as painful as possible for property tax payers who are paying for the line but may or may not ride the line.

Our web site carried an article from the Star Tribune noting the proposed fair structure for the line. The proposed structure would have recovered only 18-24% of the operating cost from riders, leaving taxpayers to cover the remaining 76-82% for the privilege of letting their neighbors get a subsidized ride.

In yet another embarrassing chapter for Northstar, the Met Council told the Northstar acolytes to go back and re-examine the fare structure. Why? Because the Council thought that riders should shoulder more of the burden.

It is indeed a pathetic development when the MET COUNCIL thinks you’re being too loose with taxpayer money. Another ignoble chapter in the Northstar rail story.
<http://www.startribune.com/local/29753309.html>

4. Erhart Watch.

For the Dog, it's indeed hard to be humble when you're right all the time. Then again, proving that Dan Erhart is the Godfather of the Good Ol' Boys is like proving that 2 and 2 equal 4.

Just one week after the Watchdog exposed Erhart for using taxpayer resources for his campaign, Erhart took things a step further.

As readers will recall, the Watchdog pointed out that Northstar rail's official taxpayer-funded web site featured a blatant campaign piece showing nothing newsworthy while displaying a large photo of Erhart in a classic political pose.

<http://himlehorner.typepad.com/northstar/2008/09/commissioner-er.html>

Just a week later, that same photo is featured on Erhart's campaign web site!

<http://www.danerhart.com/> (The photo will appear among the scrolling photos at the top).

It is clear that many of the other photos featured on this campaign web site were taken and produced with taxpayer monies as well.

The sheer arrogance is just appalling.

Moreover, shame on Congressman Jim Ramstad for endorsing Erhart. Jim Oberstar is no surprise, but Ramstad has a reputation for pursuing clean government being a, well, nice guy. Talk about falling in with the wrong crowd!

You can call Ramstad on the carpet here:

Mn03@mail.house.gov

5. Forest Fire.

Up in the Forest Lake School District, the Watchdog smells smoke. An article in the local paper this week noted that the district's superintendent appeared to get higher performance grades from the Board than what he actually earned (we know where grade inflation comes from in this district!).

Now it's entirely possible that there was an error computing the grades, but that doesn't appear to be the case, because even the incorrect scores couldn't have been possible without completely disregarding the scores of some Board members.

Said Board member Eric Langness of the fellow Board member who computed the scores, "He either deliberately inflated the scores or he is completely incompetent."

Forest Lake School District taxpayers better pay attention here.

http://presspubs.com/articles/2008/09/21/forest_lake_press/education/doc48d3d9571b690880980641.txt

6. Multi-Media.

Visit www.anokacountywatchdog.com to see pictures and video of the birthday party as well as hear what Jason Lewis has to say about the Dog and our role in keeping the flame of Anoka County democracy burning bright!

E-mail Update 10/3/08

In This Issue:

1. BOMBSHELL!
2. I Smell Bacon.
3. Impartiality Imbroglio.
4. Train Tax Trials and Tribulations.
5. Beware the Tax Increase!
6. Level 3 Sex Offender Notification.

1. BOMBSHELL!

Prepare yourself, loyal readers, for a bombshell report that promises to change the entire election dynamic in all three Anoka County commissioner races. The Watchdog recently received a private, exclusive briefing on a recently concluded investigation regarding the county. Even by Anoka County government standards, the results will shock and disgust even the most jaded observer of the Good Ol' Boy network.

The Watchdog has agreed to embargo the report at the request of the authors, who are putting the finishing touches on the report. While the mainstream media may be the ones to soon break this story, the Anoka County Watchdog has once again achieved journalistic excellence in alerting the taxpayers to this developing story.

Stay tuned. You heard it here first!

2. I Smell Bacon.

So Wall Street is in the toilet and the economy is teetering on the edge of recession. So what's Washington to do? If you're the federal government, you not only tee up a \$700 billion bailout, you also take a chance to load up the behemoth with loads and loads of wasteful pork! What started as a three page bill has turned into a 451 page monster stuffed chock full of crap. Here's a sample of what your representatives in Washington tacked onto the bill:

- \$6 million for companies that make wooden arrows;
- \$192 million for certain rum producers;
- \$128 million for race tracks;
- \$33 million in breaks for companies operating in American Samoa;
- \$10 million for small television and film productions;
- \$223 million for fishermen hurt by the 19 year old Exxon Valdez spill.

The non-partisan Congressional Budget Office has predicted that the benefit package contained in the bill will add \$112 billion to federal deficits over the next five years.
http://www.nypost.com/seven/10022008/postopinion/editorials/porking_up_the_rescue_bill_131822.htm

What the heck. We're only \$10 trillion in debt to the communist Chinese anyway. No wonder Congress and the president have approval ratings just slightly above drug

dealers and the Ebola virus.

http://www.realclearpolitics.com/epolls/other/president_bush_job_approval-904.html

http://www.realclearpolitics.com/epolls/other/congressional_job_approval-903.html

http://www.brillig.com/debt_clock/ (Check out this web site!)

The Senate passed the bill earlier this week.

<http://www.journalgazette.net/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20081001/NEWS03/810010230/1002/local>

The House, after defeating an earlier and less porky version, passed a new and porkier bailout today:

http://www.breitbart.com/article.php?id=D93J70O00&show_article=1

<http://clerk.house.gov/evs/2008/roll681.xml>

You can read the text of the bailout bill here:

<http://senateconservatives.files.wordpress.com/2008/10/bailouttext.pdf>

3. Impartiality Imbroglio.

Much has been made of PBS's Gwen Eiffel moderating the vice presidential debate because Eiffel has authored a book that is apparently flattering in its portrayal of presidential candidate Barak Obama. Critics have opined that one who moderates a debate should be as objective and impartial as possible.

http://www.realclearpolitics.com/articles/2008/10/a_debate_moderator_in_the_tank.html

Did you know we had our own impartiality imbroglio right here in Anoka County?

Earlier this week, a special interest group called the North Metro Mayor's Association sponsored a debate with the candidates running for House District 49A and 49B. The moderator of the debate was Andover Mayor Mike Gamache, who is a partisan supporter of District 49A DFL candidate Ted Butler. It would have been appropriate for the mayor to step aside and let someone else moderate the debate. If not, the mayor should have revealed his bias at the outset. In any case, it should have been disclosed that the North Metro Mayor's Association is a special interest group that lobbies at the Capitol in Saint Paul.

http://www.butlerforhouse.com/Images/Funfest/pages/brigade5k_b_jpg.htm

http://www.butlerforhouse.com/Images/Feb2308/pages/0223-3_jpg.htm

<http://www.cfboard.state.mn.us/lobby/adetail/a2604.html>

While the mayor certainly has a right to support the candidate of his choice, the Watchdog wonders how much credibility the city council will have with Republican Peggy Scott if she wins the seat in November.

<http://scott49a.com/>

Disclosure: Harold Hamilton has contributed to the campaign of Peggy Scott.

4. Train Tax Trials and Tribulations

The following item from the Coon Rapids Herald says it all:

“The Northstar Corridor Development Authority (NCDA) is looking at ways to spend the money it believes it will have left over in the budget when the Northstar Commuter Rail project is completed.”

The NCDA believes that it will have about \$10 million in excess funds. Here’s a novel idea: give the money back to the property tax payers who were overtaxed by \$10 million to begin with. Moreover, there really is no such thing as “excess” money with this project. In fact, the project is already 100% over-budget. The Watchdog hasn’t forgotten that the project was pitched to taxpayers as a \$160 million rail line that would run 82 miles. Today, it is a \$320 million project that runs only 42 miles.

Let’s hope Commissioner Dan “the Junket Man” Erhart hasn’t heard about the extra money. When he does, he’ll be off to Lutsen and Morton’s Steakhouse faster than Usi Bolt chasing Olympic gold.

<http://www.dyestat.com/3us/4out/olympicgames/pix/12bolt-prelim.jpg>

http://abcnewspapers.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=4192&Itemid=28

5. Beware the Tax Increase!

Friends, don’t forget there is a tax increase on the ballot this fall. The ballot question, if successful, would raise the sales tax and CONSTITUTIONALLY dedicate the money to arts, crafts, and MPR. Only a fraction of the money raised will support wildlife habitat.

Well-funded advocates of the tax increase are running television ads portraying the ballot question as a means of helping wildlife habitat. The ads, of course, don’t mention a tax increase or the fact that most of the money will go to the arts. In fact, the ad is a total scam for these reasons.

See the ad here:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8_lxop_0SO4

Learn the facts regarding this tax increase here:

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

6. Level 3 Sex Offender Notification.

A level 3 sex offender is moving into Coon Rapids. Under state law, there will be a community notification meeting held October 8th at Coon Rapids City Hall. The meeting will begin at 6:30 p.m.

<http://www.ci.coon-rapids.mn.us/publicsafety/Police/offender.htm>

[http://www.ci.coon-](http://www.ci.coon-rapids.mn.us/publicsafety/Police/Level3%20Offender%20Oct2008.pdf)

[rapids.mn.us/publicsafety/Police/Level3%20Offender%20Oct2008.pdf](http://www.ci.coon-rapids.mn.us/publicsafety/Police/Level3%20Offender%20Oct2008.pdf)

<http://www.corr.state.mn.us/level3/OffenderDetail.asp?OID=208392>

E-mail Update 10/10/08

In This Issue:

WATCHDOG SPECIAL EDITION! MASSIVE WASTE, FRAUD, AND ABUSE UNCOVERED IN ANOKA COUNTY! TAXPAYER MONEY SPENT ON EXPENSIVE MEALS, UPSCALE HOTELS, AND JUNKETS. ACCOUNTABILITY SAFEGUARDS ROUTINELY IGNORED. "PARTY" ATMOSPHERE PREVAILED – AT YOUR EXPENSE!

PART 1 OF 2.

Editor's Note: The research, tabulation, and documents supporting this email update were requested and conducted by Minnesotans for Responsible Government (MNRG). The Anoka County Watchdog is not affiliated with MNRG but certainly recognizes the group's hard work and determination in fighting the county to first obtain and then analyze over 3,000 pages of documentation, covering both county elected officials and high-ranking employees from 2003-2007. MNRG spent many months in this effort and deserves the thanks and praise of every Anoka County taxpayer in this effort to shine the light of accountability on county government.

The most relevant supporting documents are posted for review at www.anokacountywatchdog.com.

Note: MNRG's request yielded over 3,000 pages of documents. The Watchdog has posted only those documents that MNRG passed to the Watchdog which MNRG deemed most relevant.

Harold Hamilton founded the Anoka County Watchdog primarily because of his frustration with Anoka County government. He saw elected officials who were arrogant and unresponsive. He saw county commissioners who wasted taxpayer funds on meals, junkets, and lobbyist friends. Hamilton wanted a forum to educate and inform county taxpayers. After reviewing the report from MNRG, Hamilton is more convinced than ever that Anoka County government is out of control and in need of serious reform.

We all know of the party atmosphere that prevailed on Wall Street. Similarly, it looks like some folks in Anoka County government partied with your money as well.

During the covered period, MNRG uncovered a pattern of expensive meals, high priced hotels, and junketeering that amounts to nothing less than an abuse of the taxpayer. Moreover, accountability controls with respect to these expenses were routinely ignored, leaving taxpayers with little or no protection from illegitimate claims. The scope of these expenses is truly breathtaking, with hundreds upon hundreds of reimbursement claims totaling thousands of dollars.

All told, the county spent an eye-popping \$229,451 on resorts, meals, airfare, and mileage. This number is an approximation since many expense reports were incomplete, illegible, or outright missing.

Some of the junket destinations included:

Washington, DC
Honolulu, HI
Houston, TX
Seattle, WA
Los Angeles, CA
San Diego, CA
Phoenix, AZ
Nisswa, MN
Lutsen, MN
New York, NY
Chicago, IL
Reno, NV
Atlantic City, NJ
Philadelphia, PA
Columbus, OH
Richmond, VA

Dining excesses included:

Manny's Steakhouse (\$519)
Jax Café (\$470)
Canyon Grille (\$475)
The Lexington (\$821)
Majestic Oaks (\$1542)
TPC Golf Course Club House (\$895)

Hotels included:

Hilton Honolulu
Los Angeles Westin
Lutsen Resort
Hilton Washington, DC
Jefferson Hotel Richmond, VA
San Marcos Resort, AZ

As mentioned, accountability controls were routinely ignored. According to county policy, receipts must accompany all reimbursement claims. Moreover, reimbursement claims must list the first and last name of those in attendance. An authorizing authority must also sign reimbursement claims.

In numerous instances, reimbursement requests lacked either an authorizing signature, purpose of expense, or receipts. In some cases, the approving authority signed the reimbursement request BEFORE the expense was incurred. In many cases there was

an incomplete listing of people in attendance. This lack of detail is especially troubling since many of the attendees who were listed included registered lobbyists and even other elected officials.

For this and next week's update, the Watchdog will concentrate on the most egregious abuses and the most egregious abusers. The volume of material and the number of actors involved is simply too large to cover point by point. (For example, MNRG's executive summary runs 95 pages).

COMMISSIONER DAN ERHART

Not surprisingly, Commissioner Erhart led all county commissioners with respect to travel, meals, and reimbursement. Erhart racked up over \$32,000 in expenses over the covered period. It is important to also keep in mind that this number is quite likely grossly underestimated. The Watchdog has frequently reported that county insiders tell us that Erhart likes to bring county employees to meals where he eats on the taxpayer dime but has the employee put the meal on his card, thus putting the expense under the employee's name and not Erhart's. These receipts are often summarized expenses, making it difficult to fix accountability.

What we do know is that Erhart was present at some 209 meals where a county credit card was used. What we also know is that Erhart and the Anoka County gang have a hankering for both quantity and quality when it comes to putting on the ol' taxpayer feedbag:

Billy's Grill (66 times)

Canyon Grille (33 times)

TPC Golf Course Club House (17 times)

The Lexington (10 times)

Manny's Steakhouse (one night = \$519.61 tab) Morton's Steakhouse (one night = \$449.73 tab) Jax Café (one night = \$470 tab)

No less shocking are Erhart's hotel accommodations. Super 8? No way, baby. More like a condo room at Lutsen resort, complete with a king bed, fireplace, whirlpool, and wet bar.

<http://www.lutsenresort.com/poplar.htm>

Or how about the Jefferson Hotel, where Erhart had the taxpayers pay for a "Superior King" room?

<http://www.jeffersonhotel.com/index.aspx>

Some of Erhart's other hotel digs include:

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

http://www1.hilton.com/en_US/hi/hotel/DCAWHHH-Hilton-Washington-District-of-Columbia/index.do

<http://www.starwoodhotels.com/westin/property/overview/index.html?propertyID=1004>

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

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

How many of Erhart's constituents can afford this lifestyle? Must be rough.

When government starts living better than those who fund government, there's a serious problem.

NEXT WEEK: The other commissioners and the bureaucrats.

E-mail Update 10/15/08

In This Issue:

WATCHDOG SPECIAL EDITION! COUNTY COMMISSIONERS AND HIGH-RANKING BUREAUCRATS SPENT LAVISHLY ON RESORTS, MEALS, AND JUNKETS – AT TAXPAYER EXPENSE! AND YOU THOUGHT WALL STREET EXECUTIVES WERE BAD!

PART 2 OF 2.

READ THE REPORT HERE:

<http://www.anokacountywatchdog.com/expenses/expenses.htm>

EDITOR'S NOTE: This edition of the Watchdog is being published on Wednesday of this week instead of Friday because of the Minnesota Education Association (MEA) school break. School will be out Thursday and Friday so teacher union folks can meet because they apparently don't have any other time to meet (like June, July, or August).

Last week, the Watchdog highlighted Commissioner Dan Erhart's expenses. This week, we look at some other elected officials and bureaucrats.

Scott LeDoux

Commissioner LeDoux had expense reimbursements significantly higher than any other commissioner, with the exception of Commissioner Erhart.

Like Erhart, LeDoux engaged in a good deal of travel at taxpayer expense, including:

Tempe, AZ
Washington, DC
Los Angeles, CA
Seattle, WA
Lutsen Resort, MN
Honolulu, HI

Similar to Erhart, LeDoux also enjoyed sweet accommodations, including:

Hilton Hawaiian Village:

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

Westin Bonaventure (Los Angeles):

<http://www.starwoodhotels.com/westin/property/overview/index.html?propertyID=1004>

San Marcos Resort (Chandler, AZ):

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

The River Inn (Washington, DC):

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

Moreover, LeDoux submitted receipts for purchases that appear to be personal and not appropriate for taxpayer reimbursement:

- A king-size Hershey bar;
- A \$2.50 coffee from Starbucks;
- A newspaper;
- A toothbrush (Oral B medium bristle)
-

By the way, how much does it cost the taxpayers to process an expense report for a toothbrush?

Long-time Watchdog readers will recall that LeDoux's trip to Honolulu, Hawaii in the summer of 2005 was one of the first investigations we undertook. This was the infamous "jet lag" junket.

In reviewing the documentation provided by Minnesotans for Responsible Government (MNRG), the Watchdog had an opportunity to examine LeDoux's hotel receipt from Hawaii and discovered that the room was an exclusive "ocean view terrace" room.

LeDoux's room receipt also notes an in-room movie and \$76 in valet parking expenses. It appears that taxpayer money was used to cover these expenses.

Also troubling is an expense report that contains what appears to be a forged authorizing signature. In September of 2005, LeDoux traveled to Nisswa, MN to attend a conference. The weekly expense report submitted contains the authorizing signature of Anoka County employee Bobbie Kohler. Ms. Kohler's signature appears in many of the documents reviewed and is consistent – except on this particular report.

Steve Novak – Division Manager of Governmental Services The Watchdog led off our special report examining the expenses of Dan Erhart and Scott LeDoux because both tallied expenses far above the other commissioners and because they are elected and thus accountable directly to the taxpayers.

Having said that, nothing in the report comes close to county employee Steve Novak's sheer arrogance and disregard for the taxpayer. The size, scope and magnitude of Novak's expenses are nothing less than shocking and nauseating. His expenses should serve as nothing less than a rallying cry for reform across the entire spectrum of county government.

To start, Novak's expenses cover 36 pages of the executive summary. In other words, Novak alone comprises over 1/3rd of the 95-page executive summary.

In particular, it appears that dining on the taxpayer dime was Novak's forte (although he also did his share of junketeering). MNRG's calculations show 419 meal receipts where Novak was present:

Billy's bar and Grill (112 times);
The Lexington (27 times)
Axel's River Grille (18 times)
Canyon Grille (23 times);
Fabulous Fern's (15 times);
Saint Paul Hotel Restaurant (10 times)

Perhaps most disturbing with respect to Novak's expenses is the blatant disregard shown for accountability safeguards. Novak is employed by the county as a division director. He makes more money than Governor Pawlenty. One would think Novak would lead by example.

In reviewing Novak's receipts, it is obvious that on many occasions he purchased meals for other people in addition to his own meal. Why Novak would be authorized to purchase meals for other people is a good question. Moreover, given the attendee list at some of these meals, one wonders if taxpayer dollars bought dinner for folks like:

- Zygi Wilf;
- El Tinklenberg (candidate for congress);
- Ross Kramer (lobbyist)
- Dave Johnson (lobbyist)
- Dan Erhart (NUMEROUS times. Masking accountability?);
- Bill Schreiber (lobbyist)
- Ron Jerich (lobbyist)
- Bob Benke (lobbyist)
- Lester Bagley (lobbyist)
- Jill Sletten (lobbyist)
- Tom Ryan (Blaine mayor)
- Cort Holten (lobbyist)
- Russ Herbst (Blaine city council);
- Tom Snell (Metro North Chamber. Tom, did they buy you off?);
- Dan Larson (state senator);

On many occasions, Novak failed to list the business purpose of his meal expense. Some of these meals were obscenely expensive (e.g. \$450, \$470, \$300, \$522 and on and on...).

On multiple occasions, Novak had an expense report signed by the authorizing signature BEFORE the expense was incurred.

Novak also collected thousands in mileage reimbursement. On many of his mileage entries, Novak failed to list a business purpose.

On many occasions Novak also failed to include the receipt, another violation of county policy.

And here's a classic! Novak signed one of his mileage reports as both "employee"

AND “supervisor.”

Novak also billed taxpayers for items that he could obviously have paid for himself, including charging the taxpayers for a “hands-free” cell phone earpiece. On another occasion, Novak billed the taxpayers \$3.77 for a bottle of water.

Other Expenses.

The remaining five county commissioners reported expenses of the following amounts:

Dennis Berg (District 1): \$5,872

Dick Lang (District 2): \$2,490

Robyn West (District 3): \$950

Jim Kordiak (District 4): \$1,230

Rhonda Sivarajah (District 6): \$3,161

There are also many other high-ranking bureaucrats and former commissioners included in the MNRG report. Again, check out the entire report here: <http://www.anokacountywatchdog.com/expenses/expenses.htm>

Conclusion.

MNRG’s investigation revealed county spending that is nothing less than shocking. County employees and elected officials spent taxpayer funds on everything from expensive rooms at Hawaiian resorts to candy bars and valet parking.

The sheer arrogance of this spending almost defies explanation. What can the taxpayer say about a public servant who would run up a \$500 tab at an expensive steak house and then stick the taxpayer with the bill?

With our economy teetering on the edge, with taxpayers struggling to make ends meet, at a time when people are losing their homes, Anoka County was out junketeering and partying with property tax dollars that people work so hard to pay. With taxpayers on the ropes, the County was out partying like a bunch of Wall Street executives. There is only one word to describe such behavior: SHAMEFUL!

The Anoka County Watchdog has been sounding the alarm over this extravagant spending for over three years. It’s high time the county board got the message and take immediate action.

To be specific, the board should immediately freeze all travel and meal reimbursements. Next, the board should hire an independent investigator to fully audit every expense report to identify each and every instance where county procedure was not followed. Moreover, the investigator should identify any potential violations of the law, including ethics laws. Finally, the investigator should make recommendations regarding a complete overhaul of the expense reimbursement policy to ensure that this taxpayer-financed free for all never happens again.

The county commissioners shouldn't underestimate the seriousness of this issue. They have committed a serious breach of taxpayer trust and must take immediate action to restore the trust they swore to uphold the day they assumed office!

E-mail Update 10/24/08

In This Issue:

1. Train in Vain;
2. Halloween Horror;
3. Let Them Eat Art;
4. Past is Present.
5. Rumor Mill;
6. Have Watchdog, Will Travel.

EDITOR'S NOTES: The reaction to the Watchdog's analysis of county spending on meals and travel has been remarkable. No issue has generated as much interest, and outrage, as this one. Not even the Vikings stadium. Hundreds have contacted the Watchdog to express their anger that county officials are out wining, dining, and junketeering while they deal with rising property taxes, unemployment, foreclosures, and other financial pressures. Over three years ago, Harold Hamilton penned his introduction paragraph on the web site's home page:

"Some of our elected officials in Anoka County have become arrogant and unresponsive, forgetting that they work for the very people who put them in office. It's high time to hold them accountable for their decisions."

Can you hear him now?

On a positive note, the latest shipment of t-shirts has arrived from the Watchdog manufacturing plant in Dubuque. Shipments of those famous, stylish, debonair threads will be in your mailbox prior to Election Day. You can proudly wear your t-shirt to the polls.

Remember, if you missed the Channel 9 news report on Anoka County's excessive spending, check the web site to see the video.

1. Train in Vain.

New examples of outrageous spending by the gang down at the courthouse keep piling up like cordwood. Skeletons are falling out of the county closet with alarming speed. Here's a scary tale of a day-trip to Idaho.

In mid-July of this year, Commissioner Dan Erhart, Commissioner Dennis Berg, county employee Jon Olson, and county employee Tim Yantos all flew out to Idaho for a photo op with a shiny new Northstar rail diesel locomotive.

http://northstar.typepad.com/northstar_commuter_rail/2008/07/first-northstar.html

Fast-forward a whole 75 days. That same locomotive showed up in Big Lake, MINNESOTA. In other words, government paid for these 4 to fly out to Idaho for a few

photos when they could have waited 2 and one-half months and had their photo op just up the road from the courthouse. Needless to say, such a course of action would have denied Erhart two key opportunities: 1) a chance to hit another junket; and, 2) a photo op prior to the primary election in September.

http://northstar.typepad.com/northstar_commuter_rail/2008/10/first-northstar.html

2. Halloween Horror.

A good Halloween horror flick usually centers on a demonic, maniacal, super-natural evil being that just can't be killed. Any fan of the genre knows just how hard it can be to dispatch the likes of Jason, Michael Meyers, and Freddie Krueger.

Anoka County now has its own demon. Just call it "The Football Stadium That Won't Die." Recently, Pioneer Press sports columnist Charley Walters reported this tidbit:

"Anoka County is interested in the Vikings, who face a monster task for a new stadium in Minneapolis, reopening talks for a new stadium in Blaine."

http://www.twincities.com/ci_10673211?IADID

Only in Anoka County. And only with this group of commissioners.

3. Let Them Eat Art.

Here's another example of government setting spending priorities in this difficult economy. The Northstar Corridor Development Authority (NCDA), along with various governmental co-conspirators, has issued a "Call For Artists" to provide some neat cave paintings and assorted murals for the Northstar station near the new Twins baseball park (another taxpayer-financed "priority") and another project at the stadium itself.

The winner will get to spend \$350,000 in taxpayer funds painting happy pictures of life with a new stadium and shiny train to get us there (never mind the sales and property tax increases that paid for it).

Just remember this little gem the next time you hear that you need to suffer higher taxes to pay for core services.

This is what the Watchdog calls Marie Antoinette government.

http://northstar.typepad.com/northstar_commuter_rail/2008/10/call-for-artist.html

http://www.ballparkauthority.com/index.asp?Type=B_BASIC&SEC={57558451-5383-4710-9FD8-C46300EE9712}

Grab your beret and get cracking! The deadline is today!

4. Past is Present.

The fact that Anoka County officials abused their authority by wining and dining like Wall Street execs is bad enough. It's even more galling to realize that the County has been warned repeatedly in the past with respect to these practices yet, in a fit of arrogance, chose to ignore the warnings.

As far back as early 2006, the State Auditor warned the county it was ignoring its own reimbursement policies. Consider these excerpts from the '06 report:

"The State Auditor's Office found instances where procurement card meal charges, related to the Northstar project, were not adequately documented, as is required by Anoka County Financial Policies."

"Most of the charges did not contain sufficient documentation as required in the County's Financial Policies. The manner in which the meals were documented made it difficult to determine whether the expenditures truly served a public purpose."

"Anoka County had been previously warned about this by the State Auditor's Office and had stated at that time that it would comply with its own policies regarding the use of procurement cards. It is obvious, however, these policies were not followed."

http://www.anokacountywatchdog.com/northstar/2006/02.06/northstar_06_press.pdf
http://www.anokacountywatchdog.com/northstar/2006/02.06/northstar_06_review.pdf

Nearly three years later, nothing has changed.

5. Rumor Mill.

Don't think this whole Anoka County expenditure scandal is over. Look for more skeletons to fall out of the closet in the near future. Umbrellas, golf balls, airplanes, and more meal madness are on the horizon.

Many folks have also been pouring over the county's receipts, wondering if the state's Open Meeting law was violated when Dan Erhart and other elected officials wheeled and dealt behind closed doors, away from the television cameras of the board's meeting room, which is open to the public (although the public isn't allowed to speak).

The Minnesotans for Responsible Government report only covered Anoka County expenditures. No one lately has taken a close look at the spending habits of the Northstar Corridor Development Authority (NCDA), the joint powers group that promotes the train and is funded in part with county tax dollars. That may soon change.

Don't be surprised if the IRS takes an interest in what has been found, including the mileage and meal reimbursements.

6. Have Watchdog, Will Travel.

Watchdog founder Harold Hamilton has accepted a number of invitations to speak to local civic, business, and social groups regarding the Watchdog and his quest to introduce transparency to government spending at all levels.

If you would like Harold to speak to your group, send him an email at Harold@anokacountywatchdog.com

E-mail Update 10/31/08

In This Issue:

HAPPY HALLOWEEN!

WATCHDOG SPECIAL EDITION! SPECIAL ELECTION ISSUE.

After months, even years, of debates, fundraisers, lawn signs, and a nauseating amount of television, radio, and direct mail advertising, it's time to head to the polls and decide. Then we can put Campaign '08 to bed. Rest assured, regardless of who is elected, the Watchdog will be there to shine the light of truth on our public servants.

But we get ahead of ourselves. This is our annual election guide, your one-stop shop to help you determine who should have your vote next Tuesday. Of course, the Dog is providing the most detailed guide you'll find anywhere regarding North Metro races.

Editor's Note: In the interest of space, we will assume you're fully informed and ready to vote regarding the federal races. Thus, this guide will focus on state and local candidates, including those running for judicial office.

Where Do I Vote?

<http://pollfinder.sos.state.mn.us>

http://www.co.anoka.mn.us/v2_dept/elections/index.aspx

Who are my candidates?

<http://ww2.startribune.com/news/politics/elections/myvote/pf.php>

Ballot Question.

Voters will be given an opportunity to vote on a sales tax increase. If approved the 3/8ths increase would be constitutionally dedicated to funding habitat, parks and trails, and the arts. Learn more here:

<http://nosalestaxincrease.org/>

Anoka County Board of Commissioners.

BE SURE TO CONSULT THE WATCHDOG WEB SITE! Read the expense reports, view the candidate forum, and read candidate questionnaires!

<http://www.anokacountywatchdog.com/expenses/expenses.htm>

http://www.anokacountywatchdog.com/video/video_menu.htm

http://www.anokacountywatchdog.com/elections/questionnaire_dist_5.pdf

http://www.anokacountywatchdog.com/elections/questionnaire_dist_6.pdf

http://www.anokacountywatchdog.com/elections/questionnaire_dist_7.pdf

District 5.

This district covers southern Andover and the east portion of Coon Rapids.

* Denotes the incumbent

Scott Ledoux*

http://www.scottledoux.com/Site_2/Welcome.html

Becky Fink.

<http://sommerfink.web.officelive.com/default.aspx>

http://abcnewspapers.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=4558&Itemid=171

District 6.

This district covers, Lexington, Circle Pines, Centerville, Columbus, Lino Lakes, Linwood, and two precincts in Blaine.

Rhonda Sivarajah*

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

Kevin Ryan.

No web site listed.

http://abcnewspapers.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=4556&Itemid=171

District 7.

This district covers most of Anoka and Coon Rapids west of Hanson Boulevard.

Dan Erhart*

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

Bjorn Skogquist

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

http://abcnewspapers.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=4557&Itemid=171

Minnesota House of Representatives.

Be sure to check these resources when deciding for whom to vote in your House district, especially if one of the candidates is an incumbent representative:

http://www.anokacountywatchdog.com/email/email_updates.htm

<http://www.taxpayersleague.org/pdf/legscorecard2008.pdf>

<http://www.mnlea.org/Reports/2008report.pdf>

* Denotes the incumbent

District 47A

This district covers Champlin and Coon Rapids.

<http://www.commissions.leg.state.mn.us/gis/html/l2002/pdf/47a.pdf>
<http://www.gis.leg.mn/php/profiles/house.php?District=47A>

Denise Dittrich (DFL)*

<http://www.house.leg.state.mn.us/members/members.asp?id=12259>
<http://ww2.startribune.com/news/metro/elections/profiles/mobile/31359.html?p=27-045000110103>
2008 Taxpayer's League (TLM) score: 9%
2008 Legislative Evaluation Assembly (LEA) Score: 12%

Troy Buchholz (GOP)

<http://www.2muchtax.com/>
<http://ww2.startribune.com/news/metro/elections/profiles/mobile/31358.html?p=27-045000110103>

http://abcnewspapers.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=4565&Itemid=171

District 47B

This district covers portions of Brooklyn Park and Champlin.
<http://www.commissions.leg.state.mn.us/gis/html/l2002/pdf/47b.pdf>
<http://www.gis.leg.mn/php/profiles/house.php?District=47B>

Melissa Hortman (DFL)*

<http://www.house.leg.state.mn.us/members/members.asp?id=12266>
<http://www.melissahortman.com/>
<http://ww2.startribune.com/news/metro/elections/profiles/31362.html?p=27-037000110105&z=55443>
2008 Taxpayer's League (TLM) score: 0%
2008 Legislative Evaluation Assembly (LEA) Score: 0%

Andrew Reinhardt (GOP)

<http://andrewreinhardt.com/media.htm>
<http://ww2.startribune.com/news/metro/elections/profiles/31363.html?p=27-037000110105&z=55443>

http://abcnewspapers.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=4564&Itemid=171

District 48A

This district runs across northern Anoka County into portions of Elk River in Sherburne County.
<http://www.commissions.leg.state.mn.us/gis/html/l2002/pdf/48a.pdf>
<http://www.gis.leg.mn/php/profiles/house.php?District=48A>

Tom Hackbarth (GOP)*

<http://www.house.leg.state.mn.us/members/members.asp?id=10229>

<http://ww2.startribune.com/news/metro/elections/profiles/31366.html?p=02-601000150100&z=55011>

2008 Taxpayer's League (TLM) score: 100%

2008 Legislative Evaluation Assembly (LEA) Score: 100%

Sharon Lawrence (DFL)

<http://ww2.startribune.com/news/metro/elections/profiles/31367.html?p=02-601000150100&z=55011>

http://abcnewspapers.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=4567&Itemid=171

District 48B

This district covers Ramsey and Anoka.

<http://www.commissions.leg.state.mn.us/gis/html/l2002/pdf/48b.pdf>

<http://www.gis.leg.mn/php/profiles/house.php?District=48B>

Jim Abeler (GOP)*

<http://www.house.leg.state.mn.us/members/members.asp?id=10002>

<http://www.jimabeler.com>

<http://ww2.startribune.com/news/metro/elections/profiles/31370.html?p=02-124000110101&z=55303>

2008 Taxpayer's League (TLM) score: 27%

2008 Legislative Evaluation Assembly (LEA) Score: 41%

Andrew Boho (DFL)

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

<http://ww2.startribune.com/news/metro/elections/profiles/31371.html?p=02-124000110101&z=55303>

http://abcnewspapers.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=4566&Itemid=171

District 49A

This is an open seat covering nearly all of Andover and all of Ham Lake.

<http://www.commissions.leg.state.mn.us/gis/html/l2002/pdf/49a.pdf>

<http://www.gis.leg.mn/php/profiles/house.php?District=49A>

Peggy Scott (GOP)

<http://www.scott49a.com/>

<http://ww2.startribune.com/news/metro/elections/profiles/31377.html?p=02-108000110104&z=55304>

Ted Butler (DFL)

<http://www.butlerforhouse.com/>
<http://ww2.startribune.com/news/metro/elections/profiles/31376.html?p=02-108000110104&z=55304>

http://abcnewspapers.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=4563&Itemid=171

District 49B

This district covers one precinct in Andover and the eastern half of Coon Rapids. This is also an open seat.

<http://www.commissions.leg.state.mn.us/gis/html/l2002/pdf/49b.pdf>

<http://www.gis.leg.mn/php/profiles/house.php?District=49B>

Jerry Newton (DFL)

<http://www.newton4house.org/>

<http://ww2.startribune.com/news/metro/elections/profiles/31381.html?p=02-103000110106&z=55304>

Jake Cimenski (GOP)

<http://www.jake08.net/>

<http://ww2.startribune.com/news/metro/elections/profiles/31380.html?p=02-103000110106&z=55304>

http://abcnewspapers.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=4562&Itemid=171

District 50A

This district covers Columbia Heights and the western portion of Fridley.

<http://www.commissions.leg.state.mn.us/gis/html/l2002/pdf/50a.pdf>

<http://www.gis.leg.mn/php/profiles/house.php?District=50A>

Carolyn Laine (DFL)*

<http://www.house.leg.state.mn.us/members/members.asp?id=15272>

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

<http://ww2.startribune.com/news/metro/elections/profiles/31384.html?p=02-285000130100&z=55421>

2008 Taxpayer's League (TLM) score: 0%

2008 Legislative Evaluation Assembly (LEA) Score: 0%

Timothy Utz (GOP)

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

<http://ww2.startribune.com/news/metro/elections/profiles/31385.html?p=02-285000130100&z=55421>

District 51A

This district covers the majority of Blaine and is an open seat.

<http://www.commissions.leg.state.mn.us/gis/html/l2002/pdf/51a.pdf>
<http://www.gis.leg.mn/php/profiles/house.php?District=51A>

Tim Sanders (GOP)

<http://www.timothysandersmn.com/>
<http://ww2.startribune.com/news/metro/elections/profiles/31394.html?p=02-163000120100&z=55449>

Shawn Hamilton (DFL)

<http://www.shawnhamilton.org/>
<http://ww2.startribune.com/news/metro/elections/profiles/31392.html?p=02-163000120100&z=55449>

http://abcnewspapers.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=4559&Itemid=171

District 52A

This district covers Linwood Township, Centerville, and Columbus in Anoka County.

<http://www.commissions.leg.state.mn.us/gis/html/l2002/pdf/52a.pdf>
<http://www.gis.leg.mn/php/profiles/house.php?District=52A>

Bob Dettmer (GOP)*

<http://www.house.leg.state.mn.us/members/members.asp?id=15276>
<http://www.bobdettmer.com/>
<http://ww2.startribune.com/news/metro/elections/profiles/31403.html?p=82-013808310100&z=55025>
2008 Taxpayer's League (TLM) score: 73%
2008 Legislative Evaluation Assembly (LEA) Score: 83%

Rolanda Delamartinez (DFL)

<http://www.voteforro.com/>
<http://ww2.startribune.com/news/metro/elections/profiles/31402.html?p=82-013808310100&z=55025>

District 53A

This district covers Lexington, Circle Pines, and Lino Lakes in Anoka County.

<http://www.commissions.leg.state.mn.us/gis/html/l2002/pdf/53a.pdf>
<http://www.gis.leg.mn/php/profiles/house.php?District=53A>

Paul Gardner (DFL)*

<http://www.house.leg.state.mn.us/members/members.asp?id=15277>
<http://www.electpaulgardner.org/>
<http://ww2.startribune.com/news/metro/elections/profiles/31410.html?p=62-161006210100&z=55126>
2008 Taxpayer's League (TLM) score: 0%
2008 Legislative Evaluation Assembly (LEA) Score: 0%

John Kappler (GOP)

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

<http://ww2.startribune.com/news/metro/elections/profiles/31411.html?p=62-161006210100&z=55126>

Judicial Races.

Find the candidates running for judge in your area here:

<http://ww2.startribune.com/news/politics/elections/myvote/pf.php>

Find more information regarding the judicial candidates here:

<http://www.minnlawyer.com/elections/2008/index.cfm>

City Council/Township Board

EDITOR'S NOTE: Some of the candidates listed for local office may have been eliminated in a primary election.

Andover

Mayor:

http://candidates.sos.state.mn.us/CF_CandSelResults_Local.asp?Office=2607&x=2

http://abcnewspapers.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=4606&Itemid=171

City Council (Elect 2):

http://candidates.sos.state.mn.us/CF_CandSelResults_Local.asp?Office=6816&x=2

http://abcnewspapers.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=4607&Itemid=171

Anoka

Mayor:

http://candidates.sos.state.mn.us/CF_CandSelResults_Local.asp?Office=1997&x=2

http://abcnewspapers.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=4609&Itemid=171

City Council (Elect 2):

http://candidates.sos.state.mn.us/CF_CandSelResults_Local.asp?Office=6821&x=2

http://abcnewspapers.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=4608&Itemid=171

Bethel

Mayor:

http://candidates.sos.state.mn.us/CF_CandSelResults_Local.asp?Office=2610&x=2

City Council (Elect 2):

http://candidates.sos.state.mn.us/CF_CandSelResults_Local.asp?Office=6823&x=2

Blaine:

Mayor:

http://candidates.sos.state.mn.us/CF_CandSelResults_Local.asp?Office=6834&x=2

City Council (District 3):

http://candidates.sos.state.mn.us/CF_CandSelResults_Local.asp?Office=6846&x=2

http://abcnewspapers.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=4596&Itemid=171

City Council (District 2):

http://candidates.sos.state.mn.us/CF_CandSelResults_Local.asp?Office=6839&x=2

City Council (District 1):

http://candidates.sos.state.mn.us/CF_CandSelResults_Local.asp?Office=6838&x=2

Centerville:

Mayor:

http://candidates.sos.state.mn.us/CF_CandSelResults_Local.asp?Office=2613&x=2

http://www.twincities.com/politics/ci_10754136

http://www.centervillemn.com/index.asp?Type=B_BASIC&SEC=%7B5483EF7D-27DE-4711-A524-C22357771BCC%7D

City Council (Elect 2):

http://candidates.sos.state.mn.us/CF_CandSelResults_Local.asp?Office=6873&x=2

<http://centervillemn.blogspot.com/2008/08/duties-of-centerville-city-council.html>

Circle Pines:

No election.

Columbia Heights:

Mayor:

http://candidates.sos.state.mn.us/CF_CandSelResults_Local.asp?Office=2002&x=2

City Council (Elect 2):

http://candidates.sos.state.mn.us/CF_CandSelResults_Local.asp?Office=6918&x=2

<http://www.mnsun.com/articles/2008/07/23/news/fo24chcandidates.txt>

Columbus:

Mayor:

http://candidates.sos.state.mn.us/CF_CandSelResults_Local.asp?Office=5238&x=2

<http://forestlaketimes.com/content/view/1597/1/>

City Council (Elect 2):

http://candidates.sos.state.mn.us/CF_CandSelResults_Local.asp?Office=6998&x=2

Coon Rapids:

City Council:

At-large seat:

http://candidates.sos.state.mn.us/CF_CandSelResults_Local.asp?Office=6924&x=2

http://abcnewspapers.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=4601&Itemid=171

Ward 2:

http://candidates.sos.state.mn.us/CF_CandSelResults_Local.asp?Office=6942&x=2

http://abcnewspapers.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=4593&Itemid=171

Ward 4:

http://candidates.sos.state.mn.us/CF_CandSelResults_Local.asp?Office=6943&x=2

http://abcnewspapers.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=4594&Itemid=171

East Bethel:

Mayor:

http://candidates.sos.state.mn.us/CF_CandSelResults_Local.asp?Office=2616&x=2

City Council (Elect 2):

http://candidates.sos.state.mn.us/CF_CandSelResults_Local.asp?Office=6948&x=2

http://abcnewspapers.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=4610&Itemid=171

Fridley

Mayor:

http://candidates.sos.state.mn.us/CF_CandSelResults_Local.asp?Office=6950&x=2

<http://www.ci.fridley.mn.us/finance/electionandvotinginformation3.htm>

City Council (At-large seat):

http://candidates.sos.state.mn.us/CF_CandSelResults_Local.asp?Office=6951&x=2

Ham Lake:

City Council (Elect 2):

http://candidates.sos.state.mn.us/CF_CandSelResults_Local.asp?Office=6955&x=2

http://abcnewspapers.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=4595&Itemid=171

<http://www.ci.ham-lake.mn.us/docs/lakeroct08.pdf>

<http://www.startribune.com/politics/local/33481724.html?elr=KArksUUUU>

Lexington:

Mayor:

http://candidates.sos.state.mn.us/CF_CandSelResults_Local.asp?Office=2624&x=2

City Council (Elect 2):

http://candidates.sos.state.mn.us/CF_CandSelResults_Local.asp?Office=6959&x=2

Lino Lakes:

Ballot Question:

<https://www.linocharter.org/>

Linwood Township:

Seat "B":

http://candidates.sos.state.mn.us/CF_CandSelResults_Local.asp?Office=4899&x=2

Seat "C":

http://candidates.sos.state.mn.us/CF_CandSelResults_Local.asp?Office=6883&x=2

Seat "E":

http://candidates.sos.state.mn.us/CF_CandSelResults_Local.asp?Office=4900&x=2

Town Clerk:

http://candidates.sos.state.mn.us/CF_CandSelResults_Local.asp?Office=2627&x=2

<http://forestlaketimes.com/content/view/1597/1/>

Nowthen:

Mayor:

http://candidates.sos.state.mn.us/CF_CandSelResults_Local.asp?Office=9597&x=2

http://abcnewspapers.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=4611&Itemid=171

City Council (Elect 2):

http://candidates.sos.state.mn.us/CF_CandSelResults_Local.asp?Office=9598&x=2

http://abcnewspapers.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=4612&Itemid=171

Oak Grove:

City Council (Elect 2):

http://candidates.sos.state.mn.us/CF_CandSelResults_Local.asp?Office=6903&x=2

http://abcnewspapers.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=4613&Itemid=171

Ramsey:

Mayor:

http://candidates.sos.state.mn.us/CF_CandSelResults_Local.asp?Office=6905&x=2

http://abcnewspapers.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=4615&Itemid=171

City Council:

At-large:

http://candidates.sos.state.mn.us/CF_CandSelResults_Local.asp?Office=6906&x=2

Ward 2:

http://candidates.sos.state.mn.us/CF_CandSelResults_Local.asp?Office=6907&x=2

Ward 4:

http://candidates.sos.state.mn.us/CF_CandSelResults_Local.asp?Office=6908&x=2

http://abcnewspapers.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=4614&Itemid=171

Saint Francis:

Mayor:

http://candidates.sos.state.mn.us/CF_CandSelResults_Local.asp?Office=2632&x=2

http://abcnewspapers.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=4598&Itemid=171

City Council (Elect 2):

http://candidates.sos.state.mn.us/CF_CandSelResults_Local.asp?Office=6909&x=2

http://abcnewspapers.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=4599&Itemid=171

Spring Lake Park:

City Council (Elect 2):

http://candidates.sos.state.mn.us/CF_CandSelResults_Local.asp?Office=6915&x=2

http://abcnewspapers.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=4597&Itemid=171

School District Elections

Centennial (ISD #12):

School Board:

At-large:

http://candidates.sos.state.mn.us/CF_CandSelResults_Local.asp?Office=6961&x=2

Special election:

http://candidates.sos.state.mn.us/CF_CandSelResults_Local.asp?Office=6964&x=2

<http://www.isd12.org/index%20news%20items/homecoming%2008.pdf>

Columbia Heights (ISD #13):

School Board (elect 3):

http://candidates.sos.state.mn.us/CF_CandSelResults_Local.asp?Office=6969&x=2

<http://www.mnsun.com/articles/2008/10/30/news/fo30dist13forum.txt>

Saint Francis (ISD #15):

School Levy:

<http://www.stfrancis.k12.mn.us/default.aspx>

http://abcnewspapers.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=4176&Itemid=26

E-mail Update 11/7/08

In This Issue:

POST-ELECTION ANALYSIS.

Alright, Watchdogs, the long, arduous election is finally over and even political junkies are breathing a sigh of relief. As with just about any election cycle, there is a bit of good news and bad news. This week, we do a post-mortem from a Watchdog's perspective.

Like our voter's guide, we'll focus on state and local races, leaving the federal races for the pundits.

COUNTY COMMISSIONER

Like many races, it was a night that demonstrated the power of incumbency and the inherent limitations faced by challengers, especially for local races that too often carry a low profile. Let's go in reverse order.

District 7.

Good Ol' Boy Godfather Dan Erhart won yet another term against upstart Bjorn Skogquist. Erhart essentially bought re-election with a massive spending effort that overwhelmed Skogquist as Erhart spent big money donated in part by lobbyists and other special interests that receive benefits from county government. Watchdogs in the district reported receiving multiple direct mail pieces from Erhart while he also spent on heavy advertising in local media. It was a true David vs. Goliath match-up in which Goliath was the winner.

While this victory is certainly bad news for county taxpayers, it's good news for the Watchdog staff as we will all be gainfully employed for the next four years.

We'll see how long Erhart sticks with his campaign rhetoric about representing his constituents. We'll see if he posts his county email on the county web site. We'll see when he holds his next town hall meeting. The meeting could even be held at Billy's, where Erhart could treat his constituents for once to the meals he usually buys for special interest buddies.

One could hope that Erhart has received a message regarding his behavior but that's extremely doubtful. Look for more of the same junketeering – and more of the same coverage of that behavior from the Watchdog.

By the way, don't think you've seen all the outrageous spending that has been exposed. The Watchdog has a new set of receipts and the media is hot on the issue. More on that next week.

District 6.

There was no surprise here as Rhonda Sivarajah cruised to an easy victory. Sivarajah's common sense and reformer's attitude are needed more than ever at the courthouse. It's too bad that reformers will continue to be in the minority on the Board for at least another two years.

District 5.

Scott LeDoux ran up a decisive victory over Becky Fink. Many watchdogs agonized over this race as there was a Hobbesian choice between a junketeering candidate and left-wing candidate who promised more spending and more taxing. Big government or self-serving government? How to choose?

Many voters were turned off by reports of LeDoux's reimbursement expenses that charged the taxpayer for everything from ocean view hotel rooms to valet parking to toothbrushes and candy bars.

On the other hand, Fink ran as an honest to goodness Wellstonian leftist, even invoking the late senator's name at a public debate. Her message of more government didn't resonate at all with voters in District 5. Moreover, she inexplicably said nothing of LeDoux's junketeering. While Fink gets credit for honesty, it was obvious she was out of step with voters.

MINNESOTA HOUSE.

House races in Anoka County didn't feature too many surprises as all incumbents won and the three open seats were won by favored candidates.

Let's take a closer look at the three newcomers.

District 49A (Andover and Ham Lake)

Republican Peggy Scott mopped the floor with DFLer Ted Butler, rolling up 59% of the vote and winning every precinct. The district is fiscally and socially conservative and picked the candidate who best represents that point of view. Butler didn't do himself any favors by aligning himself with certain other candidates, a rookie mistake. In any case, this district stays in the GOP column as it has since the 1980s. It's rather remarkable that the local DFL continues to find people to run every two years who believe they can win. Congrats, Peggy. The governor will need your vote to uphold the vetoes he'll undoubtedly issue to stop the runaway train of bad ideas that spring forth this coming session.

District 49B (Andover and Coon Rapids)

The DFL wanted this seat to flip in a bad way and it showed. The party and affiliated special interests spent well over \$100,000 in independent expenditures and it paid off.

Congratulations to Jerry Newton on his victory, even though we don't always agree. The Watchdog knows Newton to be thoughtful and pragmatic on the issues. His wisdom and experience will be needed to moderate some of the extremists in his caucus who will seek to use their majority to push issues that will do little to create jobs or prosperity.

In a double bonus, the Dog is quite certain Newton's voting record will be more conservative than predecessor Kathy Tingelstad's.

District 51A (Blaine)

Republican Tim Sanders switched this open seat back to the GOP column after incumbent Scott Kranz chose not to seek re-election. Sanders, who ran a magnificent campaign, bested DFLer Shawn "Spicoli" Hamilton. Congrats to Sanders, who earned this victory the old fashioned way.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fneYptHrcpw>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uWiYphJUS7Q>

According to the Pioneer Press, Anoka County is already seeking to "educate" (i.e. whine and complain) these newcomers regarding all the issues the county faces. Hopefully the meetings won't be conducted at Manny's, the Lexington, Morton's, or the Oceanaire Seafood Room.

http://www.twincities.com/politics/ci_10911195

Other Anoka County legislators who were re-elected:

47A Denise Dittrich (DFL)

47B Meli\$a Hortman (DFL) (the Hortman unit stays employed) 48A Tom Hackbarth (GOP) 48B Jim Abeler (GOP) 51B Tom Tillberry (DFL) 52A Bob Dettmer (GOP) 53A Paul Gardner (DFL)

CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT

The sales tax will be increased yet again. This time to devote money to the arts and the outdoors. A tax increase, especially a regressive one, is the last thing our economy needs at this time. Moreover, dedicating these monies in the state constitution is bad public policy and contrary to representative government.

It was interesting to see that the question did not feature any bold face language noting that a "yes" vote was a vote for a tax increase. If such language is required for school levies, why not this ballot question?

LOCAL RACES OF INTEREST

Ham Lake

Fiscal conservatives Gary Kirkeide and Tom Johnson snagged the two available seats on the city council, keeping fiscal conservatives at a 3-2 advantage and keeping liberal mayor Paul Meunier in check.

Kirkeide received the most votes despite an anonymous smear campaign against him.

Lino Lakes

A detrimental change to the city's charter was crushed 64-36.

Saint Francis Schools

The school levy was defeated, again, 55-45.

See you at the polls in 2010!

E-mail Update 11/14/08

In This Issue:

1. Money, Money, Money.
2. Gifted Again.

1. Money, Money, Money.

We knew the media wouldn't report on the issue, so we have once again taken it upon ourselves to bring to you details of the money raised and spent in all three county commissioner races.

EDITOR'S NOTE: The latest campaign reports cover the period from the previous report (August 23) through October 17. Thus, we still don't know what was raised or spent in the campaign's final 18 days. For the district 5 and 6 races, we have simply aggregated the contributions and expenditures for the whole cycle thus far.

You can view the documents at

http://www.anokacountywatchdog.com/elections/elections_menu.htm

DISTRICT 7.

As predicted, Good Ol' Boy Godfather Dan Erhart continued to call in dollars from the Network that keeps in him power.

During the recent reporting period, Erhart collected \$17,445 while spending a whopping \$26,403 during the period.

For the cycle, Erhart collected \$37,332 while spending an eye-popping \$48,867.

By contrast, Erhart's opponent Bjorn Skogquist raised \$2,780 for the cycle while spending \$2,409.

Skogquist was outspent nearly 20 to 1 yet garnered 43% of the vote. While moral victories are cold comfort in the world of politics, it is apparent that more and more taxpayers are catching on to Erhart's high-handed, arrogant ways.

Erhart's report, not surprisingly, also contained a few of the usual turds we've come to expect from this entrenched careerist.

Again, Erhart concealed the occupation of many of the lobbyists who gave him money.

Bill Schreiber's occupation is listed as "Messerli and Kramer." No, that's a business name. Schreiber is a LOBBYIST.

<http://www.cfboard.state.mn.us/lobby/lbdetail/lb419.html>

Cort Holten is a LOBBYIST.

<http://www.cfboard.state.mn.us/lobby/lbdetail/lb2961.html>

It was also interesting to see Erhart using campaign monies to contribute to other candidates for county commissioner and city council. Although technically legal, these campaign-to-campaign contributions are illegal in legislative, judicial, and state constitutional officer races. The Watchdog has heard from legislators who are aware of this development and are considering a bill to stop it. Just call it the Erhart law.
<https://www.revisor.leg.state.mn.us/statutes/?id=211A.13>

Finally, Erhart reported paying over \$3,000 to Erhart and Associates for office rental, secretarial support, and lumber. How a law firm gets into the retail lumber business is curious to say the least.
<http://www.erhartlegal.com/>

DISTRICT 6

There isn't a whole lot to report from this race. Incumbent Ronda Sivarajah raised a pedestrian \$5,635 and spent \$5,250 for the cycle.

Her opponent, Kevin Ryan, appears to have raised nothing and spent \$1,290 for the cycle. It appears that he spent his own funds and received no contributions.

DISTRICT 5.

Scott LeDoux just can't get things right. It seems every finance report comes with a cover letter from his lawyer explaining why the report wasn't filled out correctly. The latest cover letter notes that there are three itemized contributions where the occupation of the contributor isn't listed. The law requires that when a contribution is in aggregate \$100 or more, the occupation be listed, so the public knows who is giving money and what their background is. Not that it really matters. Just ask Dan Erhart, who just can't bring himself to list "lobbyist" as an occupation most of the time.

In other words, candidates don't get the option of pleading ignorance and then keeping the money. If LeDoux doesn't know who's giving him money and he can't get the answer, then the money should be returned.

It's especially embarrassing for LeDoux since the person submitting these reports is an attorney, who sends cover letters on law firm letterhead. Scott, whatever you pay this guy, it's way, way, too much.

During the cycle, LeDoux raised \$16,172 and spent \$17,684. It is possible to spend more than what was raised as some candidates have a carry forward amount from a previous cycle or the candidate may not have listed self-contributions. Or it's just possible that the math is wrong. Perhaps another letter from LeDoux's lawyer would clear up things.

During the same timeframe, Becky Fink raised \$8,261 and spent \$8,622.

Fink was outspent 2 to 1 and the results showed.

Like it or not, you have to play the money game if you want a chance to win. It is indeed a rare occurrence where the candidate who spends the most money ends up losing.

2. Grifted Again.

Poor Tom Snell. The beleaguered director of the Metro North Chamber of Commerce is an easy mark. He was probably the kid in his neighborhood who always got cheated trading baseball cards. He was probably the kid who traded his M&Ms for carrots.

Tom's latest omelet-on-the-face episode happened when the Good Ol' Boy Godfather played him like a fiddle and got the Metro North Chamber PAC to endorse him.

Apparently, Tom and the Chamber PAC gang were unaware of Ol' Dan's junketeering ways when they bestowed their coveted endorsement upon him. We wonder how the Chamber's members feel about endorsing a guy who blows their tax dollars on 5-star hotels and meals at the Lexington.

Even worse, our hayseeds down at the Chamber PAC were also unaware that Danno is friend of Big Labor, which is no friend to America's main street businesses and thus Chamber membership.

I guess they failed to conduct that complex Google search that would have revealed Dan's ties to Big Labor:

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

<http://afscmemn.org/legislative/AFSCME%20endorsed%20candidates.php>

http://www.teamstersjc32.org/drive/08_endorsements/minnesota.shtml

There's also this gem from AFSCME:

"Dan Erhart, who supports our effort to organize his county's employees, was the top vote getter."

<http://afscmemn.org/news/home%20page%20archives/Primary%20election%20wrapup%20Sept%202008.php>

Boy, if that doesn't make business owners want to run out and buy a platinum Chamber membership!

Hey, Tom. Erhart is on line one. He's got some subprime mortgages he wants to sell to you.

E-mail Update 11/21/08

In This Issue:

1. More Outrageous County Spending Uncovered;
2. Airport Shenanigans;
3. Crying in Your Filet Mignon;
4. Dude, Where's My Car Company?
5. Retraction.

1. More Outrageous County Spending Uncovered.

Did you really think that what was reported a few weeks ago was the last word on Anoka County's outrageous waste of your tax dollars? Not by a long shot, friends. Not by a long, long, shot.

This past week, the Watchdog received more documents regarding county purchases. Take a gander at some of these "core government" purchases:

- 2,879 on "Anoka County" umbrellas;
- \$2,778 on tote bags;
- \$2,710 on lunch to celebrate submitting a proposal on the Vikings stadium
- \$2,167 on binoculars;
- \$1,553 on laser engraved divot repair tools;
- \$1,123 on laser engraved pens.

The Watchdog suspects many of these items were purchased in conjunction with the Senior PGA tour event held at the TPC in Blaine. You know, one of those core county governmental functions, like football stadiums, tourist trains, and wind farms.

In addition to all the spending, the county has also been buying meals for legislators. In November of 2004, county taxpayers footed the bill for state Reps. Melissa Hortman and Denise Dittrich to sup at the Canyon Grill.

Then on March 30th of 2006, the taxpayers treated Hortman to lunch at the Lexington.

A true example of governmental arrogance. First, these legislators already receive a salary from the taxpayers. Moreover, on March 30, 2006, the legislature was in session that day. Thus, legislators, including Hortman, received per diem payments to cover expenses like lunch. To take per diem and a free lunch both on the government dime is just typical of the arrogance that is so prevalent in government.

Visit www.anokacountywatchdog.com to review the supporting receipts and documentation.

2. Airport Shenanigans.

Just days after the election, the Good Ol' Boys apparently thought they had a mandate for business as usual down at Tammany Hall, er, the county courthouse.

Our elected public servants hatched a scheme to ram through a resolution supporting an extension of a runway at the Blaine airport with no public input.

An expansion of the airport would change the airport's status such that larger aircraft could be diverted from Minneapolis-Saint Paul International to Blaine. Such a change could very well mean greater noise, traffic, and a corresponding reduction in affected home values.

Watchdogs within the courthouse tell the Dog that the board planned a true stealth campaign on this one. Not only were there no plans to have a community "town hall" meeting, there was also a plan to bypass the board's internal committee process and bring the resolution straight to the board for a vote. As Watchdogs well know, the county gags the public at board meetings and allows no comment.

Thanks to the efforts of people like Commissioners Rhonda Sivarajah, Robyn West, and even Dick Lang, the public will now have a fair chance to be heard on this very important issue.

This issue is not the merits of a potential runway expansion. The issue is that once again, the county had designs to bypass a legitimate, open, transparent process and instead make things as inconvenient as possible for the very people they are charged to represent. SHHHH! The citizens might hear us!

You have a chance to be heard here:

December 2

Kingswood Church

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

<http://www.startribune.com/local/north/34719164.html>

<http://minnesota.publicradio.org/display/web/2008/11/18/blaineairport/?refid=0>

You can also read the proposed resolution here:

www.anokacountywatchdog.com

In the meantime, you can register your feelings here:

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

3. Crying in Your Filet Mignon.

Boo hoo. Poor Dan Erhart. He was heard complaining in the Star Tribune last week that Rhonda Sivarajah had "openly" campaigned against him. The article noted:

Erhart bristled last summer when his opponent, Anoka Mayor Bjorn Skogquist, said he'd been encouraged by Sivarajah to run for County Board. Suddenly, their differences -- obvious to anyone who has seen an Anoka County Board meeting -- became public. "It was kept within the framework of the board," Erhart said Tuesday, of his sometimes awkward working relationship with Sivarajah. "Those were private discussions, but that opened up. She openly campaigned against me."

<http://www.startribune.com/local/north/34312629.html>

EDITOR'S NOTE: Be sure to read the comments at the end of the story.

What a joke. First, it's Sivarajah's right as a citizen to campaign for or against any candidate for office. How typical of Erhart that expects a Good Ol' Boys agreement to keep one another entrenched in office. Oh, wait. Anybody familiar with Anoka County politics knows that Erhart is infamous for sticking his nose in other races. Right, Dan? What a crybaby.

http://www.butlerforhouse.com/Images/Feb2308/pages/0223-5_jpg.htm
<http://www.anokacountywatchdog.com/elections/10.17.08%20Erhart%20report.pdf>

Or is your brand of meddling acceptable because it is something less than "open?"

Oh the humanity! There, there, Dan. You can always repair your hurt feelings with the salve of filet mignon, a juicy ribeye, or even a fat lobster tail at the Lexington. Nothing so soothes the tattered soul as getaway to Honolulu. The Poplar River Condo at Lutsen can be very peaceful this time of year. Chicken Soup for the Entrenched Good Ol' Boy Soul? A JUNKET!!!

4. Dude, Where's My Car Company?

Detroit's Welfare Kings, formerly known as auto manufacturers, dropped into Washington this week to ask the taxpayer to invest in their failed business model, hoping to postpone for at least a few months a day of reckoning 35 years in the making.

What was even more absurd was the spectacle of watching the Welfare Kings arrive in style in their private jets to plead poverty to Uncle Sam.

The Watchdog is utterly opposed to any taxpayer bailouts unless and until Harold Hamilton's Micro Control Company gets a share of the \$700 billion booty. When it comes to the Anoka County manufacturing base, they're too big to fail!

<http://abcnews.go.com/Blotter/WallStreet/story?id=6285739&page=1>

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

5. Retraction.

Last week, the Watchdog reported on MetroNorth Chamber of Commerce executive director Tom Snell getting snookered into endorsing Big Labor-endorsed Dan “Junket Man” Erhart for county commissioner.

Snell sent an email to the Dog correcting the record. Contrary to what we reported, Snell was apparently a savvy, shrewd baseball card trader back in the day. The highlight of Snell’s childhood trading acumen was a transaction in which he acquired a rookie Pete Rose for a bunch of unknowns from the Twins.

Let the record reflect this correction. But in 2010, Tom, you need some better political advice.

E-mail Update 11/26/08

In This Issue:

1. They're Back.
2. Tip of the Iceberg.
3. Junket, Anyone?
4. Well-Heeled Big Wheels.
5. Quote of the Week.

Editor's Note: The Watchdog hopes all our loyal readers will enjoy the Thanksgiving holiday and the opportunity to spend time with friends and family.

Even though it's a holiday, we're hard at work to bring you all the news no one else will print regarding Anoka County. The Dog finds Thanksgiving to be an appropriate holiday, given that turkeys drive most of the news we report!

Enjoy the holiday!!!

1. They're Back.

Don't forget that the Vikings haven't given up their quest for a taxpayer-financed stadium, the current state of the economy be damned.

While the current talk has been focused on a stadium on the current Metrodome site, it is hard to see that as a legitimate site since the State, Hennepin County, and Minneapolis seem unlikely to foot the bill. Perhaps the Metrodome concept is merely a stalking horse for reviving the stadium romance between Anoka County and the Vikings.

After all, Anoka County offers something no other unit of government has: elected leadership gullible enough to think that a taxpayer-funded stadium is a good deal for the taxpayers. Moreover, a Vikings stadium is an attractive proposition to some Anoka County officials for the bare fact that it offers a rich opportunity to eat, drink, and be merry on the taxpayer dime. A steak may taste good, but it tastes even better in Houston!

Weeks after the Watchdog reported on an item in the Pioneer Press discussing a possible revival of the "partnership", the Watchdog can confirm that the Vikings have been polling Anoka County businesses with respect to a new stadium.

It could be that the polling is part of the propaganda effort for a new Minneapolis stadium. But it could also be that it is Act II of the Anoka County – Vikings taxpayer-financed romance.

Beware!

<http://www.vikings.com/StadiumVikingsStadiumDrive.aspx>

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

2. Tip of the Iceberg.

If you thought that all the junketeering uncovered in Anoka County was the end of the story, grab an emesis bag and sit down. It's quite possible that only the proverbial tip of the iceberg has been exposed.

New Data Practices Act requests have been filed and good-government advocates are awaiting the production of even more receipts and expense reimbursement reports from everyone's favorite cast of junketeering characters.

A well-placed Watchdog source reports that Junketeer-in-Chief Dan Erhart is concerned about the latest information request and what it may reveal.

Worried? What could be worse than 66 trips to Billy's Bar? What could be worse than \$519 blown at Jax Café? Oops. With this gang, it could indeed be worse. Serenity now!

<http://www.anokacountywatchdog.com/expenses/erhart%20meal%20tracker%202003-2007.pdf>

3. Junket, Anyone?

Speaking of junkets, one of Dan Erhart's favorites is just around the corner. A source within county government tells the Watchdog that the annual Washington, DC "fly in" deadline is fast approaching. This year, junketeers can stay at the fabulous Liaison Capitol Hill hotel. The Watchdog isn't in the hotel business, but we would be mighty darn careful about naming a DC hotel the "liaison." Maybe Eliot Spitzer manages the place.

In any case, we'll be watching to see who goes. Keep those receipts, commissioners!
<http://www.transportationalliance.com/flyin.htm>

4. Well-Heeled Big Wheels.

Big man, pig man, ha ha charade you are.
You well heeled big wheel, ha ha charade you are.
And when your hand is on your heart,
You're nearly a good laugh,
Almost a joker,
With your head down in the pig bin,
Saying "Keep on digging."
Pig stain on your fat chin.
What do you hope to find.
When you're down in the pig mine.
You're nearly a laugh,
You're nearly a laugh
But you're really a cry.

Roger Waters

Remember the good old days, way back in 2006 when Democrats promised to clean up Washington and introduce a new lobbyist-free environment dedicated to the principles of transparency and influence-free legislation?

With all the well-heeled corporate big wheels digging in the bailout pig bin, we figured now would be a good time to remind you, the taxpayer, of the pork-o'-rama that is Washington, DC. Take a moment to visit the "Pig Book" web page sponsored by Citizens Against Government Waste, a true Washington watchdog.

Take a look at what your tax dollars are funding what your kids will be paying for once they get old enough to earn a living and pay back our Chinese creditors.

Congress has truly earned its 73% disapproval rating.

http://www.realclearpolitics.com/epolls/other/congressional_job_approval-903.html

http://www.cagw.org/site/PageServer?pagename=reports_pigbook2008

5. Quote of the Week.

"Tenure is the holy grail of teacher unions, but it has no educational value for kids; it only benefits adults."

Who uttered that quote? George F. Will? Bill Bennet? Michele Bachmann?

No, try Michelle Rhee, the Chancellor of the Washington, DC public schools.

Chancellor Rhee has shown the temerity to take on DC's culture of failure and the teacher union that enables that failure. By closing failing schools and firing incompetent bureaucrats (those who don't have union job-for-life protection), she has obtained results and is quickly establishing a reputation as a true reformer.

By the way, Rhee is a democrat.

Hey, Michelle. Anoka-Hennepin schools need a new superintendent.

<http://www.anoka.k12.mn.us/education/components/scrapbook/default.php?sectiondetailid=258494>

Read more about Rhee here:

<http://s.wsj.net/article/SB122731062221349277.html>

E-mail Update 12/5/08

In This Issue:

1. Government Lobbying Government.
2. Katrina Meets Wall Street Meets Detroit...
3. Property Tax Primer.
4. "Economic" Development.
5. Sharing the Pain.
6. Quote of the Week.

1. Government Lobbying Government.

The State Auditor recently released its annual report on local government lobbying expenditures. The report tallies what local units of government in Minnesota (counties, cities, townships, school districts and special districts like the Met Council) spend lobbying the state and the federal government. In other words, it's a nauseating tome that tells taxpayers what one level of government is spending to lobby another level of government to secure tax dollars that ultimately come from one source – your wallet.

You think the economy is bad? You wouldn't know it from this report. In 2007, local government in Minnesota spent \$7,817,620 on lobbying activities, a 10.7% increase over 2006.

65 local units of government directly employed or hired contract lobbyists in 2007. These units spent \$3,582,782 on staff and contract lobbyists, a 14% increase over 2006.

In addition, local units of government paid dues of \$10,024,137 to associations that lobby on their behalf (which is different from the lobbyists and staff they employ directly).

Of course, Anoka County was helping lead the parade of piggery. Of the hundreds of local units of government in Minnesota, only 11 spent more than \$100,000 employing staff and contract lobbyists. Only two units spent more than Anoka County, which reported spending \$228,983. The Dog calls BS on this already high number for reasons to be explained in another paragraph. Don't forget this system is self-reporting, so asking Anoka County to use an honor system to report lobbying expenditures is like asking Tom Petters to manage your money.

Let's take a closer look at Anoka County. The County reported spending over \$228,000 on staff and contract lobbyists in 2007. Hooey.

First, it was reported that a mere \$26,375 of Steve Novak's salary is related to lobbying. Considering that Novak makes more money than the governor, it is highly unlikely that he spends only a fraction of his life hanging out at local restaurants with legislators and the well-heeled.

The same goes for Lona Schreiber, another employee-lobbyist. Schreiber makes nearly \$100,000 per year yet the county reported only \$45,282 of her salary is related to lobbying. If these things are true, the county ought to save some dough and reduce these two to part-time status. Also keep in mind that the county has BOTH employee-lobbyists and contract lobbyists. Only 11 local units of government have both types of lobbyists.

Moreover, the county total does not include other organizations that spend Anoka County tax dollars. The Anoka County Regional Rail Authority reported \$72,909 in lobbying expenditures. The Northstar Corridor Development Authority (NCDA) reported \$48,204 in expenditures. Anoka County is a member of the NCDA and pays "dues" from the county till.

The lobbying game gets even more complex. In addition to what the county pays directly in lobbying expenditures, the county also pays dues to organizations that lobby on the county's behalf. In 2007, your tax dollars were used to pay dues for:
Association of MN Counties: \$39,879
Metropolitan Inter-county Association: \$84,070 North Metro Crossing Coalition: \$7,000
North Metro Highway 10 Coalition: \$30,000

For a grand total of \$160,949

Keep this in mind when your county commissioner tells you about "budget cuts."

Don't forget that Anoka County school districts and cities also have these kinds of expenditures. Check out the full report here:
http://www.osa.state.mn.us/reports/gid/2007/lobby/lobby_07_report.pdf

2. Katrina Meets Wall Street Meets Detroit...

What do these three have in common? Well, all three are major disaster zones, one natural and two man-made. And yes, all three were, are, or will be the beneficiaries of taxpayer funds. Now were getting hotter. That's because since all three are the scene of billions in government spending, all three are black holes of accountability and oversight.

Did you forget about Katrina and all those FEMA dollars? Forget about food, clothing and shelter. FEMA dollars were a boon to tattoo parlors, porn shops and divorce lawyers.
<http://i.a.cnn.net/cnn/2006/images/06/14/gao.06.844t.pdf>

Now comes word, surprise surprise, that there is little oversight and accountability with respect to the \$700 billion taxpayer bailout for Wall Street.
<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB122824907384873263.html>

With Detroit knocking at the door, do you really think there will be any real accountability with them?

Your tax dollars at work.

3. Property Tax Primer.

With annual Truth in Taxation hearings happening and with the economy in the toilet, many Watchdogs want to know how to better understand how the government assesses and taxes their real property. Rather than go into a lengthy discussion here, the Watchdog, ever helpful, points you to this excellent primer by the Minnesota Taxpayer's Association, a non-partisan think tank not affiliated with the Taxpayer's League of Minnesota.

<http://www.mntax.org/cpfr/uypt.php>

4. "Economic" Development.

It appears the harness racing track and gambling parlor in Columbus isn't the economic gem some of our county commissioners promised it would be. After dividing the people of Columbus and lobbying on behalf of the project, Running Aces is laying off people and faces an uncertain future. A failing gambling operation, a phantom football stadium, a tourist train to Duluth. It's time our county politicians started focusing on county business, not private business.

<http://www.startribune.com/local/north/17246889.html>

<http://www.startribune.com/local/north/35346649.html?>

5. Sharing the Pain.

With private business and private taxpayers in financial distress, government is starting to feel the pain at all levels across the entire country. States, counties, and cities are all planning to deal with the downturn in tax revenue.

USA Today had a news bit regarding Philadelphia's painful downshift. In addition to closing some pools, the city plans to lay off 200 workers out of 23,000. That amounts to less than 1% of the city's workforce. Way to sacrifice, guys. If our private manufacturing companies were to be that lucky!

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

6. Quote of the Week.

"I've got plenty of other things to do in Coon Rapids and Anoka."

It's not too hard to guess that the quote came from the lips of Good Ol' Boy Dan Erhart. The quote was in response to the firestorm of controversy that erupted after the county tried to ram through a resolution to increase the length of a runway at the Blaine airport without informing or hearing from the citizens they get paid to represent.

In typical Erhart fashion, he told the taxpayers to kiss off if they're too stupid to see the brilliance of his grandiose plans.

The Dog is curious about one thing. What are those other things to do in Coon Rapids and Anoka? Perhaps eat at Billy's Bar for the 67th time?

http://abcnewspapers.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=4916&Itemid=27

<http://www.anokacountywatchdog.com/expenses/erhart%20meal%20tracker%202003-2007.pdf>

E-mail Update 12/12/08

In This Issue:

1. Red Sea.
2. Anoka County, The Titanic, and the Red Sea.
3. Anoka-Hennepin Schools, The Titanic, and the Red Sea.

1. Red Sea.

Well, the spending chickens have come home to roost in a big way. The most recent state budget forecast came out late last week and as you all know, the state's budget situation is a sea of red ink. For the current budget, the state is some \$426 million in deficit while the next budget cycle beginning in July of 2009 is projected to be approximately \$5 billion in the red. Moreover, Watchdog sources at the Capitol say that the deficit is much likely to get worse, perhaps as much as \$6 billion for the next budget cycle.

Of course, the perennial debate will fire up regarding just how we got to this spot in the first place, with many Big Government deniers claiming that profligate spending wasn't the cause. Riiiiiiight.

Remember way back when, in 2007, when the state had a whopping \$2.2 billion budget surplus? That money was spent growing government, including per diem pay raises for legislators as well as paying for year-round housing despite the fact that the legislature meets for only part of each year (so just what is that state senator doing with a taxpayer-financed apartment in the middle of August?).

And you can bet that the deniers will talk about the "cuts" of 2003 and further claim that Minnesota's quality of life isn't what it used to be because the state doesn't spend enough money. Let's check the facts. Over the past five budget cycles, state spending has grown by the following amounts:

2000-2001: 13%
2002-2003: 15.4%
2004-2005: 7.3%
2006-2007: 8.4%
2008-2009: 13.6%

Where are those "cuts" again?

<http://www.mmb.state.mn.us/doc/budget/spending/nov08.pdf>

Let's also take a look at the biggest budget areas of state government, K-12 education and Health and Human Services.

K-12 spending makes up 40% of general fund spending. Between 2003 and 2006, total state aid in this area has increased 46.3%, way above inflation and student growth. In fact, Minnesota pupil enrollment numbers are actually falling.

<http://www.mmb.state.mn.us/doc/budget/piecharts/general-nov08.pdf>
<http://www.house.leg.state.mn.us/fiscal/files/06edcuts.pdf>

Health and Human Services (HHS) is just as ugly. Now comprising nearly 28% of the general fund budget, HHS spending has spiraled out of control. 15 years ago, HHS spending was \$1.5 billion. Today, HHS spending will total \$9.5 billion for the 2008-2009 biennium, a 14% increase. In fact, double digit spending increases for HHS are the norm. Maintaining this rate of HHS spending is mathematically impossible. After years of kicking the can down the road, legislators and the governor will have to face this issue head on and solve the problem.

Speaking of solving problems, just where do the tax increasers think the state can go in that regard? The sales tax? Geez, we just jacked up the sales tax as part of that \$6.6 billion transportation tax increase. Oh yeah, we also just voted to increase the sales tax to fund the arts and bike trails. Even more intelligently, the tax increase is dedicated in the state's constitution so the legislature has no ability to re-allocate the money. Minnesota is going to look mighty stupid as we cut nursing homes and law enforcement while dividing up some \$300 million in tax dollars for art projects and bike trails. We won't even get into the Hennepin County sales tax for a baseball yard.

How about income taxes, already among the highest in the nation? Since the majority of small businesses file their taxes as individuals, any increase in the income tax would be a direct tax on main street businesses, thus killing even more jobs.

How about the property tax? The state can always tax commercial property, which is a favorite tactic since businesses don't vote. Business properties only comprise 13% of the total real estate market value yet pay over 30% of the property taxes. In fact, the property tax rate for a commercial property in Minnesota is double that of South Dakota. Increasing this tax will only drive more business out of Minnesota.
http://www.naiopmn.org/pdfs/policy/NAIOP_Comparative_Tax_2008_www.pdf

By the way, let's get back to that recent sales tax increase for the arts and outdoors. Here is a flavor of some of the projects that got state funding recently. It's a flavor of what you the taxpayer will get while school, nursing homes and public safety take cuts:

Susana M. di Palma, Minneapolis
\$4,200 – To attend the Festival del Flamenco in Jerez de la Frontera, Spain.

Ranee A. Ramaswamy, Minneapolis
\$6,000 – For travel to Bali to work with I Dewa Putu Berata to plan and map the production of, Dvee.

Lloyd W. Brant, Minneapolis
\$6,000 – For the video documentation of A Life of Serious Nonsense, that tells a tale about clowns as lovers who struggle to put on a Vaudeville show while navigating the ever-shifting rules of engagement in understanding the opposite sex.

Shari G. Aronson, Minneapolis

\$6,000 – To develop the tools to get her existing repertoire of family-friendly puppetry shows out to new audiences across Minnesota by working with a videographer to professionalize her video documentation and for a business coach.

No, we're not kidding. Just don't tell Dan Erhart there are grants available to travel. He'll pick up a paintbrush and finger puppets before you can say "Vive l'Arts!"
<http://www.arts.state.mn.us/grants/2009/index.htm>

WE'RE IN ONE HELL OF A MESS, WATCHDOGS!

2. Anoka County, The Titanic, and the Red Sea.

Since the budget news broke, cities, counties and school districts have been showing up at press conferences to decry possible cuts in state aid. The matter is indeed serious, as local governments face the loss of revenue they had budgeted.
http://www.twincities.com/politics/ci_11190568?source=rss

So what is Anoka County doing about it? Any freeze on travel and meals? Nope. Better yet, how about a 4.5% pay increase for county government workers. You heard it right. When the county is facing a loss of state aid they respond with a huge pay raise well above inflation. Moreover, this raise comes at a time when taxpayers aren't getting raises. They're taking pay cuts, losing their jobs, and seeing the value of their homes plummet.

And yes, the commissioners voted themselves a pay raise as well.

In a classic "Let them eat cake" moment of self-righteous arrogance, Commissioner Jim Kordiak proclaimed, "I am not going to vote to have county employees carry the burden for our budget problems." So who will carry the burden for the budget problems you helped create, Commissioner Kordiak? Oh yeah, the same taxpayers who bear the brunt of every clownish scheme you support down at the county. Getting by with a 4.5% pay raise in the worst economy since World War II. Rough.

Kudos to Commissioners Sivarajah and West who, as usual, fought the good fight but lost.

http://abcnewspapers.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=5094&Itemid=27

3. Anoka-Hennepin Schools, The Titanic, and the Red Sea.

We knew Anoka County wouldn't give a rip about taxpayers and the bad economy. But surely our good friends over in the Anoka-Hennepin school district are making wise adjustments. Surely, the leadership is leading by example and taking the budgetary arrows themselves in order to keep cuts away from the classroom.

Nope. Recently Dennis Carlson was installed as the interim superintendent while the school board spends a bunch of time and money searching for Roger Giroux's permanent replacement. Would you believe the school board actually offered Carlson MORE than what Giroux was making? You bet. Carlson will scrape by on a measly \$15,000 per month instead of Giroux's poverty level \$14,000 per month. Board Member Scott Wenzel was the only one to show any leadership by voting against the contract. Wenzel also offered research showing that other Metro area school districts that have recently hired interim superintendents did so at 60-90% of Carlson's salary.
http://abcnewspapers.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=5100&Itemid=27

Talk about re-arranging the deck chairs on the Titanic. These people truly don't get it.

Remember all this when you hear the old cry of "cutting to the bone."

E-mail Update 12/19/08

In This Issue:

1. Starving.
2. The Holiday Spirit.
3. The Silver Lining.
4. Moore Good News.
5. Quote of the Week.

1. Starving.

It's that Christmas season and every good taxpayer is wondering what Santa Government will be leaving in their stocking.

And after Santa Erhart brought the good tidings of a fat, oversized 4.5% pay raise for county government workers, odds are taxpayers will receive something soft and smelly in the stocking from Old Saint Dan. Even though we're in the worst economy in decades, it's really no surprise that a hefty, shiny new pay raise was left under the tree for these fair-haired boys. And don't forget that the county board treated themselves to a 2% pay raise as well. Your county commissioners will now earn nearly \$60,000 per year in salary for their part-time work, along with some sweet fringes like a defined-benefit retirement package. Rest assured, these board members indeed feel your pain. Board honcho Dennis Berg solemnly noted, "Only county board members will be getting less of an increase." We'll keep that in mind Dennis as we scan the want ads and fill out unemployment forms.

http://abcnewspapers.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=5094&Itemid=27

Sure enough, the Anoka County board voted to increase the property tax levy by 6%, which represents an increase of nearly \$7 million. Hey, the county has meals and junkets to pay for, you know.

<http://www.anokacountywatchdog.com/expenses/expenses.htm>

So while taxpayers are starved by job losses, falling home values, and higher commodity prices like food staples, the county pulls an Oprah Winfrey and packs on an additional \$7 million pounds.

http://womansday.ninemsn.com.au/img/celebrity/oprah_0908.jpg

http://abcnewspapers.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=5159&Itemid=28

The good news is that state legislators on both sides of the aisle and the governor are well aware of Anoka County's pay raise stunt. Watchdog sources at the Capitol have heard that a number of influential legislators are not happy with the county, especially when the pay raise comes on the heels of the junket scandal. Just this week, Governor Pawlenty stated his intent to pursue a salary freeze for state employees. The Governor also pointedly noted that he expects local governments to follow suit. Leave it to Anoka

County to be the poster boy for dumb decisions. If the Anoka County board ran a car company, they would do something like take a private jet to ask for a government bailout. The only difference would be that they would plan a layover to eat at Morton's Steakhouse.

http://abcnewspapers.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=5209&Itemid=27

2. The Holiday Spirit.

Now here's a holiday the Watchdog can really get behind. No, it's not Christmas, Hanukah, or even Kwanzaa.

No sir, we're talking about a TAX holiday. While most politicians in Washington are giving bailouts to Wall Street miscreants and overpriced autoworkers, some right-thinking representatives are preaching an alternative that works for the working man. Rep. Louie Gohmert (R-TX) instead wants to give every taxpayer a two-month holiday from paying taxes to the central government.

<http://www.humanevents.com/article.php?id=29700>

While the Dog cannot wholly endorse any plan that deficit spends, if Washington is going to bailout anyone, they ought to do it evenly and without favoritism.

Think of it as a Festivus for the rest of us. A true Festivus miracle! And now for the airing of grievances... <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HQFLqMyo0fo>

3. The Silver Lining.

Okay, everyone is Jonesing over the whole state budget mess. Really, there is a silver lining to the dark fiscal cloud. Namely, the opportunity to reform government, which never reforms crap unless prompted to do so by radical events like the current crisis.

This week, the Duluth city council has begun proceedings to hand off or close the city's zoo. Yes, Duluth has a zoo. Yes, the most fiscally challenged city in Minnesota (thanks to promises of lifetime retiree health care for the ENTIRE family) has a zoo.

Finally, this latest crisis is prompting the council to think and act rationally, although you can never count on the city's employee union to do likewise.

AFSCME, the union representing the bat keepers and monkey trainers, has not approved the city's divestment plan because there is no guarantee that union jobs won't be lost.

All across Minnesota, counties, cities, and the state itself will be examining spending issues like this one and hopefully cleaning some house, even if it is a primate house. <http://minnesota.publicradio.org/display/web/2008/12/15/duluthzoo/>

4. Moore Good News.

Holy cow, stop the presses! Per our policy, the Watchdog gives credit where credit is due. Kudos to Tom Snell and the MetroNorth Chamber of Commerce for hosting highly regarded Wall Street Journal economist Stephen Moore this week for two events.

As always, Moore was engaging and educational, bringing a fresh prospective to the current economic situation. Most notably, he reminded the audience of the danger of pumping so much money into the economy. Once the economy rebounds, all that money will invite some nasty inflationary pressures. Moreover, he noted the importance of keeping taxes low to keep America competitive in the global marketplace.

Do yourself a favor and get educated this Christmas by reading his latest work:
<http://www.booksamillion.com/product/9781416592389>

5. Quote of the Week.

"I don't think it is going to be our job in this situation to tell an exact cut amount in the unallotment. But it's really to help weigh in on the priorities of we would prefer, if we were passing a piece of legislation, to protect areas that are investments into the future for the state, or be able to minimize cuts to those areas."

- DFL House Speaker Margaret Anderson Kelliher

Okay, now let the Dog translate that piece of political double speak. What Kelliher is really saying is that she intends to provide no real leadership in resolving the current \$426 million state budget deficit.

Instead, she plans to offer vague statements about sparing this or that program from budget cuts while not offering a specific plan with real numbers.

Then when the governor carries out his constitutional duty to balance the budget by trimming some program areas, Kelliher will be there to roundly and publicly criticize Pawlenty's choices.

While that kind of hiding out may work for the current budget, the DFL will have to craft its own budget at some point for the coming fiscal biennium. That's when the tax increases will be brought forth.

<http://minnesota.publicradio.org/display/web/2008>

E-mail Update 12/26/08

EDITOR'S NOTE: On this the last edition of 2008, the Watchdog wishes all our loyal readers a healthy, happy and prosperous Holiday Season. We look forward to serving you in 2009. As always, we'll be on the watch!!!

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1. Commish Can't Control Combat Commission.

Speaking of historic budget deficits, did you know state government has a "Combative Sports Commission?" This commission is a retread of the old Minnesota Boxing Commission, which was mothballed for a period of time, but was revived as the Combative Sports Commission (CSC). When the body was re-constituted, our intrepid governor installed our very own Scott LeDoux as the executive director, complete with a nice salary to compliment his other governmental salary.

This past week, the highly regarded non-partisan Office of the Legislative Auditor (OLA) released a report detailing the mismanagement, ethics violations, and general lack of competence at the CSC under LeDoux's leadership.

Among the more troubling findings:

First, LeDoux received free tickets to an Ultimate Fighting Championship event held in Minneapolis and sanctioned by the CSC. LeDoux then passed these tickets on to friends and family. LeDoux's acceptance of free tickets from the very people he was charged with regulating was a clear violation of state law, according to the OLA. Said the report:

The Combative Sports Commission's executive director and office assistant violated the state's Code of Ethics when they provided complimentary tickets for a combative sports event to family members and other individuals.

<https://www.revisor.leg.state.mn.us/statutes/?id=43A.38>

Second, The OLA found that the commission did not properly manage its payroll. Specifically, the report found that LeDoux would sign blank timesheets in advance for himself and an office assistant. This practice is eerily reminiscent of what is happening in Anoka County regarding expense reimbursements, where reimbursement reports were routinely approved before any expenses were incurred.

Third, the OLA found that the CSC failed to properly safeguard the money it collected. The OLA was blunt in observing that the CSC failed to implement "fundamental" internal financial controls.

Shockingly, employees of the commission regularly took collected funds home with them and did not deposit those funds until the next week, a violation of state law.

Moreover, only one person controlled the accounting and reconciling of collected monies, a clear violation of state policy and fundamental accounting practice. When one person watches the money, there are no checks and balances in place to detect and deter wrongdoing.

Fourth, the OLA found that the CSC's web site lacked basic security features to protect the web site and email communications. In fact, the OLA found that the site was infected with a rather virulent virus. In his response letter, LeDoux claims that the web site would be shut down until the problem was fixed.

In researching this story, the Watchdog visited the CSC web site on December 24 and found it to be still infected. In navigating from internal web page to internal web page, visitors are re-directed to web sites offering items like generic Viagra. To protect our readers, the Watchdog will not publish the CSC web site or link to it in this update.

All OLA reports offer the subject of an audit an opportunity to respond. While Watchdog readers should read LeDoux's response for themselves, the Watchdog will opine that the response is classic Scott LeDoux. In short, LeDoux blames the state for his problems, complaining that the state didn't tell him how to operate the CSC. Uh, Scott, a person hired as the EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR of any organization is expected to be knowledgeable regarding the functions of the organization from the very start. Any executive director is paid well precisely because that person is expected to bring leadership skills, management skills, and subject matter expertise to the organization. Simply put, it's not an on-the-job training opportunity.

Said LeDoux in his response letter, "I am not versed in the processes of the state." Maybe it's time for the CSC to find someone who knows how to run a state agency, including the skills to implement financial accountability, understand ethics rules, and properly manage employees. What a mess.

<http://www.auditor.leg.state.mn.us/fad/pdf/fad0836.pdf>

<http://www.startribune.com/local/stpaul/36384299.html>

2. Karnac the Watchdog.

It's just too darn easy to predict what our Good Ol' Boys down at the county courthouse will do. Way back in June, just after the legislature adjourned, the Watchdog reflected upon the retirement of state representative Kathy Tingelstad. At the time, the Watchdog predicted that Anoka County would hire Tingelstad as an employee-lobbyist.

If only picking stocks was that easy. Well-placed sources within the county tell the Watchdog that Board Chairman Dennis Berg has been advocating for the county to – you guessed it – hire Tingelstad as a lobbyist. These sources tell the Dog that Tingelstad would be hired in addition to the county's other two employee-lobbyists

(Steve Novak and Lona Schreiber). According to these same sources, the “justification” for the hiring is that Tingelstad needs to be hired now to work with Schreiber, who is rumored to be retiring after the 2009 legislative session.

The sources also report that commissioners Rhonda Sivarajah and Robyn West are opposed to the hiring.

The taxpayers of Anoka County and the Board members themselves are indeed lucky to have two adults minding the store in West and Sivarajah. The hiring of Tingelstad would be one of the dumbest moves the Board could ever make.

First, Tingelstad has no credibility with either legislative Republicans or Governor Pawlenty. With former DFLer Steve Novak on board, the need is for someone with credibility on the GOP side of things, especially the Governor. Given Tingelstad’s voting record, especially overriding the Governor to pass a \$6.6 billion tax increase, Tingelstad would find most GOP doors closed to her at the Capitol. Anyone who believes GOP pronouncements that Tingelstad’s votes are in the past and water under the bridge is naïve in the extreme. When you want the Governor’s ear, you don’t send the person who spit in his eye.

Second, the state is facing a massive budget deficit, with every local unit of government in Minnesota facing painful reduction in state aid. To send a THIRD Anoka County employee-lobbyist to the Capitol under these circumstances would be a public relations black eye right up there with auto executives taking private jets to beg for a bailout. Only Anoka County would even consider such an overt, in-your-face kind of stunt. You have to wonder just how dumb these people really are sometimes.

Third, if the county wants a replacement for Schreiber, do it the right way. In this environment, the right way is to leave the job vacant after Schreiber leaves. Beyond that, why not try following the county’s own personnel rules and post the job to the general public and receive applications?

Fourth, regardless of the true motivation, to hire Tingelstad would have the appearance to most taxpayers that she got the job as payback for votes she took as a legislator, especially with respect to Northstar rail and the transportation tax increase. While the Watchdog has no way of knowing the true motives of Berg and others, there is a perception issue that needs to be considered. Again, you have to wonder what these people are thinking.

3. Quote of the Week.

It just doesn't feel right when the people we ask to pay our wages are hurting, losing jobs, losing health insurance, losing homes. For government to assume that we can move right along just doesn't seem right to me.

Commissioner Rhonda Sivarajah regarding her “no” vote on recent Anoka County employee pay raises of 4.5%.